# PROJECT OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

## OFFICIAL COMMENTARY
## 2016

Salesian Cooperators – **Rome**

# PRESENTATION

*Dear Salesian Cooperators,*

We are living in a time of true Grace from our Lord for our Association and for the entire Salesian Family. Now that the Bicentenary Year of the birth of our Father and Founder Don Bosco has drawn to a close, we prepare ourselves to share, along with the Church Universal, the Holy Year of the Mercy of God that Pope Francis has proclaimed.

It is in this atmosphere of reflection on the love of the Father, the salvation brought to us by the Son Redeemer, and the strength that the Holy Spirit pours out on each one of us and on all, that I present to you this "Commentary on the *Project of Apostolic Life*." It is an actualization, a dynamic and faithful revision of the former Official Commentary of 1990, in the light of the *Project of Apostolic Life* ratified by the Salesian Cooperator Congress in 2012.

Just like our *Project of Apostolic Life*, this Commentary is also a fruit of the commitment, hard work, study, and discernment of many Cooperators. A lively "thank you," therefore, goes to the former World Council: Coordinator, Rosario Maiorano, and the Delegates, Don Stjepan Bolkovac and Sr. Maria Trigila, who initiated an immense task of commenting on each individual article of the Statutes. Afterwards, the members of the World Executive Secretary of the present Cooperator World Council collaborated with much dedication and care in drawing up this final version, thus bringing to completion the revision and organizing the comments in a schematic form, complete with clear references to the most recent Magisterium of the Church and to the documents of the Salesian Family.

The *Project of Apostolic Life* is our "ID card": it describes the spiritual riches of our vocation and traces our way to sanctity through daily service to the young, to families, to the emarginated, and to the excluded.

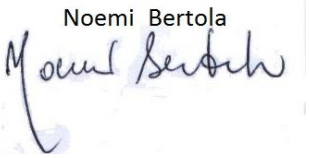
This Commentary is its necessary complement because it analyzes, chapter by chapter, each individual article and captures each one's spirit, bringing to the fore the great Gospel inspirations behind the Statutes and their operative and normative translations in the Regulations.

This is, therefore, an opportune and fruitful key to understanding which will permit each one of us to interiorize our Project and to give it concrete expression in the life of our Association.

Inviting you to give joyful witness to Don Bosco's original notion of wanting us to be *true Salesians in the world*, I offer you this helpful aid which will contribute to guaranteeing that we remain living branches grafted on the Vine.

With esteem and affection,

Noemi Bertola



Rome, January 24, 2016
*Feast of St. Francis de Sales*

# INTRODUCTION

The intent of the new *Project of Apostolic Life* is to delineate the identity of the Salesian Cooperator. It not only presents a way to be, to live, to act, and to relate with others, but it is the way to understand one's lay vocation; i.e., one's own "personal plan of life" in Salesian style.

The word "vocation" is one key to understand the new *Project of Apostolic Life*. We are not simply "collaborators" or "benefactors" but laity who feel that they are "*called and sent on a concrete mission: to contribute to the salvation of youth, committing themselves to Don Bosco's very mission to the young and to ordinary folk.*" (*Project of Apostolic Life*, Art. 2). A vocation is a Call and a Grace; it is beyond our possibilities to be its source of inspiration or to create it. The initiative belongs to God. This is a constant of the vocations presented in the Bible and Jesus repeats it: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." (Jn. 15:16) Therefore, we must accept and welcome it, give thanks for it, and pray and work; moreover, if we wish to look to the future of the Association, we must have a gaze and a heart which are attentive to the young. They are not only the privileged object of our apostolate – the young are also the protagonists of a new springtime and of a new face for the Salesian Cooperator.

Vocation is a path closely tied to maturing in the Faith, in a dialogue with God that lasts for one's entire life. The fundamental condition necessary for it to rise up is to develop one's Christian life in every aspect: truth, apostolate, morals, and prayer. A strong personal faith and a life interiorly bound to Christ are indispensable so that vocations mature in accord with the Word of the Lord. All Salesian Cooperators must become consciously aware of this. Each Community and each Center represents Don Bosco in the area where their members live and work and are appointed to extend the charism and mission of the Salesian Family into the future. Having a Community and a place for the Association are indispensable points of reference. No one has a vocation to isolation; therefore, it is greatly encouraged that all Salesian works organize their educating community, rich in ministries or services for the mission, as a place for convergence. These ought to become places where all the Groups can experience the Salesian charism and mission. The criterion of "come and see" is followed so that the young will be able to welcome and to respond to God's Call in a responsible way.

In many cases an explicit invitation needs to be made. Today's society no longer conceives of life as vocation and mission. The understanding of their relevance and social significance is scarce today. Points of reference for imagining how one's own life will be in the distant future are confusing, if not discouraging. In some parts of the Church, where it is regarded as an "Institution", it is presented as an heir to a past of intellectual and moral subjugation. A young person can have a desire to get involved and dedicate him or herself to a task, but this involvement is often oriented towards "Movements" and the causes which are most popular today: peace, ecology, and the poor. The attraction of Christ and a love for Don Bosco will always determine a different direction for them to follow. The Disciples were fascinated by Jesus but understanding that they could follow Him meant they needed to listen to the invitation, "Follow Me!" Perhaps the ability to present, to rouse up enthusiasm for, to point out the steps to take and the conditions necessary, and to invite the young to spread "that energy of charity" to become God's and Don Bosco's Cooperators needs to be strengthened in our Association. Therefore, we need Cooperators and Formators who know Don Bosco and his charism and who not only understand it but who can also make

proposals as experts in spiritual life. The *Project of Apostolic Life* clearly points out the privileged field of our apostolic work: the young. It is in this field that we develop and carry out an activity which is very apropos to our vocational proposal: education. Let us frequent those places which can offer interesting stimuli: educating communities. We need to extend the options for involvement in a *Project of Apostolic Life* which go beyond Salesian works.

The Sacred Author states: "Your Word is the lamp unto my feet and the light unto my path." (Ps. 118:105) God's Word is a light capable of illuminating the steps along man's path of life; it makes the way sure because it is a compass which can give direction in the midst of the fog of so many voices and attractions which confuse, disorient, and cause the heart of man to wander far from the right path. By following the *Project of Apostolic Life*, the Salesian Cooperators share the path traced out by the Gospel and "commit themselves in a responsible manner to this way which brings one to sanctity." (*Project of Apostolic Life* Statutes Art. 41)

# chapter I

## THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR
## IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY AND IN THE WORLD

*«You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,*
*and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,*
*and that your fruit should remain»* (Jn. 15:16)

The Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco. Jesus chose His Disciples and appointed them to bear much fruit, a fruit that would last. As disciples of Jesus and Sons and Daughters of Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperators are called to bear much fruit. What a great gift and stupendous mission have been entrusted to us! In order to understand the *Project of Apostolic Life* and to live it authentically, we must allow ourselves to be illuminated by this great Mystery.

In a well-known page of the prophet Ezekiel, he describes the wood of the vine. What value does it have? None. The wood of the vine is the only wood from among the trees of the countryside with which one can do nothing; nothing, no useful object, can be made from it. The wood of the vine is good for only one thing: to allow the vital fluid to flow to the branches so they produce fruit; therefore, the *wood* of the vine is wood useless for anything except to bear fruit. And it is to this image of the prophet Ezekiel that Jesus refers in His famous discourse on the Vine and the Branches in Chapter 15 of John's Gospel. In Israel's culture, the vine was the image of the people, of the people of Israel. There is the famous canticle of the love of the Lord for his vineyard in Chapter 5 of the prophet Isaiah; the prophet Jeremiah also speaks of Israel as a vine. Since Jesus declares Himself "the True Vine", there must exist false vines. Jesus continues substituting the reality of Israel with that of His own Person: not the manna from Heaven, but He Himself is the True Bread which gives life to the people; He is the True Light in contrast to the Law; He is the True Vine, the True People planted by the Lord. And the Father "is the Vinedresser". Thus, we can see that there are distinct roles: Jesus is the Vine, through which the Life-giving fluid flows, and the Father is the Vinedresser. What is the concern of the Vinedresser? That the vine might always bear fruit; indeed, the Evangelist writes, "every branch that in Me does not bear fruit, He cuts away."

What is the meaning of this expression? The Evangelist is speaking of the Christian community where there is a love that is communicated by the Lord, a love received from the Lord, and this love must be transformed into a love shown to others. This is characteristic of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, one takes in the Body of Christ, the True Bread, the Source of Life. He or she is then to be disposed to become bread, the source of life, for others. There is a risk, though: within a Community there might be someone who absorbs this vital fluid, this energy, this love, and this Bread, but then does not become bread for others or transform the love that he or she receives into love for others. He or she is a passive element who thinks only about his or her own interests and about him or

herself and therefore does not communicate life. It's not the other branches and not even Jesus, but the Father, Who takes it away because it is a branch which is useless.

Love which translates into service is the guarantee that one is in full contact with the Lord. Jesus repeats this, saying, "Remain in Me and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself if it does not remain on the vine, neither can you if you do not remain in Me." Therefore, Jesus continues to insist that this love received from Him must be transformed into a communicative love; otherwise, it is useless. Jesus returns to reclaim His title, His Divine condition: "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who remains in Me and I in him" – in this dynamic process of fusion with God, He asks only to be welcomed into the life of the believer, so as to spread its existence further – "to bear much fruit." The more one gives life to others, the more one receives. One has only what has been given to him. The greater, the more unlimited, the gift of life to others is, the more unlimited will be God's response. But then, Jesus warns: "He who does not remain in Me is thrown away like a branch and withers." This expression which we have translated with "withers" is, literally, "becomes arid". The Evangelist takes the expression from Chapter 37 of the prophet Ezekiel, who imagined the situation of the people as a valley full of dry bones, indicating that the people were without the Holy Spirit. And so, he who does not remain in Jesus – he who receives this love and does not communicate it to others – becomes arid because one possesses only what one gives to others. Behold the guarantee of Jesus (though, unfortunately, we, in our modern language have re-dimensioned it somewhat): everyone knows the expression "Ask for what you want and it will be given to you"; however, we forget the two conditions put by Jesus: – *if you remain in Me*, therefore, if we communicate to others the love received from Him – *if My words remain in you*, therefore they remain the guide for orienting our life, our existence, and a love which becomes service to others – at this point, and only at this point, preceded by these two conditions, does Jesus say, "Ask for what you want and it will be given to you." So, when one lives in harmony with the Lord, when a man or a woman's life is founded on that of God to the point of becoming one thing only, the only thing that he will ask for will be the gift of the Holy Spirit and a greater capacity to love. The Father will take care of the rest. The Father does not respond to the needs of His children; rather, He foresees them. This gives us great security. And take note of the ending: "In this is My Father glorified." There used to be a way of thinking that said God needed to be glorified through extraordinary works and gloriously great things; but no, the only way in which to manifest the glory of God, the revelation of His love, is a love which becomes like His, "that you may bear much fruit and become My disciples." The only manner to give glory to God is to manifest in our life that forgiveness, that mercy, and that sharing which in some manner resemble His.

This is the underlying choice which traverses the entire *Project of Apostolic Life* and its first chapter. It is a mysterious reality, but true and exalting. Here is born the "Salesian charism." It is the Holy Spirit Who, by calling the Cooperator to become a disciple of Don Bosco, animates him or her in the apostolic task which gives fruit – communion within the Association and with the other members of the Salesian Family and the Salesian Spirit. The first chapter defines, in a general and global manner, the qualitative and original identity of the Cooperators and of the Association. It delineates in broad strokes who the Salesian Cooperator is, what he or she does, how he or she does it, and what is his or her place and role in the Salesian Family and in the Church. Therefore, it covers what is of fundamental importance - laying the foundation of that building called the Association of the Salesian Cooperators.

## Art. 1. The Founder: A Man Sent by God

*To contribute to the salvation of youth, "the most delicate and most precious portion of human society,"*[1] *the Holy Spirit, through the maternal intervention of Mary, raised up St. John Bosco, who founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1859) and, together with Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872). He extended the apostolic energy of the Salesian charism by officially setting up the "Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators," the third branch of the Family (1876), united to the Society of St. Francis de Sales (also called the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco or the Salesian Congregation).*

*The Holy Spirit formed the heart of a Father and teacher in St. John Bosco, one capable of total dedication, inspiring him with an educational method permeated by the charity of the Good Shepherd.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core Themes

1. Don Bosco: A Man of God, Founder, Guided by the Holy Spirit
2. Charismatic Reality of the Association of the Cooperators in the Church

#### Keys to Understanding

**A.** The name of "Founder" was conferred upon Don Bosco by the Church in reference to the three Groups of the apostolic Family created by him. In ecclesial documents, the title of the "Founder of an Ecclesial Institute" has different meanings. Up until Vatican Council II, there were two predominant ones:

- *historical-juridic (or canonical):* one who conceived the idea of a Religious or Apostolic Movement, identified its purposes, and delineated the norms of life and of governance for it (at least the essential ones) was declared a Founder in a *historical-juridic sense*.
- *historical-theological:* one who felt called by God to create an Ecclesial Institute, and who defined its goals, type of life and spirit was recognized as its Founder in a *theological-historical sense*.

In the documents of Vatican II, a third significance emerges:

- *theological-charismatic*: a Founder in this sense is one who was called by God, not simply to create a new institute, but to give life to it and to live *personally* the experience of the Spirit which characterizes said institute.

Don Bosco is the Founder of the Salesian Family in all senses – historical, juridic, theological, and charismatic:

*in the historical-juridic sense:* he gave origin to the three institutes by indicating their purpose and norms;
*in the theological* sense: he felt he was "called by God" to give life to a spiritual Family; and
*in the charismatic sense*: he gave life to and personally lived the Gospel experience of the apostolic Family created by him.

**B.** In order to recognize Don Bosco as an instrument in God's Hands, the Church relied upon the criteria of its Christian wisdom: the authenticity of his virtues and of his actions. He, himself, in the midst of his developing

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[1]Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, SDB. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco.* Diego Borgatello, SDB, ed. Vol. II. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1966) 35. Print.
Ibid. Vol. VII. 171.

experience, was certain that he was being guided by Providence. To John Bosco, a young Priest in Torino in 1841, the Holy Spirit gave a special sensitivity for perceiving, through different experiences, the difficulties in which the young found themselves for, having been uprooted from their country life, they flooded this city which was in full social, political, and religious upheaval. He was thus called to consecrate his life to help them become honest, upright citizens and good Christians and to create, to this end, a series of works which met their corporal and spiritual needs.

**C.** The Holy Spirit brought Don Bosco to discover gradually that his mission to the young "had to spread out in space and time for the benefit of different peoples and of numerous generations." But to do this he needed "men capable of working with Don Bosco and appropriate Institutes to assure continuity in dynamic fidelity." From 1844 on, he surrounded himself with Priests and laity, men and women, who formed a type of "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales": these were his first collaborators. Later, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco understood that his complex and important mission would have a greater probability of perduring in a stable way if he were able to count on persons who were entirely dedicated to it. This same Holy Spirit raised up the call to apostolic consecration in the hearts of the first disciples of the Saint. Thus, beginning in 1859, the date of the founding of the Salesian Society, the first manner of the "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales" neither disappeared nor was absorbed, but, as the Founder tells us: "was divided into two categories, or, rather, two families." Those who were free to, and felt they had the vocation, gathered together in common life, living in that edifice (the Oratory/Hospice of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco) which has always been recognized as the Mother House and the center of the "Pious Association", which the Holy Father, the Pontifex Maximus, advised him to call "the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales" and which it is still called today. The others, or "the externs," continued living in the world, in their own families, while continuing to promote the work of the oratories, still keeping the name of the "Union" or the "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales" and of "promoters," or "Cooperators."

These Cooperators, called "extern members", were expressly foreseen in the various drafts of the Salesian *Constitutions* from 1860 to 1874, the year in which they had to be sacrificed (Chapter VII of volume X of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* is dedicated entirely to the approval of the *Constitutions* of the Salesian Society and many of the difficulties encountered by Don Bosco to do so.) In 1872, he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, which he wanted aggregated, or closely affiliated, to the Salesian Society so that they might care for the education of girls. Don Bosco, therefore, did not renounce his firm conviction that the greatest number of Christians possible must unite their forces for the good of souls, above all of poor youth. From 1874 to 1876, he wrote various drafts of the *Rule* in which his project was eventually clarified and he found a different juridic configuration: The Salesian Society had to be as life-giving leaven to a vast charitable movement in which men and women would be participants in his mission and in his spirit – each one according to his or her own state of life: thus, the Association of Salesian Cooperators was born – the third institute and bearer of his charism.

**D.** The first chapter of the Cooperators' *Rule* written by Don Bosco states: "It is necessary that Christians unite in doing good." ("Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way…" Par. I) It lists some general points which, without a doubt, still have relevance for us today despite its having been written in the style of the 1800s and, therefore, reflect the cultural climate of his times. The fact that it is important for Christians to work in a united manner is witnessed to by the experience of *the Early Apostolic Church*. The advantages gained from working in this way of solidarity are indicated by the *Gospel* message. This united front of Catholics is necessary if they are *to face up to* other social, cultural, and political forces.

**E.** The Divine inspiration for founding the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was simply accepted by many without any fuss while the origin of the Cooperators was ascribed to an initiative that was purely human and suggested to Don Bosco by historical circumstances. But it was Don Bosco himself who said:

> It is not Don Bosco, it is the *Hand of God* who makes use of the Cooperators! Listen! You have said that… the work of the Cooperators is loved by many. And I add that it will spread into all nations, into all Christianity… The *Hand of God* upholds it! The Cooperators will be those who will help promote the Catholic spirit. This may seem like a utopia of mine, but still I stand by this conviction. (*Biographical Memoirs* Vol. XVIII 125)

For Don Bosco, becoming a Cooperator was a concrete way of being a Catholic and, in the final analysis, a way of living the Gospel in one's historical reality. This article of the *Project of Apostolic Life* harkens back to the approval of the Association, as contained in Pius IX's Papal Brief of 1876. It is a pronouncement of the highest authority of the Church and the guarantor of the authenticity of the Gospel inspiration for the apostolic project carried out by the Cooperators.

## Art. 2. The Salesian Cooperators: A Specific Vocation in the Church

*§1. To commit oneself to be a Salesian Cooperator means to respond to the apostolic Salesian Vocation, gift of the Spirit, taking on a specific way of living the Gospel and participating in the mission of the Church. It is a free choice, defining one's existence.*

*§2. Catholics of whatever cultural or social circumstance can follow this path. They feel called to live their faith life fully involved in each day's concerns, characterized by two attitudes:*

*a) knowing God as Father and the Love which saves; encountering in the Only-begotten Son Jesus Christ the perfect Apostle of the Father; living in intimacy with the Holy Spirit, Who animates the People of God in the world;*

*b) feeling called and sent on a concrete mission: to contribute to the salvation of youth, committing themselves to Don Bosco's very mission to the young and to ordinary folk*[2].

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Theme**

The "Salesian" Commitment as Vocation

**Keys to Understanding**

The adventure of God, Who, through His Presence, His Word, and His Love – whether to one person or to a people – involves Himself in the vicissitudes experienced by man is a Mystery which exceeds our human comprehension. The Church is thus the "Body of Christ" and the "Spouse of the Spirit"; it is an unusual reality, which cannot be comprehended or lived deeply except within the categories and capacities of intuition and of analysis proper and exclusive to faith. Vatican Council II pointed out that the Church is the bearer of a sovereign vocation and an indispensable mission, defining Her more historically as the "People of God". This is a vision of the Church in which there is the fullness of co-responsibility and of equal dignity for all, without any individualism at any level, and where it is "communitarily" faithful in one sole entity differentiated by multiple ministries and charisms.

**A.** When presenting the Salesian nature of the Cooperators' vocation, the article takes its inspiration from Biblical language close to human experience. In fact, it utilizes, besides the term "vocation", those connected with "mission," "way," and "gift." The Salesian Cooperator vocation, from the standpoint of being a "choice" on the part of our Lord Jesus, is presented as one of the possible "roads" offered to Christians. To understand the argument adequately, it is necessary to recall the significance which Holy Scripture attaches to the keywords above.

In Biblical thought, every *vocation* comes from God, is a fruit of Christ's Grace, and is a gift of the Holy Spirit: it is always God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, Who calls. Every vocation presupposes Divine election. God makes the Call heard by the one whom He has chosen. Every vocation has as its objective a mission to be accomplished: God calls to send – to those whom He has chosen and whom He has called, He keeps repeating the same command: "Go!" Every vocation implies a road to be taken. One who has been called to accomplish a mission must recognize and follow the ways of God: the direct way of good, of virtue, of truth, of justice, of love, of peace,

[2]Giovanni Bosco. "Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way of Contributing to Public Morality and to the Good of Society." Trans. Arthur J. Lenti, SDB, in *Project of Apostolic Life.* 121. Art. IV. n.d. Web. 3 July 2016. https://donboscosalesianportal.org/official-family-groups/salesian-cooperators/

of the way that leads to life; not the tortuous way of evil which brings one to perdition and to death. To be a Christian means: to have been chosen by God; to have received a *vocation* born of the Holy Spirit so as to live a life in that same Spirit; to be sent to collaborate in the Divine plan of salvation; and to walk the *way* followed by Christ (the *sequela Christi*). This vocation to the apostolate and to sanctity, common to all Catholics owing to their Baptism and Confirmation, is put into action by following different specific vocations. Vatican Council II speaks expressly of the vocation that is proper to the laity, to Catholic spouses, to Priests, to Religious, and to laity who are members of an Institute approved by the Church. One can love God and his neighbor in different forms of *service* or *commitment* or *ministry*: those proper to the members of the Hierarchy; those tied to family, social, and political life; and those connected with the work of evangelization and of responding to the urgent needs of the historical moment.

In light of the above, it is clear that it is the task of every Catholic to respond to the Divine Call, common to all the Faithful, in a way that is both *concrete and personal*. This means that everyone must say to him or herself with great honesty: "God *calls* me to love Him and my neighbor. He calls *me*, with my natural gifts and with the gifts that I have received from the Holy Spirit. He calls me *here and now, today*, within the context of my personal, family, social, and ecclesial circumstances."

**B.** What does it mean to have this Salesian vocation to be a Cooperator? Before all else, it means feeling attracted by the Gospel figure of Don Bosco and realizing that his personality, his work, his realistic and dynamic spirit, and his method of education all correspond to certain traits of the Christian experience. It means feeling at home with Don Bosco and desiring to work with him in the Family which continues his mission to the young and to common folk. It means being sensitive to and concerned about the problems of the young and of common people, understanding these problems as perhaps decisive ones in today's world and of the proximal future; and, therefore, sympathizing with the little ones and the poor, wanting to help them in a concrete manner so as to assure their human advancement and Christian salvation. In short, it means feeling a great desire to offer one's personal contribution – whether modest or tremendous – to the realization of Don Bosco's apostolic project while remaining in one's state as a lay Catholic involved in the apostolate, or as a Deacon, or as a Diocesan Priest. To have a Salesian Cooperator vocation means to be convinced that God's Spirit is Love and Freedom. He calls every good Catholic to find his original place among God's People and to complete a particular task within the mission of the Church.

**C.** The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, in no. 4, takes up again and gives life to the above:

> For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also (see I Cor. 12:7), 'allotting them to everyone according as He wills' (1 Cor. 12:11) in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be 'good stewards of the manifold grace of God' (I Pt. 4:10), to build up the whole body in charity (see Eph. 4:16). From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who 'breathes where

He wills.' (Jn. 3:8) This should be done by the laity in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their Pastors.

When stating that the Salesian Cooperator vocation "is a gift", the text of the Statutes does nothing other than apply this Biblical and Conciliar doctrine to the particular case of the Salesian Cooperator. More precisely, the Salesian Cooperator vocation is a charism of the Holy Spirit, Who is Love. It has been given to each individual in view of the human promotion of his or her person, not to lord it over others, but to put oneself at their service in a manner that is most suitable to one's abilities and circumstances. Every personal Call from God is made to the most profound depths of a person's awareness; it changes one's existence, not only in one's external circumstances but in his or her heart. The Christian vocation is a call to follow Christ along a new way which entails *conversion*. Every specific vocation defines the person who welcomes it in a variety of ways, inasmuch as it gives definite goals to his or her apostolic activities and carries with it the assimilation of precise spiritual attitudes, behaviors, and actions. The Salesian vocation to be a Cooperator is *a free choice, which qualifies one's existence.* In effect, it calls forth responsibility from each person; asks for his or her free response; implies his or her participation in Don Bosco's apostolic project and the assimilation of his spirit.

**D.** The Cooperator Salesian vocation is not offered to a restricted élite, nor is it a gift reserved for a fortunate few. *Catholics of whatever cultural and social condition can follow this path.* When seeking Salesian Cooperators, Don Bosco turned to the vast public of *good Catholics* of his time. His prospects regarding this Institute were not narrow, but rather vast: he foresaw a numerous membership in the Association, open to Catholics belonging to all social strata and one that would spread far and wide. In fact, the Association numbered (and numbers) among its members persons who belonged to the aristocracy, to the middle class, or were common folk from the city or backwoods, professionals, professors and teachers, laborers, farmers, manual laborers, Deacons, and Diocesan Priests. In short, the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator fits every cultural and social situation conceivable, from the most elevated to the most modest. Today there are many valid ways of "working with Don Bosco."

## Art. 3. One Vocation: Two Ways to Live It

*§1. Don Bosco conceived the Association of Salesian Cooperators as being open both to the laity and to the secular clergy.*

*§2. Lay Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolic commitment and live the Salesian Spirit, with lay characteristics and sensitivities, in the ordinary situations of life and of work.*[3]

*§3. Secular bishops, priests, and deacons who are Salesian Cooperators live their ministry taking inspiration from the pastoral charity of Don Bosco, whose priestly life is a model of one which gives pride of place to working with commitment in behalf of young people and in places where ordinary folk work and live.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core Themes

1. The Lay Nature, Proper to the Salesian Cooperators
2. The Ordained Ministry, Proper to Cooperators Who Are Deacons or Diocesan Priests

#### Keys to Understanding

The configuration of the Association reflects an explicit intention of the Founder, which the first paragraph of the article expresses thus: *Don Bosco conceived the Association of Salesian Cooperators as being open both to the laity and to the secular clergy*. All throughout its history, the Association has constantly numbered among its members both lay Catholics and secular Priests. The number of lay Cooperators was always greater than Priest Cooperators, which number varied according to circumstances. Above all, during Don Rua and Don Rinaldi's Rectorates, there were many Priests who worked among the Cooperators: as Diocesan Directors, Co-Directors, and Decurions [Translator's note: A good and in-depth history of the Association was published recently in Italian, *Il cammino di una profezia* available both in Italian and English for use *intra nos* only and not for publication. All rights are reserved by the publisher.] Many activities within a local or diocesan radius were headed and animated by them. From around the year 1950 and on, their presence in the Association was greatly reduced.

Within the Association, the existence and the Christian and ecclesial action of the two groups (laity and clergy) take on specific characteristics, in a marked way, and impress upon them specific guidelines for their participation in Don Bosco's apostolic project. Being laity or members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are *two ways of living* the unique Salesian vocation common to all Salesian Cooperators.

Within the Church, all, both ordained and lay, are Cooperators with God and with each other. Built on the foundation of the Apostles and together with Mary, who is the Church's Image and Prefiguration, the entire Church is the great Co-operator with the Father and with Christ in the work of the patient construction of the Kingdom. There is no true and complete cooperation with God outside of Her (the Church): Don Bosco was also convinced of this. In the Church, all Her members, without exception, are called to cooperate actively in the Divine task of salvation. Today, therefore, Christ, in the Name of the Father, and Mary and the Church, in the Name of Christ, call to Themselves and send to others every baptized person who is consciously aware of his or her Faith. To lazy,

[3]Canon Law Society of America. *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition.* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983) can. 278. Print.

unengaged, sleeping Christians, the Owner of the Vineyard says: "Wake up! Why are you here all day long doing nothing?" – Their dramatic response, relevant still today: "Because no one has hired us!" – "Therefore, *go, you, too*, into My vineyard!" (Mt. 9:37). The Council has reaffirmed this with great clarity, and in a very impressive way, using the term "cooperation". There ought not be any parasites in the Church: every baptized individual is personally called to collaborate, as a good son or daughter, in the paternal undertaking of God and, precisely for this reason, everyone, whether ordained or lay, receives from the Holy Spirit *different abilities*, different gifts ("charisms", I Cor. 7:7 and 12:7), and the possibility to give his or her contribution, which may be little and yet is indispensable.

The article highlights three guidelines regarding the specific participation of the Salesian Cooperator in Don Bosco's apostolic project: 1) He or she brings to life today his or her apostolic commitment and lives the Salesian Spirit in the ordinary situations of life and work. These are the theological and sociological conditions of the secular state in which he or she carries on the mission of the Church according to Don Bosco's spirit. 2) The Cooperator accomplishes all of this with characteristic lay sensitivities; that is, as a Christian called to carry out an apostolate to the young and to common folk through the exercise of fidelity to the practices of the Faith, through prophecy, and through Christian witness and animation within the temporal order. 3) As a lay person, he or she spreads such values as these in his or her own environment; i.e., the specific values of Don Bosco's Gospel project carried out with lay characteristics in one's family, in one's marriage, in the areas of life and work, and in one's social reality. *The laity*, are all, *in full title*, co-responsible in the work of God. *Lumen Gentium* says: "Through their Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. ... every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself." (no. 33b) *Apostolicam Actuositatem* says:

> The Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate... The laity derive the *right* and *duty* [emphases my own] to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of His kingdom. (nos. 2a and 3b)

And they specify: "It remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 35d) "They are fellow workers for the truth... they cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* nos. 6a and 10) And, with magnificent words: "they should be aware of the fact that they are cooperating with God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 16a) "co-workers [of Christ] in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 33) Obviously, they also work with the Bishops, Diocesan and Religious Priests, among themselves, in their parishes, in the diocese, and elsewhere. (see *Lumen Gentium* no. 27c) The *catechists* in the Missions are called "reliable coworkers of the priestly order." (*Ad Gentes* no. 17b) *Christian spouses and parents* receive the sublime titles of "Cooperators with the love of God" (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 50b), "Cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 11b), "witnesses and Cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 41e)

In delineating the figure of the Salesian Cooperator who is an Ordained Deacon or Priest, a member of the ecclesiastical Hierarchy, the article highlights three essential guidelines which refer directly to the specific way in which he participates, in his unique condition in the world, in the realization of Don Bosco's apostolic project. The fact that he lives out his personal ministry taking inspiration from Don Bosco, an eminent model of priestly life, is characteristic of the Salesian way he exercises his priestly or diaconal ministry. He gives privilege of place to the young and to the environments of common folk in his pastoral choices. This marks his ministry's field of action, keeping it in harmony with the Salesian mission to the young and to common folk. In this way, he enriches the Church in which he works because the apostolic project of Don Bosco is a concrete expression of the mission of the Church.

*The Ordained Ministers - Bishops, Priests, and Deacons* - are obviously eminent "Cooperators with God". The Council applies this title explicitly to missionaries because they cooperate "in the mystery of salvation." (*Ad Gentes* nos. 15b and 25b) Priests, especially parish priests, are often defined as "prudent Cooperators with the Episcopal order." (*Lumen Gentium* nos. 28b and 41c)

All the above manifests the mystical greatness, the ecclesial value, and the doctrinal and spiritual quality of the name "Cooperator". What does it mean to be a Salesian Cooperator? It is, for the Christian, a way of expressing and living out one's cooperation with God's Plan, which is profoundly part and parcel of the Christian vocation itself.

## Art. 4. The Association, in the Church

*§1. The Association of Salesian Cooperators is approved by the Apostolic See[4] as a public Association of the Faithful and shares in the spiritual patrimony of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. The members actively collaborate in its mission, in the name of the Church, under the authority of the Rector Major as Don Bosco's Successor, in a spirit of fidelity to its Pastors and in collaboration with other ecclesial forces.*

*§2. Salesian Cooperators manifest a filial devotion to the Supreme Pontiff.*

*§3. The Association of Salesian Cooperators is recognized as a public ecclesiastical juridic person[5]. It has its headquarters in Rome.*

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Theme**

The Association as a Juridic Reality

**Keys to Understanding**

**A. *The Association as a Juridic Reality***

From the very beginning of his work of the Oratory, Don Bosco sought to change the condition in which his collaborators or Cooperators found themselves – that of a private association – and to confer upon their collaboration a public character under the form of an Association approved first by the Archbishop of Torino and then by the Holy Father. To this end, he drew up some guidelines or practical norms, early on, and then, later, some articles which he inserted into the various drafts of his *Constitutions* of the Salesian Society. Finally, in the *Rule* of 1876, the Association is equated to a "Third Order" but with this difference: it had apostolic goals and not just devotional ones. In fidelity to the intentions of the Founder, and in conformity with the new *Code of Canon Law*, this article presents the Salesian Cooperators as comprising "a Public Association of the Faithful" which participates in the spiritual patrimony of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

*A Public Association of the Faithful:* According to the *Code of Canon Law*, "Associations of the Christian faithful which are erected by competent ecclesiastical authority are called public associations." Such is the case of the Salesian Cooperator Association, beginning on May 9, 1876 – the date in which it was recognized as such by Pius IX in his Brief *Cum Sicuti*.

*Association equated to a "Third Order"*: Again, according to Canon Law, "Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute while in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name." It is opportune to recall here the traditional distinctions among "First Order," "Second Order," and "Third Order," which indicate, respectively: a Religious Institute of men (e.g., the Franciscan monks); a Religious Institute of women (e.g., the Dominican nuns); and the Association of the Faithful tied to a Religious order of men and directed by it. In the case of the Cooperators, their Association is equated to a Third Order with the official name of

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[4]Pius IX. "Cum Sicuti." *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. Vol. XI. (Torino: Pia Società Salesiana, 1930) 546-547. Print. (found in Italian version only).

John Paul II, RVA (5/9/1986), Prot. n. T9-1/1986 – Benedict XVI, PVA *ad experimentum* (3/15/2007), Prot. n. T9-1/2006 – Francis, Definitive PVA (4/29/2013)

[5]*Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. Can. 313.

"Association of Salesian Cooperators" because it meets the criterion listed above. In effect, it is an "Association of *apostolic life*": this expression gave the inspiration for the present title of the *Project of Apostolic Life*. *It is tied to a Religious Institute*, the Society of St. Francis de Sales: this is why the *Project of Apostolic Life* was approved by the Congregation for Religious and not by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. For this reason, "*it participates in the spiritual patrimony*" of said Society. All the Salesian values which are proper to the apostolic project of Don Bosco and common to the vocational Groups of the Salesian Family constitute this spiritual patrimony; it is placed "*under the higher direction*" of the Society of St. Francis de Sales in the sense defined by the *Project of Apostolic Life* itself. This juridic configuration of the Association entails a general implication: ecclesiastical legislation that covers the "Associations of the Faithful" and, in particular, "Public Associations" is valid also for it. Such legislation regards those matters which directly interest the Cooperators: the existence and the purposes of the Associations of the Faithful (Canon 298); the right for an Association of the Faithful (Canon 299); the competency of the ecclesiastical authority in establishing Associations (Canons 300 and 301); Clerical Associations (Canon 302); Third Orders and Associations equated to a Third Order (Canon 303); the Statutes of the Association and matters to be defined by it (Canon 304); vigilance of the ecclesiastical authority over the Associations (Canon 305); the condition to enjoy the rights and privileges of the Association (Canon 306); the acceptance of members into the Association (Canon 307) and their dismissal from it (Canon 308); the competencies of the Associations (Canon 309); and the obligations of the Religious Institutes to which an Association is joined (Canon 311).

Legislation concerning *Public* Associations treats of other arguments which interest the Association of Cooperators: the authorities competent to establish them (Canon 312); the juridic personality of such Associations (Canon 313); the approval of the Statutes (Canon 314); the higher ecclesiastical direction (Canon 315); the condition for the valid admission and dismissal of an Aspirant (Canon 316); the administration of the goods of the Association (Canon 319); and the suppression of the Association (Canon 320). During the revision of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, attention had to be paid to the canonical legislation noted above and to the norms connected with it, if it were to be approved by the Holy See. The comments about individual articles highlight the juridic aspects of the argument and will be examined one by one.

**B.** When carrying out the Salesian mission, the Cooperators work not only as members of the Church, as do all the baptized, but in the name of the Church and, specifically, of the Priests who guide and animate Her because they are members of a Public Association within the Catholic Church. This means: their Salesian apostolate is officially recognized by ecclesiastical authority and is authorized by it; they share in the mission of the entire Christian Community; they manifest the practical living out of that mission in a public way; tied to the Society of St. Francis de Sales, they work within the framework of particular bonds with said Society and with its Rector Major; and they work, not as a "closed group" but with a spirit open to collaboration, *in fidelity to their Pastors*, and *in collaboration with other ecclesial forces*. Canon Law insists on this point:

> Members of institutes of consecrated life who preside over or assist associations in some way united to their institute are to take care that these associations give assistance to the works of the apostolate which already exist in a diocese, especially cooperating, under the direction of the local ordinary, with associations which are ordered to the exercise of the apostolate in the diocese. (Canon 311)

This norm is guided by the law of communion which must animate all the members of the Christian Community, both parochial and diocesan. Such communion becomes real through mutual collaboration among persons and among groups. In many dioceses and parishes today there is found a concrete application of what is called an "organic pastoral" promoted by Vatican Council II – through this means the different apostolic forces present at the parish and diocesan levels collaborate with each other in drawing up and putting into action a pastoral plan in communion with the parish Priests themselves and under the higher direction of their Bishop.

**C**. A fourth fundamental implication concerns the fact *that the Association of Salesian Cooperators enjoys the status of a public juridic ecclesiastical person* according to the norms of Canon 313 and within the sphere of what is defined in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. Such qualification was conferred upon it with the decree of erection and with the successive approval of the Statutes. In what this consists is explained by the *Code of Canon Law*: here are cited some excerpts which directly regard the Association of Salesian Cooperators, especially in what concerns its organization; the Councils at various levels; the administration of goods; and its rights and duties within the Church.

> Can. 114 §1. Juridic persons are constituted either by the prescript of law or by special grant of competent authority given through a decree. They are aggregates of persons (universitates personarum) or of things (universitates rerum) ordered for a purpose which is in keeping with the mission of the Church and which transcends the purpose of the individuals. The purposes mentioned in §1 are understood as those which pertain to works of piety, of the apostolate, or of charity, whether spiritual or temporal.

Therefore, the Association of Salesian Cooperators is understood as either aggregates of persons or aggregates of things belonging to the Association itself.

> An aggregate of persons, which can be constituted only with at least three persons, is collegial if the members determine its action through participation in rendering decisions, whether by equal right or not, according to the norm of law and the statutes; otherwise it is non-collegial. An aggregate of things, or an autonomous foundation, consists of goods or things, whether spiritual or material, and either one or more physical persons or a college… (Canon 115)

The Councils of the Salesian Cooperators at the various levels constitute an aggregate of persons with collegial character.

> Public juridic persons are aggregates of persons (*universitates personarum*) or of things (*universitates rerum*) which are constituted by competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the purposes set out for them, they fulfill in the name of the Church, according to the norms of the prescripts of the law, the proper function entrusted to them in view of the public good…" (Canon 116)

"*Representing* a public juridic person and acting in its name are those whose competence is acknowledged by universal or particular law or by its own Statutes." (Canon 118) "A juridic person is *perpetual* by its nature; nevertheless, it is extinguished if it is legitimately suppressed by competent authority or has ceased to act for a hundred years." (Canon 120) As a public juridic person, the Association of Salesian Cooperators can make, in the ways foreseen by the *Project of Apostolic Life*, official acts recognized in the Church regarding the Association's apostolate; the collaboration within the Association and with apostolic forces outside of itself; the acceptance of Aspirants; the formation and dismissal of its members; and its organization at various levels. In countries where there are concordats ruling over the relationship between Church and State, the Association can take advantage of such a qualification in its relationships with civic authorities. Finally, as a Public Association, it enjoys its own headquarters in Rome, at the Generalate of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. This juridic configuration of the Association within the Church brings with it some spiritual consequences: the real awareness of being members of an organized and distinct group which is inserted into the living tapestry of the Church – the Mystery of communion – and the participation in a more efficacious and evident manner in Her mission by putting into effect the apostolic project of Don Bosco.

## Art. 5. The Association in the Salesian Family

*The Association of Salesian Cooperators is one of the Groups of the Salesian Family. Together with the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and other officially-recognized Groups*[6]*, it is a bearer of the common Salesian Vocation and shares responsibility for the vitality of Don Bosco's project in the Church and in the world.*

*The Association brings to the Salesian Family those values which are specific to the secular state, respecting the identity and autonomy proper to each group. It lives a particular relationship of communion with the Society of St. Francis de Sales which, by the will of the Founder, has a specific role of responsibility within the Family.*

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Themes**

1. Belonging to the Association and the Salesian Family
2. Configuration, Responsibilities, and Values in Relation to Don Bosco's Project
3. Bond of Communion with the Society of St. Francis de Sales

**Keys to Understanding**

**A.** Don Bosco founded one spiritual Family composed of different and complementary Groups, even if he did not succeed at his time to realize this unity in an appropriate canonical form. The original unity of this Family has its roots in communion of spirit and in the mission directed to the service of the young and common folk. In the light of the Magisterium of Vatican Council II, the Family founded by Don Bosco has been recognized as a charismatic reality; i.e., as an ecclesial gift of the Holy Spirit destined for growth and expansion among the people of God throughout time - beyond the mutable circumstances of place and of time and according to a determinate and permanent direction.

Three urgent needs require the communion of Salesian forces: the social context which is particularly touched by the process of secularization urges and prompts us to avoid every form of isolation and self-sufficiency; the ecclesial context in its rediscovery of the People of God as protagonists in the history of salvation; and the vastness and complexity of the problems which our youth face impel us to accentuate the forms of allocating the forces working in this sector and their mutual collaboration. It is not a matter only of a simple "strategy of action", but of building together a "future" in the light of the Gospel for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Our Founder Don Bosco and his Salesian Family are to be understood within this ecclesial vision which urges us forward to overcome all restrictive concepts which would reduce both Don Bosco and his Family to the "private property" of we who continue his Work. Consequently, the Salesian Family is an ecclesial reality which becomes a sign and a witness of the vocation of its members for a particular mission in the spirit of Don Bosco. In such a way, the Salesian Family develops an original spirituality which is charismatic in nature and which enriches the entire Body of the Church and becomes a Christian pedagogical model.

[6]Superior Council of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco. "Guidelines Adopted by the Superior Council for Acceptance into the Salesian Family." Trans. *Acts of the General Council.* 304.2 (1982): 61-65. Print.

**B.** Different types of Groups belong to the Don Bosco's apostolic Family, each with its own particular kind of bond with it and with each other. The criterion adopted regarding what kind of bond links them is primarily a *vocational* one: the common Salesian Vocation makes it such that some Groups have tighter ties among themselves. The ones with the closest ties are those which the Holy Spirit inspires to seek after Christian sanctity by committing themselves to the mission to the young and to common folk according to the Salesian Spirit. They are the ones who know that they are co-responsible and collaborate to fulfill this mission according to such a spirit. The three Groups founded by Don Bosco himself (Cooperators, SDB, FMA) belong to this category, given this vocational sense. [Although Don Bosco also founded a fourth Group, the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), it is on a different level from the first three because its members do not make a lifelong Vow or Promise and theirs is not a group of apostolic action but primarily an apostolate of prayer.]

In time, the Spirit of the Lord enriched the Salesian Family with other Groups. These are those Groups which *participate in the mission* - not simply those who are the intended receivers of Salesian action (i.e., the young and the poor). These distinct Groups constitute a polychromatic array of forces which represent all the different life circumstances and all the forms of apostolic Salesian work. They give the concrete possibility to respond better to the multiple demands of the mission but on the condition that they truly feel to be one Family only and wish to collaborate in fact and in deed.

Then there are other Groups or persons who gravitate around these officially-recognized ones and who have various types of bonds with them but are not connected by a Salesian Vocation or by the education they received. When taken together, they form a vast "Salesian Movement." The Salesian Family occupies a certain place within this Movement as the "motor" and unifying center. The social dynamics proper to such a movement have made it such that Don Bosco has become the patrimony not only of the Salesians but also of the entire Church and of humanity. In effect, the "Salesian Movement", while remaining, *per se*, an ecclesial dynamic, can include different forces, even those that are rather heterogeneous and which have different organizational modalities and different interests as regards human promotion and societal concerns, given that the "Movement" is open to collaboration even with non-Christians and sometimes with non-believers. In short, persons of goodwill, even if they do not always know in-depth the values that are central to a Salesian education as expressed by the Preventive System, can still gravitate around Don Bosco and his ideals.

**C.** The Salesian Family is a project of life and of unified action – both integrated and open – to which individuals are called by the Holy Spirit and towards whose realization participation is effected in different ways. It is a *unified* project because many values are held in common and are to be realized together, given the fact of having been called for the one saving mission proper to Don Bosco and to be carried out according to his spirit. The action of all the members of the Salesian Family – understood as a holistic promotion and education of the young to the Faith – moves along the lines of co-responsibility even if the expressions of this apostolic action will differ according to the times, persons, and needs. It is an integrated project because each Group works on it according to its own proper identity: Consecration (the SDB and FMA Religious and the other Religious Institutes – secular Institutes where the VDB and the CDB are concerned) and the concrete form of life (priestly or lay, celibate or wed) proper to each individual member of the Salesian Family. It is a project *animated by the Holy Spirit* Who keeps united all those who have been "called together". It is a project which implies *communion within a just autonomy* so that each Group might express the richness proper to it in a holistic way.

**D.** As to what concerns the proper bonds with the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Association lives a special rapport of communion with the Salesian Society which, by the will of the Founder, has a specific role of responsibility within the Family. The Salesians have the function of being and giving "stability": they live the

Salesian mission and spirit within Religious Consecration according to the fullness desired by Don Bosco. Their profession of the Gospel Counsels furnishes the helps necessary for this stability and for faithful creativity both in the broader realm of the Church Universal and within, among the Groups comprising the Family. They carry out both an internal and an external unifying function because, in a spirit of service, they propose close ties with each individual Group and also between the Groups.

## Art. 6. The Salesian Cooperators: Salesians in the World

*Salesian Cooperators live out their faith in their own secular reality. Taking inspiration from Don Bosco's apostolic project, they have a strong sense of communion with the other members of the Salesian Family. They commit themselves to the same mission to youth and to ordinary folk in a fraternal and united way. They work for the good of the Church and of society in a manner adapted to the educational needs of their territory and to their own concrete possibilities.*[7]

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Themes**

1. Ecclesial Nature
2. Secular Nature
3. Salesian Nature

**Keys to Understanding**

The human vocation is to become more human every day and always; the Christian vocation is to become ever more truly a son or daughter of God – another Christ; i.e., to tend to the fullness of Christian life. But since the Church is "in intimate solidarity" with mankind and its story (see *Gaudium et Spes* no. 1), the Spirit of God never ceases to raise up in Her men, women, and Movements to respond to the new needs of the times. We all know that the 19th century was an epic of decisive transformation: the beginning of the industrialization that invaded Europe was accompanied by social and political upheaval and, in particular, by the phenomenon of urbanization. It was at that time that the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco and made him "a giant of charity": his vocation would be to dedicate his life to poor, abandoned, and at-risk youth to save them from the material and spiritual misery in which they were living and to assure them of holistic promotion; he would also have to invent an educative method appropriate for them and establish a *vast movement of apostolic forces* which would be capable of assuring the continuity and the spread of his work and of the original spirit by which he wants the work animated. Thus, he would found a group of direct, on-the-spot, collaborators – male and female Religious apostles – and a more flexible group of collaborators: Diocesan Priests and lay apostles inserted into every environment and place. To this immense and united apostolic Family, he gave St. Francis de Sales as inspiration and Patron; *therefore, all the members are Salesians*, vowed to the same basic task and according to the same spirit even if some are Religious Salesians (with Vows: SDB and FMA) and others are "non-Religious" Salesians (without Vows: "Cooperators").

**A.** The fact that the Salesian Cooperator takes his inspiration "from the apostolic project of Don Bosco" is the global and decisive sign of all the aspects characterizing his or her identity. On one hand, this article highlights those elements which are in common with the other vocational Groups of the Salesian Family: vocation, mission to the young and to common folk, the sense of solidarity and collaboration, working for the good of the Church and of society, and the Salesian Spirit; on the other hand, it also brings to light those aspects which differentiate it: its secular nature, proper to a person who lives in his or her family and is involved in temporal commitments, his personal gifts – both of nature and of Grace – and his or her specific lay or ordained reality. The common elements make him or her "Salesian"; those specific elements qualify him or her as "Salesian in the world"; i.e., "secular."

[7]Pascual Chavez, SDB. *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco (Salesian Family Charter).* Trans. (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 2012) 25-26. Print.

**B.** The article presents the identity of the Salesian Cooperator in the light of Vatican Council II. For the Council, the Church is the fruit of a free *election, vocation, and sanctification*. Constitutionally, it is a Mystery of *communion*, is essentially *missionary*, and participates in the mission of Christ and of His Spirit. It puts into action this mission in *service* to the person, according to the needs of the historical moment and following Jesus' example. By his or her *Promise*, the Salesian Cooperator follows the *impulse* of the Spirit and chooses a way in which to live his or her Baptismal *consecration* and the one made at Confirmation. In the Salesian vocation as a Cooperator, one commits him or herself to Don Bosco's *mission to the young and to common folk* in order to participate in the mission of the Church. He or she carries out the Salesian mission following the dynamic of *communion* within the Association, in rapport with the Salesian Family, and in collaboration with other ecclesial forces.

In their relationships with those who adhere to other religions and with those who belong to Churches and communities which are not Catholic, Salesian Cooperators follow the indications of Vatican Council II and of the successive papal and episcopal Magisterium which concern ecumenical dialogue and the relationship of the Church with non-Christian Religions.

**C.** The secular character and nature proper to the laity and to Deacons, along with those proper to Diocesan Priests, and their inherent commitments [for those who are laity, the Christian animation of temporal realities (family, work, economy, culture, and politics…)], are part and parcel of the daily life of the Salesian Cooperators and are identified with their Christian mission. The vocation proper to the Salesian Cooperator is to be "a Salesian in the world" without the ties of Religious Vows. Within the Association there are men and women; white collar and blue collar workers; cultured and common folk; young adults; adults; elderly; lay Catholics, Deacons, and Secular Priests; celibate and married; persons who work in civic and ecclesial institutions, as well as persons who work in the sphere of SDB and FMA works or those of other Salesian Groups. In every environment and place, the Cooperators put into effect Don Bosco's apostolic project in a way adapted to their circumstances and to their own concrete possibilities. Such an orientation cuts across the field of the Salesian mission and service to the young, of communion and collaboration, and of formation and organization.

***Given all the above, what is necessary in order to be a Cooperator?***

Above all, one needs to be convinced that "*the Spirit of the Lord fills the universe*": The Holy Spirit does not content Himself with inspiring Vocations only to the Priesthood and Religious Life: He "calls" every baptized person to find his or her original place in the Church and to fulfill his or particular task within the common mission:

- to have a *taste and a desire for an authentic Christian life* when faced with so many baptized people who seem to ignore completely the responsibilities inherent to their Baptism;
- to desire to *flee from mediocrity* and from "formula piety" so as to take the Gospel seriously and to attempt to live the formidable adventure of an incarnated Faith and of a life given to others;
- to be *sensitized to and concerned about the problems of youth and the poor* and to take conscious awareness that these are the most decisive problems in our world and of the world to come and, therefore, to sympathize with the youth and with the poor and to wish to help them to assure their human and Christian promotion;
- *to know Don Bosco* and to realize that he himself, *his work*, his realistic and dynamic spirit, and his educational method correspond to certain traits of our own character. To follow him and to work with him, therefore, will develop our natural and supernatural gifts for the good of the Church; and
- *to have a sense of fraternity*, to love meeting with others, to love working with others, to accept the values of co-responsibility and of collaboration and, therefore, a certain discipline of action.

The young adults and the adults who, in saying "YES" to this invitation of the Holy Spirit, commit themselves and their entire life to live a holistic Christianity in the spirit of Don Bosco and to educate the young become Salesian Cooperators. "We need to become clearly aware that to commit oneself as a 'Salesian Cooperator' is to respond to a true 'call'; therefore, it is to accept an authentic Salesian apostolic vocation." (see *Acts of the Special General Chapter XX* no. 730)

# Chapter II

## THE APOSTOLIC COMMITMENT OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

*«You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.*
*Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works*
*and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven»* (Mt. 5:13-16)

The entire second chapter is illuminated by these words: "The lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator [is] marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes." The Beatitudes speak to us of a different world, of a different kind of community, of a logic which is in radical opposition to that of the world – an alternative to the ones that exists – and of a Church which makes Herself the servant of mankind. It comes spontaneously to ask ourselves: What gestures can verify and render the proclamation of the Beatitudes comprehensible today?

Jesus' Beatitudes are neither a simple wish nor a codification of ethical conditions which ensure the fulfillment of a promise. They are the efficacious proclamation of the Messianic Promise: It is possible to be "blessed" in who and what one is. This – even if the situation seems desperate – is because it is God who makes blessed those who entrust themselves to Him. The Beatitudes are a huge, efficacious promise of life and of felicity which spur us on to rethink the ways in which we define life and happiness in our daily life. The different intonations given the Beatitudes and in which they find fulfillment in the Bible texts (the poor, the pure of heart, those who hunger and thirst for justice and peace, and those who suffer and cry…) indicate, through a truth offered, welcomed, and taken to oneself what life and felicity are, precisely as they assure us of its fullness. If proclaiming the Beatitudes means rewriting them in an ever-new and ever-faithful story – one in which the events of the Gospel Beatitudes lay the groundwork and our renewed passion for evangelization and the challenges that the young throw at us are interwoven in these complex times of crises and of profound change – then it is indispensable that we identify these challenges with precision and have the willingness to respond. How we perceive them conditions, in fact, every proposal that seeks to face reality head on. Among the many challenges, we Salesian Cooperators highlight those that concern education.

***We "place our bets" on education***

We know that we are living in dramatic and complex situations. And we realize that man is at the center of a story of political, economic, cultural, and, sometimes, even religious relationships which set conditions on and often suffocate him. A long ecclesial tradition recommends to us the courage to give privilege of place to education as the way to a global transformation which is both incisive and feasible. Education is a privileged way to serve social transformation because through it one can achieve a concrete realization of the Beatitudes. Education is, in

fact, a presence and a relationship for restoring to each man the joy of living and of a future which previously had often defrauded him by progressively setting into motion within him a conscious reflection and self-criticism – of his own story, of others, and of the world. To restore life and hope in this way seems but a little thing in the midst of all the bullying and abuse of power, the being taken advantage of, discrimination and prejudice, and of acts of violence; but it is, in truth, a very great thing which we are willing to bet on, both in the political realm and in its regenerative capacity. Here is found the core of our apostolic commitment and service to the young.

Not only do we affirm the close relationship that must exist between education and evangelization, we also highlight something more: the choice of education as also the privileged place for evangelization. This perspective reminds us that God is indispensable in every person's life, precisely when man is the lord of his life. He is not a ruthless competitor in his hunger for life and liberty. He is, instead, the "decisive resource" to be called upon in his depths and in the truth of the very dignity of man.

***Love for life as the reference point***

The preceding points are expressed and become concrete within a global attitude – love for life. This attitude is indispensable for anyone who wants to proclaim the Gospel Beatitudes. In our love for life we confess God's saving power. And in the Name of Jesus, in fact, we affirm that the man of every day is already the new man. The present is marked in a germinal way by its future.

Certainly, man is poor and a sinner. But he is not only that. He is already the new man – poor, faltering, and a sinner – who becomes new by bringing the gift of his life to its gradual fulfillment. Life is like a seed: it carries the entire plant within it – in that miniscule fragment of life in which it is expressed. By means of an intrinsic force and in the presence of favorable conditions, it blossoms little by little into something continuously new. The leaves, the trunk, and the branches are not added on from the outside. They are not pieces to be assembled. They are already present in that incipient stage, *in potentiā*: that seed is already the plant, even if it develops into it day by day.

This is life. An act of faith in God's power instantly becomes a huge, limitless trust in man. The Salesian Cooperator stays close to the young to witness to this faith and this trust: he or she is not the one who makes the seed inside them sprout into a large tree. He or she but supports the growth process – unleashing it, encouraging it, urging it on, and restoring to each one the ability to get back his own life and sense of hope.

***«You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world»***

These words serve as an excellent introduction to the illumined and wise understanding of the material in the second chapter, which is dedicated precisely to the apostolic commitment of the Salesian Cooperator in the concrete fabric of his family and his social, professional, cultural, political, ecclesial, and Salesian life. In such a context of being fully immersed in the secular world, he must carry out a mission which fosters quality human and Christian life for all those with whom he lives and works and, especially, for the privileged "receivers" of his apostolic commitment: the young and common folk.

## Art. 7. The Witness of the Beatitudes

*The lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator, marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes, commits him or her to the evangelization of culture and of social life.*[8] *For this reason the Cooperator, being rooted in Christ and aware that all baptized people are called to the perfection of love, lives and gives witness to:*

- *a life lived according to the Spirit, as the source of joy, peace, and forgiveness;*
- *freedom, in obedience to God's plan, appreciating the value and autonomy proper to secular realities, committing themselves to direct these, above all, to the service of persons;*
- *Gospel poverty, administering the goods entrusted to them using the criteria of temperance and of sharing, in view of the common good;*
- *a sexuality according to a Gospel vision of chastity, marked by delicacy and a joyful married or celibate life, lived with integrity and based on love;*
- *that mercy which opens one's heart to all material and moral miseries and urges one to work with pastoral charity;*
- *justice to build a more fraternal world that recognizes and promotes the rights of all, especially of the weakest;*
- *a firm will to be a builder of peace in a world agitated by violence and class hatred.*

*This way of love for God and for others is a sure path towards sanctity.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core Themes

1. Gospel Values Proposed to All the Disciples of the Lord Jesus
2. Evangelizing with the Spirit of the Beatitudes
3. The Beatitudes of the Salesian Cooperator

#### Keys to Understanding

*Lumen Gentium* solemnly declared that all the Faithful in the Church are called to sanctity and to perfect charity, even if by different paths and in different states of life, and that the Gospel Counsels have been proposed to all Christ's disciples – even if their practice takes on a different expression according to each individual's specific vocation. It is in this (and only in this) sense that the present article speaks of the attitudes and of the various Gospel Counsels, inasmuch as they can be lived effectively by all the lay Faithful, once they have taken into account their abilities, distinct vocations, and different circumstances of life: celibate, for the love of the Kingdom; betrothed; married; or widowed. In short, it focuses on how the Gospel values expressed in the Beatitudes can be lived concretely by "secular" apostles.

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[8]John Paul II. *Christifideles Laici.* Par. 16. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

Vatican Council II. *Gaudium et Spes.* Par. 72. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

**A. *A Personal Style of Life Marked by the Spirit of the Beatitudes***

*Gaudium et Spes* declares that it is of great importance that the laity "should observe the right order in their earthly activities in faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel. Thus their whole life, both individual and social, will be permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty." (no. 72a) But is it possible to reach this ideal? Certainly! But not by confiding only in one's own strengths but, rather, by placing one's trust in God's help. "This Charity of God," affirms the Conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* "enables the laity really to express the spirit of the Beatitudes in their lives." (no. 4) The *Project of Apostolic Life* recognizes and adopts these authoritative declarations of Vatican Council II with the affirmation: *the lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator is marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes.*

**B. *Evangelizing Culture and Social Life with the Spirit of the Beatitudes***

The Council takes an extra step forward and invites all the lay Faithful not only to take on the spirit of the Beatitudes as their own by showing themselves docile to the marvelous action of the Holy Spirit but also to radiate it in the environments in which they live, to everyone's benefit. This affirmation is from *Lumen Gentium*, no. 38: "All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. (Gal. 5:22) They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers—whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed." (Mt 5:3-9) This inversion of values can be understood only by making reference to Christ; the Beatitudes are nothing without Him because He alone gives them meaning for He lived them perfectly: "Learn from Me Who am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt 11:29) In effect, the placement of the Beatitudes at the start of Jesus' inaugural discourse offers, according to Matthew 5:3-12, the "*plan for Christian happiness*." Inserting the spirit of the Beatitudes into the present-day world cannot happen without *an evangelization* of the culture and of social life. And this carries with it a true renewal of present-day mankind in all strata of society. Paul VI underlined this on a memorable page of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which merits being transcribed here because the *Project of Apostolic Life* takes inspiration from it when it declares that the Salesian Cooperator's personal style of life, marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes, *is also a commitment to evangelize culture and social life*:

> For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new." But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs… for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation. (nos. 18 and 19)

We need to be knowledgeable if we are to be able to incarnate the Gospel in our culture and society.

**C. *The Beatitudes of the Salesian Cooperator Today***

According to the Discourse on the Mount, two principal Beatitudes sum up all the others: poverty, with its pageant of works of justice, humility, meekness, purity, mercy, commitments and labors for peace; and persecution for the love of Christ. "Yes" to the Beatitudes implies "no" to opposite attitudes and behaviors: hatred, self-sufficiency, pride, hardness of heart, intrigue, the will to dominate, violence, the desire for luxury, and sloth.

In translating the Gospel message of the Beatitudes for the Cooperator of today, the *Project of Apostolic Life* keeps all this in mind but makes direct reference to some fundamental dynamics of the human person (the use of liberty, the administration of goods, and the sexual life) and some contemporaneous and variously diffused social situations (efficiency, aggressiveness, divisions, violence, and suffering). Concretely-speaking, it lists the following Beatitudes: a life lived according to the Spirit; the use of one's freedom in obedience to God's plan; the administration of goods in a spirit of Gospel poverty; living one's sexuality according to a Gospel vision of chastity; and primacy given to the Holy Spirit's values: mercy, justice, peace, and the apostolic fecundity of suffering, of non-violence, and of forgiveness.

The order of the first three on the list is adopted from the Salesian *Constitutions*, which respect the sequence proposed by Don Bosco. The underlying motive is the distinct bond which obedience, poverty, and chastity have with the Salesian mission. Taken together, these Beatitudes constitute a project of Gospel and Salesian life which is truly capable of evangelizing profoundly both the family and the social realities in which the Salesian Cooperators live and work.

- ***Freedom, in obedience to God's Plan***

The "secular" aspects of Christian obedience are presented in a special way in this article. Only in a second moment, but certainly not because it is considered secondary, does it speak of "ecclesial" obedience, which is made of attentive and mature docility to our legitimate Shepherds. In what does this "secular obedience" consist? Following the authoritative indications of Vatican Council II, the *Project of Apostolic Life* brings us back to *obedience to God's Plan*. In regards to this, a text of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 7b, is particularly pertinent:

> All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress, not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order. 'God saw that all He had made was very good' (Gen. 1:31). This natural goodness of theirs takes on a special dignity as a result of their relation to the human person, for whose service they were created. It has pleased God to unite all things, both natural and supernatural, in Christ Jesus 'so that in all things He may have the first place' (Col. 1:18). This destination, however, not only does not deprive the temporal order of its

> independence, its proper goals, laws, supports, and significance for human welfare but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth and puts it on a level with man's whole vocation upon earth.

Recognizing and obeying this Divine Plan for Creation implies an initial human and Christian attitude, expressly proposed to the Salesian Cooperator in the *Project of Apostolic Life*: *appreciation for the value of and the autonomy proper to secular realities*. Cultivating such an attitude requires the acquisition of a correct lay mentality; that is, a mentality that bears the following characteristics: 1) concern for the objective value of secular realities, such as physical health and life, family, work, jobs and professions, culture, the sciences, the economy, industry, commerce, politics, relations among peoples, social justice, and peace; 2) dedication to them with constancy even if they are complex realities which demand a serious study of what is real in the present day; 3) a profound sense of professionalism; 4) awareness of the usefulness and the purpose of every job and profession and the demands inherent to each, which are often burdensome; 5) the nurturing of a healthy realism in facing one's existence; 6) seriousness in planning objectives to be reached; 7) the cultivation of collaboration; and 8) appreciation for organization. These qualities are not easily found in one who believes he can prescind from the values that are proper to the "laity."

Recognizing and obeying this Divine plan for Creation means, in today's situation, *not allowing oneself to be brainwashed by the multiple and contemporaneous forms of secularism, laicism, and atheistic materialism.* These absolutize Nature and secular realities, unhinging them from God or, according to the atheistic hypothesis, "freeing them from His domination"; thus demonstrating a grave inability to comprehend the meaning of Creation and the union that exists between God and the realities created by Him and entrusted to the responsibility of man. Regarding these ideas, a second passage of the Conciliar Decree (no. 7c) is important and must be cited:

> In the course of history, the use of temporal things has been marred by serious vices. Affected by original sin, men have frequently fallen into many errors concerning the true God, the nature of man, and the principles of the moral law. This has led to the corruption of morals and human institutions and not rarely to contempt for the human person himself. In our own time, moreover, those who have trusted excessively in the progress of the natural sciences and the technical arts have fallen into an idolatry of temporal things and have become their slaves rather than their masters.

In the face of these and analogous distorted situations of sinful human intervention, a specific task for the lay Christian is obvious. This is also expressly proposed to the Cooperator by the *Project of Apostolic Life*: *always to direct [secular realities] to the service of persons.* This is a second aspect of the secularity proper to the Salesian Cooperators' specific vocation for it is meant for the Christian animation of the temporal order.

- ***Gospel and secular poverty***

Before all else, the type of poverty proposed to the Salesian Cooperator is Gospel poverty; in other words, it is the one practiced by the Lord Jesus and proclaimed a "Beatitude" by Him. Before being an economic or social reality, it is a spiritual and religious attitude. The "poor", in the Biblical sense, are the meek who are aware of their personal limitations and who trust in God. Jesus of Nazareth is presented as the Messiah of the poor and He Himself is poor because He is "meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:29) and the "peaceful" King. (Mt. 21:5) He, Who also appreciates things and uses them with simplicity, demands of His disciples this spiritual attitude, before all else: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3); i.e., He demands of them: an attitude of radical freedom where temporal goods are concerned (regarding whatever they may either possess or lack); the recognition and admission of their own indigence and weakness; and the knowledge that they need God's help. In this way, they become capable of desiring and of receiving the true riches which come from above. The accent placed on this spiritual aspect of poverty by the Gospel must not make us forget the religious value of material poverty, in the measure in which it is a sign and a means of interior freedom. Bethlehem (Mt. 27:35), Nazareth (Mt. 13:55), public life (Mt. 8:20), and the Cross (Mt. 27:35) are all different forms of poverty embraced, lived, suffered, and endured by the Lord. Christ puts all His disciples on their guard against the danger of riches (Mt. 6:19 ff.) and proposes material poverty to them. Such was, in fact, the condition of the life of the Apostles and of St. Paul who lived off his own work (I Cor. 11–12) and the ideal which the first Christian Community set their sights on to imitate – in which "no one called his own that which belonged to him." (Acts 4:32)

If material poverty – provided it be received with a generous spirit – is already here on earth the cause of an authentic spiritual joy and of hope for an ineffable eternal recompense, it remains, nonetheless an inhuman condition and the Gospel notes the demands of Social Justice: the rich have obligations toward the poor; what is more, service to the poor is a manifestation of love for Christ (because in them we come to Christ's aid). (Mt. 25:3) Gospel poverty opens up horizons concerning the significance of the good things created by God for the benefit of all men; it motivates us, therefore, to seek alternative structures regarding the prevailing materialistic situations of today's world. In the end, the principle and the objective of Gospel poverty are participation in the Mystery of the "liberality of our Lord Jesus Christ": "being rich He became poor, for your sakes; that through His poverty you might be rich." (II Corinthians 8:9) With the Biblical significance of poverty of spirit clarified, it is necessary to add immediately that the kind of poverty indicated for the Salesian Cooperator is a secular poverty and, therefore, a poverty which conforms to their condition as persons who live in a determinate human context with responsibilities to their family and society. As such, it is distinguished completely, for example, from the kind proper to Religious. Moreover, it does not only regard their material goods but also the spiritual, cultural, and moral ones, which are more precious than simple riches. And what is more, it does not only concern the use of the goods but also of their acquisition and their destination. This is all understood in the phrase: "*administering the goods entrusted to them using the criteria of temperance and of sharing, in view of the common good.*"

The text also points out the demands of this Gospel and secular poverty and how they relate to concrete, present-day situations. They are, in substance: the awareness that they are not owners but mere administrators of their own goods and are responsible under the law of work with its demands, difficulties, and privations; the testimony of simplicity, of temperance, and of moderation which flee from luxury and ostentation, which are true injustices to the enormous masses of indigent and needy people; the spirit of solidarity which pushes beyond the egotistical accumulation of things and holding onto unused goods; and the generous sharing of the same *in view of the common good*.

- ***The Gospel vision of chastity***

Christ the Lord gives His intimacy to those who give themselves to Him in the simplicity of faith and of love – "to the pure of heart" – and proclaims them "blessed" for "they will see God." (Mt. 5:8) According to Biblical faith, which believes that all Creation is good – and, specifically, the entire reality of sexuality; i.e., the fundamental condition of being a man or woman – chastity is an interior and moral reality and is fully realizable when one's very existence is marked by the living presence of the Lord. It must be remembered, so as to avoid misunderstandings, that every Christian situation bears its own kind of inherent chastity. There is a chastity which is proper to fiancés, one proper to spouses, and another proper to those who are celibate. The *Project of Apostolic Life* proposes it as an achievable ideal for every Salesian Cooperator, keeping in mind one's specific state in life. This does not preclude that those who feel called by God to do so can reach all the way to the renunciation of creating one's own family in view of a particular self-giving to the service of God and of neighbor.

This is not to be equated with naïve innocence, or ignorance of the biological and psychological reality bound up with one's being male or female, or with just a "tranquil possession" of it. Rather, it suggests the idea of a *continual conquest* by means of an illuminated educative path. It does not present the commitment to reach it as an oppressive burden which renders one anxious, untrusting, or worse, bitter and dissatisfied, on account of possible fragility and weakness; but, rather, it is a liberating spiritual force which leads one to self-control and which is expressed in behaviors marked by naturalness and delicacy. Nor is it seen simply as a bearer of serenity (even though it is, without a doubt) but as a source of true joy: it is the "Beatitude" of which the Gospel speaks. It is valued, above all, as being *centered on love,* which finds different expressions in the celibate lifestyle, in the state of being engaged, in matrimony, and in widowhood, and is open to multiple forms of authentic human and Christian friendship.

- ***Mercy, justice, and peace***

In completing this discourse on the Gospel Beatitudes in relationship to the actual contexts in which the Salesian Cooperators live and work, the article now takes into consideration three socio-cultural situations produced by a widespread materialism and the cause of not a few social evils: "efficiency" (not to be confused with an efficient way of working, which is a value), aggressiveness, and divisions. These stand counter to the three attitudes inspired by the primacy given to the values of the Spirit and defined by the Gospels as "Beatitudes": mercy, justice, and peace, as motivated by a correct comprehension of the Cross of Christ, which is the supreme manifestation of love.

## Art. 8. Apostolic Commitment

*§1. Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolate, first of all, through their daily tasks. They follow Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, sent by the Father to serve the people of the world. This is why they are committed to putting into practice the Gospel ideal of love for God and for one's neighbor in the ordinary circumstances of life.*[9]

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

*§3. They foster and defend the value of the family*[10] *- the foundational nucleus of society and of the Church - and are committed to construct it as "a Domestic Church"*[11]*. Married Salesian Cooperators live their mission through their marriage as "co-operators with the love of God the Creator"*[12] *and as "the first and chief educators of their children,"*[13] *according to the pedagogy of goodness proper to the Preventive System.*

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

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

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core themes**

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

**Keys to Understanding**

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

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[9]*Gaudium et Spes.* Par. 45.

[10]*Christifideles Laici.* Par. 40.

[11]*Vatican Council II. Lumen Gentium. Par. 11. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

[12]*Gaudium et Spes.* Par. 50.

[13]Vatican Council II. *Gravissimum Educationis.* Par. 3. Trans. The Holy See n.d. Web 1 May 2014. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html

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

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

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

- ***The Sequela Christi today***

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

He or she must follow Christ today. This means:

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

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

- ***Sent by the Father***

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

- ***To serve man***

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

- ***In the world***

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

- ***Salesian in the world***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and indispensable service in promoting the good of the family. It is also important to note the profound relationship that exists between the youth and family pastorals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Making these general guidelines of the Magisterium of Vatican Council II and of the Synod of Bishops their own, and opposing the dominant “pro-choice” mentality with an attitude of "generosity" in welcoming and transmitting life, the *Project of Apostolic Life* formulates in the following way this second aspect of the mission and

of the married Cooperator's moral commitment connected to it: "Co-operators with the love of God the Creator" and "the first and chief educators of their children".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Art. 9. The Task of Christian Education

*§1. Salesian Cooperators, like Don Bosco, bring the task of educating and evangelizing*[14] *everywhere, in order to form "honest citizens, good Christians, and blessed inhabitants of Heaven,"*[15] *who know that they are always on the journey to a greater human and Christian maturity.*

*§2. They share with the young their enthusiasm for living with authenticity the values of truth, freedom, justice, the sense of the common good, and of service.*

*§3. They educate the young to encounter the Risen Christ – in our Faith and in the Sacraments – so they may find in Him the meaning of their life so as to grow as "new men and new women".*

*§4. They are committed to helping the young develop a life plan which will give witness to their Christian and Salesian presence in the Church and in society.*

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Themes**

1. Educating and Evangelizing
2. They Share with the Young Their Enthusiasm for Living Values with Authenticity
3. They Educate the Young to Encounter the Risen Christ – in Our Faith and in the Sacraments

**Keys to Understanding**

If one situates him or herself within the Biblical vision and abides by the concept of the Church proposed by Vatican Council II, then, to every "mission" there is a corresponding "service". The Church participates in Christ's mission and is, by Her very nature, sent to the "service" of God and of man. This article describes the type of human and Christian service that the Salesian Cooperator carries out among those to whom their missionary service is directed in a privileged way. Said task of Christian education is considered in its essential aspects.

**A. *Educating and Evangelizing: The Present Understanding***

The Preventive System brings one to make an intimate unification between evangelization and education.

> Don Bosco, in fact, excludes in his pastoral-educational activity any division between education and evangelization. He wished to describe his practise with a kind of catchy slogan: 'Evangelize by educating and educate by evangelizing.'… 'We are well aware that education and evangelization are specifically distinct activities of their class, but nevertheless there is a strict connection between them on the practical plane of existence.' (Viganò *Acts of the General Council* no. 290 28-29)

[14]Egidio Viganò, SDB. "The Salesian Educational Project." Trans. *Acts of the General Council*. 290.3 (1978) 27-39. Print.

[15]*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*... Introduction: "To the Reader".

- ***Evangelizing by educating***

Don Bosco's pastoral concern is characterized, and with consistent seriousness, by the choice of education as the field and the modality of his pastoral action; therefore, the Preventive System rests on the concrete fact of the existential co-penetration which exists between “evangelization” and “education” along the same lines as those indicated to us in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 31-36. Don Bosco speaks of "good Christians and honest, upright citizens" who seek "sanctity, wisdom, and health" and he proposes a style of life which includes “joy, study, and piety”. (see *Acts of the General Chapter XXI* 81) Thus his ministry is not reduced to catechesis or liturgy alone but branches out into all the concrete pedagogical and cultural commitments concerning the circumstances of the young. Rather, his ministry is situated within the humanizing process, without a doubt with a critical sense of its deficiencies but also with the globally-optimistic vision of human maturation, convinced that the Gospel must be sown precisely there so as to bring the young to get involved in a generous way in their story and their history. His pastoral action tended to be useful precisely for the building of a new society – so much so, that Don Bosco was able to present to some politicians his "system" as a genuine commitment to human promotion, even if they did not accept a faith-filled vision. Rightfully so, Don Bosco appeared to the world and to the Church as a "Holy Educator," or a priest who put his sanctity to work in education. On the other hand, if the Gospel is of salvific value in human growth and if the boys, girls, and teenagers live "an age of education", their evangelization will be most consonant if it accompanies them along an educational process in which Faith is integrated as the unifying and illuminating element of their entire personality.

- ***Educating by evangelizing***

The educational task of the Salesian Cooperator has as its goal evangelization. Our educational art is "pastoral", not only in the sense that it springs from and is explicitly and daily nurtured by apostolic charity on the part of the educator but also in the sense that the entire educational process, both in its content and its methodology, is oriented to the Christian goal of salvation and is permeated by Christianity’s Light and Grace. Salesian pedagogy carries with it in its global nature the rather profound task of opening oneself and others to God's absolute values and to interpreting life and history according to the riches of the Mystery of Christ. It truly takes into account the power and the perspectives of the Resurrection and reflects seriously on the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world. This modality of "educating by evangelizing" also carries with it some concrete options regarding the educational process. Such options refer to the reality of the "person" of the one being educated, to the true and historic goal of his growth, to the content and means which he needs, and to the methodology which will be most beneficial to his maturation.

**B.** ***They share with the young their enthusiasm for living values with authenticity***

When analyzing the content of this Christian educative service, one stops to linger on certain Gospel values of a social nature: "truth, freedom, justice, a sense of the common good, and service." These are the great values proclaimed by the Social Justice documents of Vatican Council II: “The social order requires constant improvement: it must be founded in truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love: it should grow in freedom towards an ever more human equilibrium. An improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained.” (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 26) These are the same values which the individual Cooperator must bring to his or her social reality. It is, therefore, natural that it must be "shared" with the young among whom one carries out his task of Christian education. At play here is a formation to a well-understood "social and political commitment."

- ***Educating to the Truth***

What characterizes our society are the enormous changes which are progressing at a dizzying rate. We no longer live in an epoch of change, but in *a change of epoch*. This is what characterizes postmodernity. Postmodernity is the result of a general disenchantment and of a frustration with the lack of success of the postulates of modernity. "Modernity" was, in fact, the time of great social utopias. It was the time of faith in many things: an unlimited faith in *liberty*, faith in *science*, faith in *progress*, and faith in the human being. People thought that human reason, knowledge, and progress would be the solution to all problems. They presumed that there would be an end to ignorance, slavery, superstitious religions, and that man would be completely happy. This, however, did not happen (note the two World Wars).

And then postmodernity sprang up as a reaction following, counter to, and beyond modernity. It was the exhaustion of reason, the renunciation of systems and ideologies, but also of ideas and of truth. Today we have an avalanche of information but are orphans as far as wisdom in concerned. We live in a "*fluid culture*." There is a diversity of ideas, values, cosmic visions, and lifestyles, but without any normative orientation due to the lack and negation of any kind of absolute. The postmodern ideas end in *nihilism* and create an environment of *relativism* and a polytheism of values, judged on the basis of *usefulness and functionality*.

- ***Educating to justice, the sense of the common good, and service***

The idea that the common good has been defined in its concrete forms, once and for all, without discerning the meaning that it takes on in the complexity of one's historical situations, is a mistake. The construction of a just social order by which each person receives that which is due him is a fundamental task that every generation must face anew. The task of the "honest citizen" as regards the common good is, therefore, more a style of life and a way of acting which are characterized by certain underlying choices, to be required of one who is involved in or wishes to be involved in politics.

Let us summarize these choices in five points that seem indispensable for one who wishes to serve the common good:

*First* – The commitment to public ethics and social morality must be indissolubly linked with an ethical commitment on the personal *plane*: the logic of the "mask" – which joins "private vices and public virtues" – must be refuted. This carries with it the recognition of the *primacy of the conscience* when acting in society and politics and the right of each Representative of the People to *conscientious objection* on questions of ethical relevance. But it also means that the credibility of the politician is to be measured on the sobriety of his lifestyle, his generosity, his constancy in his commitments, and his fidelity, shown in his deeds, to the values proclaimed.

*Second* – In his or her relationship with citizens, the politician must follow the maxim: "*belonging to the masses and possessing the word*." This means that he or she must stay close to the people, listening to their concerns, and making him or herself heard on matters of justice for those who do not have a voice – so as to support them. We are not at the service of whoever is in power at any given time but, rather, of the people. In this commitment to the common good, may the poor, those without a voice, and those who are socially weak be considered points of reference to whom listening and respect are due. Social status, education, and the safeguarding of everyone's health are not subjects open to discussion. They are *sine qua non* values to be kept safe and to be improved by liberating them from waste and excessive forms of State aid which do not truly serve the poor.

*Third* – The political dialectic must always be subordinate to *the search for possible convergences* so as to work together in the service of the common good: co-responsibility, dialogue, and participation are to be put before any

preconceived counterproposal or a logic inspired by personal or group interests. The common good is always preferred to one's personal gain or to that of one's political party.

*Fourth* – In service to the common good, it is necessary to know how to accept the *gradualism* required to reach goals: the popularist logic of "instant gratification and everything I want" has often motivated promises that were not kept – if not violence and the failure of even just causes. It is necessary to focus on the goal with perseverance and firmness without yielding to immoral compromises and unjustified delays or by having recourse to sinful means. All choices made for the common good are not to be measured solely on immediate efficacy but, above all, on their worthiness and the educative role at the service of all: in particular, the commitment to the fundamental values of safeguarding human life at every phase, of promotion of the family, of justice for everyone, of the rejection of war and of violence in every form, and of commitment to peace.

*Finally* – The citizen who intends to work for the common good must consider the purpose of this service to be *the good of all* – even of political adversaries who, therefore, are not to be considered enemies or competitors to be eliminated but, on the other hand, are to be seen as a guarantee of a critical confrontation for discerning the best ways to reach the realization of each one's personal dignity.

This list of the most minimal rules for the common good remain fruitless if there is no assumption of morality which gives to everyone, especially the young, reasons to live and to hope! What is at stake is not the gain of some but a future which we will build together.

**C. *They educate the young to encounter the Risen Christ – in our Faith and in the Sacraments***

The Vatican Council II Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, teaches that in the Church's mission to all men: “by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the Sacraments and other means of Grace, she may lead them to the faith, the freedom and the peace of Christ; that thus there may lie open before them a firm and free road to full participation in the mystery of Christ.” (no. 5) The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* expresses this concept clearly, asserting that it is the task of the People of God to lead man not only to discover with their minds but also to perceive through experience what the meaning of life, of work, of death, of the present, and of the future are in the light of Christ so as to become “new men” in this way.

Don Bosco’s example and instructions and Salesian tradition have seen the Salesian Cooperators dedicate themselves to such work with commitment and in many initiatives, consciously aware of the divine greatness of the service rendered to the young and to common folk. Dynamic fidelity to the mission received demands of the Salesian Cooperators to go forward in such a direction, keeping in mind the current context of the Church and of society.

*In their educational task, Salesian Cooperators:*

*§1. put into practice Don Bosco's "Preventive System," a spiritual and educative experience which is based on Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness*[16]*;*

*§2. foster a family environment in which constant dialogue, an animating presence, personal accompaniment, and group experience help all perceive God's presence;*

*§3. promote the good and educate to a love for life, to responsibility, solidarity, sharing, synergy, and communion;*

*§4. appeal to a person's inner resources and believe in the invisible action of grace. They look at each young person with realistic optimism, convinced of the educational value of the faith experience. Their relationship with the young is inspired by a mature and welcoming love.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Putting into Practice the Preventive System
2. Fostering a Family Environment
3. Educating to a Love for Life
4. Appealing to a Person's Inner Resources

### Keys to Understanding

"*The educator is an individual consecrated to the good of his educandi; therefore, he must be ready to face every inconvenience and every labor so as to reach his goal: in other words, the civic, moral, and scientific education of his pupils.*" ("The Little Treatise on the Preventive System").

"*It has only been a few days that I have been separated from you, my dear sons, and yet, it feels like many months have already passed. You truly are my delight and my consolation and I miss both of these two things when I am far from you.*" (*Memorie Biografiche* XVII 369 [*sic*])

### A. *Putting into Practice the Preventive System*

The educator *is* the Preventive System. Such a statement might seem exaggerated, forced, and paradoxical. Still, it does not seem a stretch of the truth to state that Don Bosco's Preventive System is identified with the person of the educator, so great is the trust placed in him or her. The predominant function of the educator draws near to assuming the characteristics of a consecration – almost a Vocation. Education, therefore, is more than just one kind of work – it is a form of life because it does not "*produce*" material things but it "*constructs*" people who bear within themselves the gifts of plans, ideas, certainties, hopes, and a soul. It is required of the educator not only to be competent in pedagogy and relational abilities but also to live a precise identity.

[16] Giovanni Bosco. *The Preventive System in the Education of the Young*. Trans. Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco. 50-54. n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2013. www.sdb.org.hk/cp/p01/p01c05/p01c05012.doc.

Pietro Braido, SDB. "Il Sistema Preventivo in un 'Decalogo' per educatori." *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane.* 4.1 (1985) 131-148. Print. (available in Italian only)

- ***Standing alongside the young***

At the center of this system is the young person and his or her aspirations; at their side, however, stands the educator – totally available and ready to stand alongside them and take their part faithfully. Therefore, every act of education becomes, so to say, a "co-education"; not only in the sense of a "reciprocal education" between an adult and a young person but in a double sense – that both are called to participate in this "common" educative action. The young must become allies rather than simple listeners or recipients. They must be traveling companions and collaborators with the educators. The first task of the educator is, therefore, that of *being there*, of standing beside the young. The line of demarcation between the adults and the young is not very clear cut. The educator and the educandi are, to use a metaphor, in the same boat; if it sinks, they both drown. The educator does not find himself, to use another metaphor, on the sidelines of a game being played, nor can his role be reduced to that of an impartial referee. If the educand does not feel that he is being accompanied along his path to adulthood by the educator, he feels like he is "exposed to the four winds." If he does not have the security of believing that they are heading together towards his maturity, he becomes frightened.

- ***For building, not destroying***

The educator is always *personally implicated in the educative relationship*. The educator's personality, past, fears, and concerns have an impact on the educand. It is always and above all the person who educates. Preventive education does not exist except as a fruit of an encounter between persons who stand one in front of the other, totally present to each other. An authentic personal human relationship means that I am completely present to the other, that I am with him or her 100%, and that I take part in his or her personal existence because I care for and take interest in him or her. Young people quickly and easily realize if the educator is authentic in his actions – if they come from valid motivations and from deep convictions that constitute the very identity of the educator or not. Young people are not looking so much for a father or a mother who thinks of everything, who organizes their free time, who is a teacher concerned about the subject matter, or an adult who gives orders, much less the "judge" who threatens punishment. No. What they long for is the man or woman who is able to stand beside them and be more attentive to each one of them, individually, as a person, than to the generic demands of education, and someone who is ready and available to offer them a positive contribution to the development of their potential. Precisely in the measure in which the educator gives the young the feeling that they have the ability to value such potential, so will the way open to his or her being a proactive presence.

**B.** ***Educating to a Love for Life***

- ***Education is a matter of the heart***

Love for life springs from the heart alone. Truth is not only a matter of the intellect. There is a truth about persons, about life, and about human relationships at the center of our being which we call "the heart". It is here that all the faculties of the person are rooted. Consequently, the Salesian Cooperator educator cannot limit him or herself to transmitting knowledge. He or she must put into motion those energies which lie hidden in the heart of the young lest they become confused or shrink from the task on account of external pressures. It falls to the Cooperator and, even before him, to the parents, to set in motion and direct those *personal and community dynamics which can help this process along*.

- ***Love for life starts with the reunification of the subject***

Too often among *school*, *family*, and *parish* there exists a *schizophrenia* which impedes the ability of the young person to form a realistic image. This schizophrenia ends up fostering the illness to which many young people (but not only young people) are subject: *fragmentation of identity*. There exists an overabundance of opportunities, of stimuli, and of messages (which are often contradictory). The (young) person is incapable of making a critical evaluation or of creating a hierarchy in their regard. His vision of reality, even his identity, shatters

and crumbles. This creates a profound sense of insecurity and a powerful identity crisis. *An interior center*, a hinge, is missing which would permit him to put himself back together and link together in a coherent manner all his experiences and plan his own personal history wisely.

Family, school, and parish possess the tools needed to respond to this crisis: *Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness*. These three words are the educative keys which illumine the mind, touch the heart, and get the feet moving – they are the keys to gather and unify many aspects of life, making its meaning spring up gradually along its different stages; otherwise, we risk creating baby adults who become adult babies. Just like Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperator commits himself to form mature and responsible persons in society and in the Church.

**C. *Appealing to the Inner Resources of the Person***

The Preventive System requires of the educator to "get into the game" and to evaluate his personal convictions constantly – including those related to the problems of the young – living beside each young person, with a constant attitude of trust and not as a strict counselor or an inflexible judge. In particular, the educator is asked to become the very image of the values which he bears so as to prepare each young person to acquire the criteria necessary for making critical and informed choices as well as the tools which help them live serenely the moment when he must distance himself from them. Education seeks to produce in the young person an interior response and to raise up a commitment guaranteeing continuity, perseverance, and development for his whole life.

In summary: The educative efficacy of the Preventive System depends, before all else, on the quality of the educator's presence to his or her educand. The educator him or herself is the key to understand the educative action he or she carries out and situates in perfect harmony with his or her “travelling companion” who speaks the same language.

**D. *Fostering a Family Environment***

With the preventive style, there tends to be created an interpersonal rapport between educandi and educator that is very close to that typical of the family, permitting exchange and understanding at the level of intimacy; there is, however, a code of rights and duties which is present by its very nature and is translated into an articulated distribution of roles and responsibilities.

- ***Father, friend, brother***

a) Above all, the educator practices *fatherhood*, which equates to one of the roles recognized as essential by psychology: that of being the authority figure and the role model. For the child and for the preadolescent, the adult-educator remains the pole of attraction in great part; for the adolescent and the youth, he represents, instead, the dialectic pole in redefining his own personal identity. The educator is also the “arena” of confrontation for the educand’s ideas and the impetus to understand himself better through dialogue and exchange. In the Preventive System, there is no “alibi” of spontaneity, of permissiveness, or of a presumed respect for childish candor, but neither does it opt for an authoritarianism which is also destructive. The educator does not abdicate his personal responsibility, delegating to others his duties or remaining in a situation which fluctuates between a feeble attempt at making proposals and a tendency to impose them. For his authority to have credibility to a young person, he cannot put aside his role of father by seeking the affection of the young through avoiding telling them uncomfortable truths. Education is hard work!

b) Fatherhood must be linked with *friendship* and *fraternity*. Don Bosco asks the educator to be both friend and brother at the same time, inasmuch as he knows that inside the young person is a fundamental need for communication, friendship, and feeling important. The two friends/conversants thus find themselves in a sort of

equal and fraternal friendship. If the father commands and dominates, the brother, and even more the friend, does not. In the one-on-one encounter between friends, which is conducted by the educator in such a way as to be able to make a correct diagnosis of the young person's difficulty, they go *together* to an examination of the means and of the ways to a solution. The conclusion on the part of the young person will be a commitment to a new phase of life in the company of the friend-educator who is present among the young, sharing in their recreation, their work, their love for life, and the proper "explosion" of their youthful energies: physical, intellectual, emotional, moral – in everything – including their sufferings.

- ***Pre-existing condition***

Creating the conditions necessary to establish a willing relationship of cooperation and of "walking together" is one of the most delicate aspects of this issue. On the part of the educator – father-friend-brother – there needs to be an "acceptance" and a "being accepted"; analogously, on the part of the young person, he or she needs to permit him or herself to do his part. Therefore, a two-pole pedagogical acceptance is established: "paternal, fraternal, and friendly comprehension" on the part of the educator who takes interest in the young person, on the one hand, and "acceptance" of the educative intervention and of the person who does so on the part of the young person. On the part of the educator, the starting point is the unconditional acceptance of the young as they are and not as he wishes they would be. It is an acceptance that is created at the level of being and not of having: "It is enough that you are young," wrote Don Bosco "that I love you very much." Along with this, the educator is asked to furnish himself with goodness, to exclude every animosity and personal “touchiness”, and to acknowledge that objective and subjective difficulties may co-exist even with authentic goodwill within young people. But the young person, too, must also accept the educator and his intervention in accordance with an ensemble of motives: reasonableness and rationality, authority and fear, personal ascendancy and fascination. To be able to do this, the young person must overcome a number of psychological defense mechanisms because the future good brings along with it the cost of renouncing things that give immediate gratification.

## Art. 11. Typical Activities

- *Salesian Cooperators are open to varied forms of apostolate. Among these they give a privileged place to family life, besides their own work and their life in the Association*[17]*:*
- *Christian catechesis and formation;*
- *animation of youth and family groups and movements;*
- *collaboration in educational and scholastic institutions;*
- *social service among the poor;*
- *work in social communications;*
- *cooperation in pastoral ministry for Vocations;*
- *missionary work;*
- *collaboration in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue;*
- *witness to their own faith in socio-political service; and*
- *the development of the Association.*

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Theme**

Activities as the Place of Apostolic Commitment

**Keys to Understanding**

**A.** The Salesian mission and its educational service are put into effect by means of a vast array of initiatives and activities. This article repeats this general principle by which all forms of Salesian apostolate are open to the Cooperators for they are true Salesians in the world. It puts forth, therefore, a list indicating those activities which correspond directly to the mission specific to Salesians and which, possibly, are to be privileged above others. The choice of one of these typical activities or others not listed but still in keeping with Salesian Spirituality will depend upon the aptitudes and abilities, the preparation and openness, and the circumstances of the individual Cooperator; therefore, it makes proposals and not "binding stipulations."

**B.** The passion for education and evangelization was the soul of Don Bosco's life. He gave ample space to catechetical work and to the Christian formation of the young. Many of his Priest and lay collaborators at the very beginning were involved in catechesis and in initiatives which sought to impart a religious education to the young. In his *Constitutions*, he wrote: "the first charitable work will be to gather the poorest and most abandoned young to instruct them in our Holy Religion." In order to respond to the needs of our times, catechesis and various activities directed towards the Christian formation of adults and young people have been placed first and fourth in the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Salesian Cooperators.

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[17] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*... Art. IV, 1.
*Lumen Gentium*. Par. 35.
United States Catholic Conference, Inc. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) nos. 904-906. Print.
*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*… Art. IV, 2-5.

Don Bosco was also very attentive to the gregarious nature of the young, their need to be part of a group; it is enough to think of the importance he gave to the sodalities to realize this. He considered them an effective means for the social, moral, and religious formation of the young and for helping them mature in their sense of personal and collective responsibility.

A considerable number of Salesian Cooperators work today in educational and scholastic centers as their profession: as educators, teachers, and counselors at various levels. Scholastic law in many countries foresees the active participation in the running of the school or of the center even by parents of the educandi in addition to the scholastic personnel.

In numerous lands at present, the Salesian mission to common folk has assumed the form of "social service to the poor," carried out through initiatives suggested by the needs and possibilities of the place: welcome centers, dispensaries, ambulatory clinics, hospitals, oratories, scholastic and recreational centers…

**C.** Commitments in the realm of Social Communications, which creates culture and places life models before people, interests the Salesian Cooperator. Don Bosco had courage and zeal when realizing avant-garde initiatives in this area. "The press was one of the principal undertakings that Divine Providence entrusted to me. I do not hesitate in calling this means 'Divine' since God Himself assisted in man's regeneration." (Epistolario Volume IV 318 ff.) Those words are from Don Bosco's March 19, 1885, Circular to his Salesians; they summarize Don Bosco's thought and work and are the "Magna Charta" of Salesian work in this field. His love for the young caused him to excogitate all the means that would be apt or useful in creating a propitious atmosphere for their holistic formation. In theater and acting, he saw a valid formative element and one that would help the young develop their youthful personality; in music, he saw a vehicle to get across wholesome ideas and the means to raise up a climate of pure joy. To all the Groups of the Salesian Family he left this saying: "I pray you and I adjure you never to omit this most important part of our mission." (Epistolario Volume IV 321) Don Bosco understood the value of this "school for the masses" which creates culture and proposes life models so he put himself to work in apostolic undertakings that would defend and support the Faith among the people.

**D.** Privileged attention is also given to those young people who show signs of a specific apostolic Vocation. In the vocation pastoral, Salesian Cooperators can offer their collaboration in various ways: sensitizing both individuals and groups to the family atmosphere, to work, and to the ecclesial community in which they live and work; drafting vocational pastoral plans at all levels of the local and provincial Salesian communities, of the parish, and of the diocese; undertaking responsibilities for vocation animation; and engaging in vocational discernment through identifying the young who show signs of a specific apostolic Vocation and directing them to people and places where they can receive vocational guidance.

**E.** Numerous are the initiatives which the Salesian Cooperators (whether as individuals or in groups), the Centers, and the Councils at various levels can begin for the purpose of promoting the Association. Some concern its *growth* – in both number and quality of its members; some, the *spread* of the Association through the creation of new Centers; and others, the *internal vitality* of the Association as regards its functioning and organization.

By the phrase "missionary work" is intended that entire group of services and of initiatives which foster and support the Missions and solidarity. It also means direct involvement in Mission lands and places of mission. As far as *missionary cooperation* is concerned, a few different kinds of concrete collaboration can be named: cooperation with the Consulte, the Mission Procures, and mission Centers established at the provincial or diocesan level; volunteer organizations; and NGOs. For this to happen, missionary interest among the members and among

the people with whom one lives and works needs to be kept alive through promotion and support of initiatives which foster missionary vocations and the drafting of and putting into action projects and plans which seek out ways to finance said initiatives through State, Church, and private organizations and entities.

**F.** Salesian Cooperators also live in daily contact with non-Catholic Christians. If, in a more or less recent past, relationships between these were inspired by an attitude of defense (apologetics) of each one's respective beliefs and by proselytism, with the advent of the ecumenical movement and after what Vatican Council II said in its Decree on Ecumenism, and the more recent developments within the Catholic Church in this area, the situation has changed. Nonetheless, even if ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are connected and tied to each other, still, they are not one and the same. There exists a specific and qualitative difference between the two that is not to be confused. Ecumenical dialogue is not founded only on the respect due to every human conviction, above all, that of one's Religion; nor is it founded only on a liberal philanthropy or a mere bourgeois courtesy; on the contrary, ecumenical dialogue is rooted in the common faith in Jesus Christ and in a reciprocal recognition of Baptism through which all the baptized are members of the one Body of Christ and can pray together just as Jesus taught, "Our Father". In other Religions, the Church recognizes a ray of that Truth which "illumines every man," but that is revealed in its fullness only in Jesus Christ; He alone is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (*Nostra Aetate* no. 2) It is, therefore, ambiguous to refer to interreligious dialogue in terms of macro-ecumenism or of a new and vaster phase of ecumenism.

Christians, and the followers of other Religions share: the sense of God and respect for Him or for the Divine, as well as the desire for God or for the Divine; respect for life; the desire for peace with God or the Divine, among men, and in the cosmos; and many moral values. They can and must collaborate to defend and promote together social justice, peace, and freedom to the advantage of all men. This is especially valid for the monotheistic Religions which regard Abraham as their Father in Faith. This new climate of dialogue urges the Salesian Cooperators to participate in initiatives undertaken by the Local Church – above all, in fields which concern spirituality and the Salesian mission.

**G.** The structures which societies confer on themselves never possess a supreme value nor can they guarantee by themselves all the good things desired by the human person. In particular, they cannot substitute the voice of one's conscience or satisfy the thirst for Truth and for the Absolute. Accepting the Gospel of salvation carries with it beneficial effects even in the public dimension of the life of societies and of individuals and is able to humanize the face of this earth. Indeed, the vocation of a Christian, and, in particular, of the Salesian Cooperator, is a public profession of faith and an active presence in all the sectors of civic life. Therefore, the Church, formed in freedom by those who believe in Christ, must, in matters concerning current legislation – so said Pope St. John Paul II in his address to the European Parliament on October 11, 1988 – "guarantee to all citizens equally the right to live in accordance with their consciences and not to contradict the norms of the natural moral order which are recognized by reason."

In this area, it is indispensable that the Salesian Cooperator have: a well-formed and correct conscience; obedience to the dictates of the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church; a conscience capable of a wise and responsible action at the service of said society lest political involvement create division. We and all involved in politics must work in truth, justice, love, and respect for the dignity of man and must keep in mind but one goal: the growth of the common good.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, in no. 42, Pope St. John Paul II wrote:

> In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful *are never to relinquish their participation in "public life",* that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*… this is felt today as a pressing responsibility – the lay faithful must bear witness to [those] human and Gospel values…

The Salesian Cooperators are asked to give their necessary contribution in the reconstruction of a holistic and global vision of man and of the world which opposes the culture of death, of mistrust, and of the secularization of life. Their service will be an honest, upright, and selfless one, in collaboration with all others and able to conserve and develop Christian Tradition and culture on the socio-political plane.

*§1. Salesian Cooperators participate in the mission of the Association in the Church and reinforce it with their own commitment and by involving other persons.*

*§2. Normally, the activities of Salesian Cooperators take place, in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, in structures where secular circumstances offer them greater possibilities of meaningful involvement: civic, cultural, socio-economic, political, ecclesial, and Salesian.* [18]

*§3. Salesian Cooperators can carry out their apostolic commitment in works run autonomously by the Association and in initiatives which respond to the most pressing needs of their locality.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core theme

Structures as Growth and Expansion of the Charism

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** Apostolic action must adapt itself if it is to be adequate for the actual social, cultural, political, and religious structures of its time for these are both differentiated and structured. In the case to the contrary, it risks being ineffectual and void of influence. In this area concerning structures, the secular character of the lay Salesian Cooperator offers ample possibilities for involvement and, therefore, for incarnating the Christian message and service within the living fabric of the human and ecclesial reality.

The article takes into consideration civic, ecclesial, and Salesian structures. The comments made about activities are valid also for these structures: the insertion of the individual Salesian Cooperator into one or another of these will depend, among other things, on a person's availability, willingness, and preparation.

The text names the following structures:

a) *civic:* Federal, State, Provincial, Regional, and Municipal Councils and Meetings, Parliaments, Senates, and Houses of Representatives; Neighborhood Associations; and various types of public and private associations which exist to guarantee and promote civic values and goods;
b) *cultural*: schools of every level and type, printing houses, centers of production and of diffusion of radio and TV programs, and clubs or cultural circles;
c) *socio-economic*: industrial, commercial, medical, and welfare structures; and
d) *political*: Parties, Unions, Special Interest Groups, Worker and Teacher Associations, etc.

N.B. Involvement of the Salesian Cooperator in such structures cannot prescind from the requirements of the Salesian mission and spirit.

**B.** A useful indication concerning the type of involvement of the Salesian Cooperator in the ecclesial structures is that of offering responsible collaboration *to the Bishops and Parish Priests*. This underlines the new type of

[18] Eugenio Ceria, SDB. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Trans. Vincent Zuliani, SDB. Vol. XVII. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 2002) 10-11. Print.
*Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition.* Can. 305.
*Christifideles Laici.* Par. 42.

relationship between the lay Faithful and the Clergy promoted by Vatican Council II. It is a relationship which is no longer between an *active* subject (the Pastor) and a *passive* and solely receptive subject (the Faithful) but it is a relationship of co-responsibility between *two active subjects*, while recognizing the differences in ministries and roles.

**C.** The Association encourages groups of Salesian Cooperators, who are suited and willing, to give life to new works and to undertake them even on their own initiative where the local needs suggest their usefulness. This is in full harmony with the guidelines of the Vatican Council II Decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which recognizes in the lay Faithful the responsibility to be able to undertake apostolic initiatives and, further, suggests to the Pastors to foster and support them in these initiatives, leaving them that proper freedom required by the dignity that is theirs as children of God and as secular apostles.

## THE SALESIAN SPIRIT OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

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

***"To cooperate" with God the Father***

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

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

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

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

The *second*: An apostle does not propose him or herself to others but always and only the Lord Jesus, the Only One who can free us from every form of slavery; the Only One who can lead His sheep to pastures of eternal life. (see Jn. 10:1-15) He is the Only One who never abandons anyone who has gone astray but unites Himself in

solidarity with his weakness and, full of faith and hope, seeks him out, retrieves him, and brings him back so he may have life to the full.

Rooting themselves in Christ and conforming themselves to Him is the greatest joy of the Sons and Daughters of Don Bosco. From this comes love for the Word and the desire to live the Mystery of Christ as it is presented in the Liturgy of the Church; being assiduous in their participation in the Sacraments of Communion and Confession, which educate to Christian freedom, to the conversion of hearts, and to a spirit of sharing and of service; and participation in the Mystery of the Pasch of the Lord, which opens them up to a new understanding of life and of its significance - both personally and in community, in interior and in social realities as well.

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

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

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

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

*Guided by the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco lived and passed down to the members of his Family an original style of life and action: the Salesian Spirit.*[19]

*The Salesian Spirit is a quintessential Gospel experience, whose source is in the very heart of Christ, who urges those who live it to become gift and to give service. It is nourished by the carrying out of apostolic charity, the principal interior dynamic which unites passion for God and passion for neighbor. It is manifested in a Sacramental spirituality, which is made actual by living daily life with joy and optimism and in responsible service within the ecclesial community and civic society. It requires a demanding "ascetical method" expressed through a serene and joyous countenance, in keeping with Don Bosco's urging: "work and temperance."*[20]

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Salesian Spirit
2. Ascetical Methodology

### Keys to Understanding

**A. The first article of the *Project of Apostolic Life* states that the Holy Spirit formed in Don Bosco the heart of a Father and Teacher**, capable of total dedication, and inspired in him an educational method permeated by the "charity of the Good Shepherd". Don Bosco was the first to "live" the Salesian Spirit, putting into action its inspirations and virtues and letting himself, above all, be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Salesian Spirit is the essential part of Don Bosco's spiritual patrimony; it is a heritage permeated by his sanctity because it leads to the Gospel and, therefore, to Christ himself.

**B. The first paragraph of this article is an attempt at a description of the Salesian Spirit.** This is a vast and profound reality because it pertains to life. The formula "Salesian Spirit," used by Don Bosco when exhorting his Salesians to keep the good spirit, expresses "the unity of spirit" and "the spirit of the Rule." The Special General Chapter of the Salesians describes it as:

> our own style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, in putting into operation the specific vocation and the mission which the Holy Spirit does not cease to give us. More specifically, the salesian spirit is the complex of the elements and values of the world of men and of the Christian mystery… to which the sons of Don Bosco, gathering the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and by reason of their mission are particularly sensitive, as much in their interior disposition as in their outward behaviour.

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[19] *Salesian Family Charter*. 37.

[20] *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Vol. XII, 338.
Ibid. XIV, 89.
Ibid. XV, 148.

The summary formula *style of life and of action* means taking on as our own the ways the Lord sees, feels, and acts. It means taking on a way of working in society, of relating with others, and of standing before God which was characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth.

**C. The Salesian Spirit involves the entire human person.** It is a reality which is taken on in a vital way - in such a way as to become part of the person. Thus, the Salesian Cooperator "radiates" the Salesian Spirit in all the "little things" and gestures and actions of each day. It is lived within the Church by all the members of Don Bosco's apostolic Family and constitutes a factor which distinguishes them in relation to other Catholics: in the case of a Priest or a Deacon, Salesian Cooperators live as Ordained men in the exercise of their ministry or, in the case of the laity, as men and women according to the lay condition proper to them and in activities typical of the laity, as is the case with the majority of the Cooperators. "Being Salesian" thus assumes different concrete expressions.

**D. The Salesian Spirit is a typical Gospel experience.** The concrete reality that took place in Christian Revelation is Jesus Christ. He is the *Unicum* (the Only One) capable of giving ultimate satisfaction to anyone who examines reality in a critical way. Asceticism, i.e., the critical gaze on and interaction with reality, consists of an attitude of continuous identification with the Mystery of Jesus Christ. A confirmation of this comes from prayer and the liturgy: "gazing upon" Christ and the Crucifix. For Benedict XVI, dealing with God is already a necessity in and of itself – as much as breathing each day is for us… If God were not present, we would not be able to breathe in a proper way. Living the Salesian Spirit, therefore, means making the Lord Jesus' way of saying, feeling, and acting one's own. "It has its source in the very heart of Christ," says the text. It means taking on a way of working in the world, relating to others, and staying before God which was typical of Jesus of Nazareth. It characterizes and gives a concrete tone to the Cooperators' presence and action in the world as well as to their relationships with their brothers and sisters and their rapport with God.

The Salesian Spirit concerns the *entirety* of one's person and life. It is not a garment that one puts on and takes off according to the Seasons: it is a reality which must be assimilated vitally, in such a way as to *become part of* a person. One does not live it every now and then or only in one or another area of one's action, work, and life: it pervades one's whole life by conferring upon one's being and acting a concrete, characteristic tone.

In summary, the Salesian Cooperator not only *does* good and useful things which correspond to the Salesian ideal but he or she is a Salesian in the very depths of his or her being, from head to toe. And this is felt, seen, and radiated in the little things, in daily gestures, and in big decisions. It is perceived and felt most greatly when a group of Cooperators come together for an experience of a work in common or at gatherings: without any special effort, a climate, an atmosphere, is created immediately… And when each one returns home, it comes spontaneously to say: "I breathed Salesian air and I felt completely at ease. Beauty and worthiness also exist elsewhere but 'that something' is missing." "That something" is precisely the Salesian Spirit!

**E. "Work and Temperance"** are the fourth and fifth Diamonds placed on the mantle at the shoulders of the Personage in the "Dream of the Ten Diamonds," which is narrated in volume XV of the *Biographical Memoirs*. The Diamond of "Work" is placed on the right shoulder, as if to indicate the primacy of that "ecstasy of work" of which St. Francis de Sales speaks in his *Theotimus* and which is totally animated by the profound dynamics of Faith, of Hope, and, above all, of Charity. Work is the fundamental trait of the Salesian: The Salesian is a worker. Don Cagliero used to say: "He who does not work is not Salesian." For Don Bosco, work is not just any kind of activity; rather, it is full-time dedication to the mission with all of one's abilities. This does not encompass only manual work but also intellectual and apostolic ones. Whoever writes, confesses, preaches, studies, or cleans the house – each one works for souls. Our work is characterized by pastoral charity and right intention.

The Diamond of "Temperance," placed on the left shoulder, indicates a general self-control in a lifestyle accompanied by a sense of measure and equilibrium. Temperance is that Cardinal Virtue which moderates passions, words, and actions according to reason and the demands of Christian life. Humility, moderation, simplicity, and austerity gravitate around temperance. Its manifestations in daily life are equilibrium (moderation in all things), the ability to collaborate, interior and exterior calm, and a serene and authoritative rapport with everyone, but especially with the young.

**Summing up**: It is in this way that one perceives the *depth* to which the Salesian Spirit *unites and keeps united*, forever, permanently, all the members of the Association and of the Family. The same blood, physically and biologically, unites all the members of the same human family. The same Salesian Spirit unites Salesian brothers and sisters. This is a sign and a criterion of holy parentage. Wherever it is missing, a "vital" belonging to the Association also lacks; in that case, official membership and the Promise made were of little significance or efficacy.

## Art. 14. Experience of a Committed Faith

*§1. The Salesian Cooperator welcomes the Salesian Spirit as a gift of the Lord to the Church and makes it fruitful according to his or her own lay or ministerial condition. He or she takes part in the charismatic experience of Don Bosco and commits him or herself to promote Salesian humanism so as to create reasons for hope and future prospects for both the person and for society.*[21]

*§2. By living Salesian Spirituality, he or she fosters a "practical" experience of ecclesial communion.*

*§3. The Salesian Cooperator entrusts him or herself to the Immaculate Virgin and Help of Christians, for She is the guide of one's apostolic Vocation: to be a true "co-operator of God"*[22] *in making His plan of salvation real. He or she asks Mary, the Help of Christians and Mother of the Good Shepherd, for the help and strength necessary for his or her own salvation and for that of the young. The daily entrustment to Mary characterizes Salesian Spirituality.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core themes

1. A Committed Faith
2. Mary, God's First Cooperator
3. Ecclesial Communion

#### Keys to Understanding

**A.** The Salesian Cooperator is called to profess the entire Christian Faith: His or her *Credo* is the one of the entire Church. In the richness of the Christian Mysteries, the Holy Spirit Himself guides him or her to put self at the service of the physical and spiritual "well-being" of man, especially of those who are in most need of help and of hope. "The Son of Man did not come to be served but *to serve* and to give his life for the redemption of many." (Mk. 10:45)

Following the example and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and of the Church, and, in Her, of the Association, the Cooperator puts him or herself at the service (*diakonia*) of humanity so as to proclaim the Gospel to all and to call everyone to fullness of life. It is a service which, according to the Post-Conciliar Magisterium of the Church, encompasses: the *renewal of humanity* through social work and various forms of educational initiatives; personal and community *Christian witness*; *the explicit proclamation* of the Gospel through the teaching of Religion and catechesis; *missionary work* through interreligious dialogue (especially the sharing of life and of prayer) and *collaboration* with those of other Religions so as to combat situations of injustice and to accompany those who are so disposed to enter the Church; the *animation of prayer* in the Christian Community and, in particular, that of the liturgy; many *human and Christian solidarity initiatives*; and many forms of *missionary cooperation* and an *evangelizing presence* in areas marked by religious indifference or atheism.

Forming "good Christians and honest, upright citizens" is way Don Bosco most often used to indicate *everything the young need* so as to live their human and Christian existence in fullness: clothing, food, lodging, work, study, and free time; joy and friendship; active faith, the Grace of God, and the way of sanctification;

[21] *Salesian Family Charter*. 15-17.

[22] I Cor. 3:9.

participation, dynamism, and insertion into the social and ecclesial realms. His experience in education suggested a plan and a particular *style of intervention* to him which he condensed into his *Preventive System* and which rests totally on Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness.

When we speak of Valdocco, we mean the Oratory and we are making reference to the first years of the fourth decade of the 19th century (1841 to 1846) in which *the Festive Oratory took shape: a school of catechesis, a garden of recreation*, and a center of alphabetization, above all for immigrants, or the abandoned, on non-work days. The oratory takes shape primarily as a place where youth can find unity and express the vitality of a group of boys and girls, teens and young adults, who otherwise would be strangers to each other. As to its structure, at first, it was Don Bosco, together with some of the boys (educators and catechists) who had been better prepared in the associations which animated all the boys in the practice of the Christian virtues through intense religious activity, general culture, recreation, and choices of activities which constituted an initial way for them to participate in things and take on commitments and responsibilities. Then, beginning in 1847, the Oratory also took in the neediest boys from among the abandoned, giving them a place to live – the Hospice St. Francis de Sales. This was a central gathering place for boys who needed to have placement in a job or who wanted to study in the city schools. Later, it became a place for other types of assistance, trade school, cultural formation, and academic education. From 1855 to 1870 one can trace a definite turn in Don Bosco's educational work and assistance: the gradual transformation of the Valdocco Oratory into a *boarding school* both for those on the technical school track (1852–1862) and those on the academic track (1855–1859). This line of activities that would push the work of the Festive Oratory into second place then took shape, even if the Oratory always holds first place in the ideal realm.

From a simple place to gather for catechism and games on days off from school and work – Sundays and feast days – it becomes a place of global formation, with the addition of many buildings. The phenomenon of "turning into high schools" (hostels, academic route high schools, boarding *trade schools*, and later dormers and day students) took place swiftly and would, at least for a century, absorb the greater number (and the best) energies of the Salesian Society and would give a "new look" to the Preventive System. It did not matter if they were schools of the humanities or of trades – they both proposed:

1. Technical courses for the purpose of working at a trade;
2. Basic educational instruction for the purpose of higher studies, including Theology;
3. The broadest education possible (singing, music, theater, games, and outings) – all oriented in a Christian manner; and
4. Unforeseen by the first *Constitutions* approved by the Holy See in 1874, a new and extraordinary openness to *missionary activity* (from 1875 on), which was introduced in Argentina with the Italian immigrants as the first concern.

**B.** Through re-reading Don Bosco's ideas and experiences in the light of a renewed Conciliar ecclesiology and of the Pontifical Magisterium as regards evangelization, the Salesian Cooperators express their apostolic action under different formulae: *pastoral/educational service*, carried out according to the Preventive System; "*educating by evangelizing and evangelizing by educating"; holistic education in the style of the Preventive System;* educating and evangelizing according to the *pedagogy of goodness*; and other analogous formulae. Essentially, the Salesian Cooperators carry out their Gospel service in their daily life through their proclamation of it and their witness to it.

It is again Don Bosco who points out some elements of the journey (Rome, 1878): to help the Salesians "face and put a halt to irreligion and bad manners which are ever increasing, which, both in the city and in the country, drag to eternal ruin such poor and inexperienced young people… to diminish the number of unruly youth; who, left to their own devices, run a great risk of helping to populate the jails." (Genoa, 3/30/1882): "We see them

roaming from piazze to piazze, from shore to shore, growing up on laziness and games and gambling, and learning obscenities and blasphemies; and later, we see them becoming rogues and criminals; and finally, and most often right in the flower of their youth, we see them land in prison." (Lucca, April 1882): "Many thousands of young men, in well over 100 Houses, receive a Christian education, receive instruction, and are set on the path of the technical arts or a trade which will allow them to earn their daily bread honestly (…). Your offerings go to raise up these young men for civil society to be Christian workmen, faithful soldiers, exemplary teachers, Priests, and even missionaries who will bring Religion and civilization to barbarous peoples." (Torino, June 1, 1885): Salesian Work must be sustained "because it educates the young to virtue and to the path of the Sanctuary [sic] for its principal aim is to instruct the youth so that they promote in the midst of the world, in schools, in hospices, in festive oratories, in families – so that they promote, I say – love for Religion, for good manners, for prayer, and for frequenting the sacraments – these youth who, today, have become the target of evil men." "In these times, evil men seek to spread impiety and bad manners, to the ruin, especially, of unwary youth through societies, the press, and gatherings with the more-or-less blatant purpose of drawing them away from Religion, from the Church, and from healthy morals."

**C.** The article makes particular reference to no. 4 of the Vatican Council II document *Ad Gentes*:

> To accomplish this, Christ sent from the Father His Holy Spirit, who was to carry on inwardly His saving work and prompt the Church to spread out. Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified. Yet on the day of Pentecost, He came down upon the disciples to remain with them forever (cf. John 14:16). The Church was publicly displayed to the multitude, the Gospel began to spread among the nations by means of preaching, […] For it was from Pentecost that the "Acts of the Apostles" took again, just as Christ was - conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary, and just as Christ was impelled to the work of His ministry by the same Holy Spirit descending upon Him while He prayed.

The Salesian Cooperator, in the measure in which he knows himself to be a living and active part of the Church, feels the need to live in intimacy with the Holy Spirit and to invoke Him with insistence, knowing that He is present in a mysterious but real way in his mind and spirit and as the One Who sustains him in his apostolic Salesian commitment.

**D.** Through Jesus' work and the sending of the Holy Spirit, God raised up the Church so that, through the combined action of all its members – the Faithful and Her Shepherds – She might be the visible Cooperator with His plan throughout the centuries. Vatican Council II made this vision of faith its own right from the first lines of *Lumen Gentium*, when it defined the Church as the "Universal Sacrament of Salvation," in other words, as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humankind." By placing him or herself within this vision, the Salesian Cooperator sees in the Church the "Body (visible and organic) of Christ," animated by His spirit of love. We are speaking of one of the most realistic ways in which Paul described the Church. "We know we are a living part" of Her because, by the power of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and our specific Salesian

vocation, one becomes an active and co-responsible subject. He or she sees in Her "the center of communion of all its forces working for salvation." According to what Vatican Council II has declared, the Church, the:

> messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

**E.** The contemporary Church's reflection on the Mystery of Christ and on Her own Nature has brought Her to find, at the roots of the first and, as the crown of the second, the very figure of Woman: the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. God has placed in His Family – the Church – as in every domestic hearth, the figure of Woman, who, in a spirit of service watches over Her and protects Her. In His salvific work, Christ had as "a Cooperator" His own Mother, Mary of Nazareth, predestined to this by the wisdom of the Father and enabled by the presence of His Spirit. The Salesian Cooperator sees and venerates in Mary, as "Perfect Servant" of the Father in imitation of her Son, She who "has cooperated in an absolutely unique way in the work of the Savior, as the *Mother of Jesus*"; and with Him, as Co-Redemptrix, in glory with her Son, "does not cease to cooperate as *Mother and Help of the Christian people*."

**F.** Reflection on these Mysteries illuminates the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator and helps him or her understand self in his or her most profound aspects. In the Cooperator's life and daily apostolate, he or she shares St. Paul's joy and awe at having been called to be "a Cooperator with God, in his field, in the building of his edifice.": "To me, the least among all the holy ones, has been granted this grace to proclaim the unfathomable riches of Christ." Don Bosco, too, beginning in 1878, printed on the frontispiece of the *Salesian Bulletin* the phrase attributed to St. Dionysus the Areopagite: "Of those things that are most divine, the most divine of all is that of *cooperating with God* in saving souls."

## Art. 15. Centrality of Apostolic Love

*§1. The heart of the Salesian Spirit is apostolic and pastoral charity. This makes the mercy of the Father, the salvific love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit present among the young. Don Bosco expressed this with his motto: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle." He signified it in the name "Salesians," by choosing St. Francis de Sales*[23]*, model of Christian humanism, of apostolic dedication, and of amiability, and promoter of lay spirituality, as his patron.*

*§2. This charity is, for Salesian Cooperators, a gift of God, which unites them to Him and to the young. Further, it takes its inspiration from the maternal solicitude of Mary, who supports and sustains them in their daily witness.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Apostolic and Pastoral Charity
2. Christian Humanism

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** What one notices immediately in Don Bosco's words is the welcoming of all that is completely human. Before all else, tending to the honest citizen and good Christian is also highlighting the dignity of the human person. Vatican Council II in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, in no. 12, clearly states: "According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown."

Educators and apostles have the task of waking up and mobilizing all the potentialities in the young: their faculties of understanding and of reason; their variegated affective patrimony; and their will fortified by freedom. Salesian Cooperators, like Don Bosco, choose Christian humanism and the methodology of the charity of St. Francis de Sales. It is a humanism which is not ignorant of the weaknesses of man but which founds itself on an unshakeable faith in the intrinsic goodness of the person because he or she is beloved by God and is called by Him to Christian perfection, in every state of life. Such humanism is a constituent aspect of the charismatic and spiritual experience of all the Groups founded by Don Bosco and has been made their own, as a precious heritage, by the other Groups which today have been aggregated to the one Family.

For Don Bosco *"Salesian" Humanism* meant valuing everything positive that is rooted in the life of persons, in created reality, and in the events of history. This brought him to: perceive the authentic values present in the world, especially if they were pleasing to the young; insert himself into the cultural flux and of the human development of his time, motivating the good and refusing to bemoan evils; seek cooperation from many in a wise way, convinced that each person has gifts which are to be discovered, recognized, and valued; believe in the power of education which supports the growth of the young person and encourages him or her to become an honest, upright

[23] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*... Art. V, 8.
Francis de Sales. *On the Love of God*. Trans. John K. Ryan. 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963). Print.

citizen and good Christian; and entrust himself, always and everywhere, to the Providence of God, Whom he perceived and loved as a Father.

In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperators are committed to offering to today's society his or her service, in receptivity to the innovative guidelines promoted by Vatican Council II and the successive Pontifical Magisterium concerning the relationship of the Church with other Religions and with contemporary society, centered on interreligious dialogue, on the defense of the dignity of the human person and of the family, on the promotion of justice and of peace, on intercultural dialogue – especially in multi-ethnic contexts – and on the safeguarding of all Creation.

The aim of an education given by Don Bosco is two-fold: a good Christian and an honest, upright citizen - a phrase which can also be summed up in the formula of a holistic education or in those very efficacious, renowned, traditional ones of the three "S"s - health, study, and sanctity (in Italian… sanità, studio, e Santità), or "joy, study, and piety," "bread, work, and Paradise", "work, religion, and virtue," "piety, morality, culture, and civility," "happy both on earth and in Heaven".

1. *Good Christian*: invited to pray; to give good example; to frequent religious practices; to "take part in all those things that can promote the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls"; to speak well of the Church, of Her Priests and Bishops, of the Pope, and of the ecclesiastical positions; to help root out scandals; and to correct fraternally. The spiritual means are those inherited from the Council of Trent and from the spirituality of his time: a well-assimilated catechesis, the Sacraments, practices of piety, and a sense of religious duty - all the way to sanctity. "The first thing suggested to him to become a Saint was to work so as to win souls to God; for there is nothing holier in the world than to cooperate for the good of souls." (*The Life of Dominic Savio,* chap. 8).

2. *Honest, upright citizen*: One who fulfills the obligations of his personal state of life. It is obvious that the Christian, inasmuch as he is a good citizen, is also called to contribute to the order and the progress of society by leading his own family wisely, participating as much as is possible in works of charity and solidarity, in commitment to catechetical and educational action, and in "uniting himself in the field of action and of work" through joining groups and associations that are at work in the world and are Christian, and by opening himself to the most demanding apostolic and missionary prospects. He or she does so with a sense of duty, of respect for civic order, of work as a necessity for subsistence but also as a factor of his identity, of personal self-development, and of service to society. Obviously, he or she does so within the limits that are imposed by the social condition of the young.

It is taken for granted today that the formula "honest, upright citizens and good Christians" means the following: A "good Christian" is not just one who goes to Church and is obedient to the Hierarchy but also one who works for a society built on solidarity and with responsibility within the Church community. The "honest, upright citizen" is the person who does not withdraw from society because it is pluralistic and overflows with a plethora of messages but participates with his own internal dynamics and strengths, giving his crucial contribution and active participation for a better quality of life for all men and women.

Don Bosco stood firm in his belief in a Religious State and of the image of society layered with "strata" within which, inevitably, the rich and the poor live together, and in which respect for authority, love for work, gratitude to benefactors, and unconditional intangibility of private property flourish. Rather than elaborating principles, he manifested tendencies: he was conservative more than democratic, paternalistic more than egalitarian, clerical more than lay, and promoter of associations more than corporations or unions. He aspired to a peaceful moral order which was respectful of everyone and in which the clergy had preeminence; his social model was

acquired, traditional, and not something to be created; it was hierarchical, making distinction between the spiritual and the temporal and defending the primacy of the former over the latter; his was not a conflictual personality but the kind that tried to integrate everyone. His purposeful distance from politics does not signify, however, a lack of national spirit; instead, it was very alive in Don Bosco, manifesting itself in his love for peace and for active assistance in moments of need (the cholera epidemics, earthquakes…).

**B.** Salesian humanism takes into consideration daily realities, from work to culture, from the joy of friendship to civic commitment, from the beauty of Nature in which we are immersed to personal and social education, and from professional competence to moral uprightness in one's gestures and choices – all realities which constitute our life – as values that are to be defended and helped to grow. Commitment to promotion of the human person in Salesian history takes into great consideration those little realities which make up the experience of persons.

Salesian humanism works out of the perspective of giving meaning to everyday life. Don Bosco's type of education tends to fill one with hope and to give a future to the history of persons through the use of Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness. The apostolic Salesian commitment of all the Groups of the Family is defined as "education", which is the content of one's specific mission and the way of intervening so as to be efficacious. It is also the spiritual choice for those who work in and for the Kingdom. We educate to help each person find his or her rightful place in society and in the Church. One's vocation is the most important point of his or her life. We are placed in this world, not for ourselves but for others and are entrusted with a specific mission to which we are committed as a service to our brothers and sisters. The call is to work always and everywhere and in all things with Gospel charity – something which is greatly needed. Believers, both the young and adults, consecrated and laity, men and women, express in a thousand forms the gift of charity: some do so through educational activities, others in commitment to evangelization to the point of giving of oneself totally and completely.

Pastoral charity is the center and the summation of Salesian Spirituality. If the hallmark of the Franciscans is poverty and that of the Jesuits obedience, charity is the one of the Sons of Don Bosco. Charity, in fact, is the summit of all the charisms: "Aspire to the greater gifts! I will show you the way that is better than all others": Charity. This virtue is not a matter of a personal conquest but it is the humble and total opening up of oneself to God, following Mary's example. It is the impassioned search for the young to give them over to God. Thus love is the hallmark of Don Bosco's spirituality and incarnated Charity becomes the propelling center of Salesian Spirituality: it is the typical note that characterizes a love which knows how to make itself loved and to call forth love. This love is visible, is made manifest, and frees and saves.

In his letter from Rome of 1884, Don Bosco revealed its mystical significance: "How is it possible to reanimate these dear young people? With charity… Jesus Christ made Himself little with the little ones and bore our infirmities. Behold the teacher of the Family Spirit! Jesus Christ did not break the bruised reed or put out the smoldering wick. Behold your model." The mysticism of the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* consists in profound communion with God, which forges the heart of the educator, predisposing him or her to total dedication and to generous service. The perspective of Don Bosco's mysticism is found in this: learning from God how to love and participating in Christ's love by cultivating an apostolic heart which knows how to give of itself without limits for the salvation of the young.

It was precisely pastoral charity which was the spiritual energy impelling Don Bosco to seek out souls and to serve God alone; it was a charity which filled his mind and heart and also his projects with the intent of expanding them and of giving stability to his work. For this reason, he gathered around himself various persons, coordinating and harmonizing their functions and their many gifts, their different states of life and ministries notwithstanding.

*§1. Salesian Cooperators know they are "in intimate solidarity"*[24] *with the society in which they live and for which they are called to be light, salt, and leaven. They believe in the interior resources of the person. They share the values of their own culture and they commit themselves to work so that it may be guided by Christian humanism. They promote new realities with a critical Christian sense. They integrate into their life "all that which is good,"*[25] *adopting a listening stance, especially as regards the young, in discerning the signs of the times. .*

*§2. Faced with socio-cultural challenges*[26] *and difficulties, they adopt a critical and constructive attitude. They work with commitment to spread a Christian culture and ethic of welcome and solidarity in society.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core theme

To Be Light and Leaven: Optimism in the Face of the Good and Realistic Courage in the Face of Evil

### Keys to Understanding

In this chapter dedicated to the Salesian Spirit are highlighted and specified *how* one works, by what interior *convictions* and *sentiments* one is animated, and what typically Salesian exterior behaviors the Cooperator manifests. The question is: *How does the Salesian Cooperator behave before the world* in which his Salesian vocation calls him or her to live and to work to be its "salt, light, and leaven"? This article explains it from two points of view: 1) when faced with the good, he or she practices optimism; 2) when faced with evil, he or she puts into practice a realistic courage.

Pastoral Salesian charity indicates to the Cooperator an underlying positive attitude: "solidarity." As a Christian, "he feels himself a living part of the Church." As a lay Christian he feels he is a living part of the world, "a citizen" fully inserted in temporal reality and co-responsible in its regard, contributing to its holistic growth by being "salt, light, and leaven." The Conciliar Church testifies to this: "this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds…" and shares in the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted". [In other passages the Council speaks of "human, natural, perennial, positive, moral, and socio-cultural" values of the world which the Christian willingly recognizes and applies himself to develop.]

The Salesian Cooperator believes that God in His Providence has placed in every person natural resources and supernatural Graces upon which a man of action or an educator can always put his trust and find valid reasons to hope. This was the conviction of St. Francis de Sales, "the model of true humanism." This was also Don Bosco's conviction, as an adversary to the Jansenism of his time: *in every young person, even the most wretched* – he used to say – *there is also always a point accessible to the good, a sensitive chord* that can be made to vibrate. The entire Preventive System consists in "calling upon the interior resources of the person." In the diverse contexts in which

[24] *Gaudium et Spes*. Par. 1.

[25] I Thess. 5:21

[26] *Gaudium et Spes*. Paragraphs 4 and 11.

the Salesian Cooperator lives and formed by the young or by adults or by one and the other together, he or she tends to give trust, to entrust responsibilities, to help persons grow, and to spread optimism.

In the situations and the events of this world, Salesian optimism brings the Cooperator to see the good rather than the negative side – before which, however, he or she does not close his or her eyes. Indeed, he or she seeks to discover all the good that is done and which is spoken of but little. He or she welcomes and appreciates everything that is truly human and corresponds to some aspect of the vocation and the dignity of man and, in particular, "the values of his own culture." He shares with the young the taste for authentic values. He willingly listens, therefore, to the invitation of St. Paul to the Faithful of Philippi: "brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things… and the God of peace shall be with you!" (Phil. 4:8-9)

The Salesian Cooperator takes on a positive attitude before every form of authentic progress: ownership of things, dignity and liberty of every person and of every people, equal dignity between men and women, a solidarity which is ever stronger on interpersonal, social, national, and international levels. In the face of novelties and newness, he does not assume a prejudicial, negative, or diffident attitude. His propensity is to take them into favorable consideration, "especially if they are pleasing to the young." Don Bosco loved what the young loved, without fear; in his houses they felt at ease and they lived there without mortifying inhibitions. In all these things discernment needs to be exercised, that "critical Christian sense": new things do not always equate to progress; at times they are futile because the "merchants of novelty" manipulate consciences and take advantage of the natural thirst for change; therefore, the Salesian Cooperator follows the norm of St. Paul: "Examine everything and retain that which is good."

The Salesian Cooperator looks at reality with a "trusting" attitude: his perception of history and, above all, his faith convince him that life always finishes by triumphing over the culture of death. Therefore, he does not fear combatting all that which goes against the dignity of the human and Christian person – especially against whatever demolishes the hope of young people. He operates in a lucid, loyal, practical, and courageous manner. He prefers deeds to words: "He combats evil with courage and constancy," and does not abandon the Earth to those who exploit it. "He is committed to multiplying the good." The more the culture of death spreads, the more the disciple of Don Bosco feels provoked to roll up his shirt sleeves so as to work on public opinion and to seek new solutions to bring about good, above all when the defenselessness of the young is in play. The Association was founded for this reason: "to shake from the languor in which so many Christians lie and to spread the energy of charity." (*Biographical Memoirs* Vol. XVIII 125).

## Art. 17. Style of Action

*Salesian Cooperators live as "good Christians and honest citizens,"*[27] *sanctifying their existence in everyday life and rooting their action in union with God. They believe in the value of life, of giving freely without seeking return, of fraternity, and of "being neighbor." They cultivate those attitudes which foster education to the joys of daily life and they communicate this to others.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Style of Action
2. Concreteness, Civility, and Flexibility
3. Living as Good Christians and Honest, Upright Citizens: Civic and Political Commitments and Involvement

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** This article is composed of three sentences: the first elaborates on the roots of the Salesian Cooperator's action; the other two present some typical characteristics: flexible realism and the courage which is ready for sacrifice. It discusses the action of the Salesian Cooperator or, perhaps better, the active and operative aspects of his life in all fields and, in a particular way, in the field of the apostolate.

Among the ranks of the Saints, Don Bosco is one of those who worked the most for the Kingdom and who most exalted the work carried out for the Kingdom, that is, *"co-operating" with God in the realization of His plan of salvation*. In the seventy-two years of his life, he managed to realize: works for youth (oratories, academic and trade schools, and vocational centers); works for common folk (principally, good literature); missionary works (the organization of eleven Missionary Expeditions); the foundation of three apostolic Groups (in the midst of incomprehension on the part of many) and of one Archconfraternity whose apostolate is prayer and the spread of devotion to Mary Help of Christians; the construction of four churches (of which two are basilicas today); spiritual direction (especially through Confession); work as a writer for the people (about one hundred books and booklets); mediation between the Holy See and the new Italian State; and numerous travels (some very long: Paris, Barcelona). Moreover, he insisted with extraordinary energy about work to his Sons, promising them "bread, work, and Paradise." "Behold the scandal for a Saint," notes Don Caviglia: "He says many more times 'we work,' rather than 'we pray.'" On his death bed, he said twice to Don Rua: "I recommend that you tell all the Salesians that they ought to work with zeal and ardor." This work is *animated* by an uninterrupted and profound interior life. It is not a matter only of work carried out, materially-speaking, but of the work which has a "soul" – pastoral charity – with the knowledge that one is "cooperating" with God the Creator and Redeemer for His Kingdom.

The Salesian Cooperator is convinced of the value of action. He never says: there's nothing to do! The Salesian Cooperator makes himself concretely aware of the needs of the Church, of the world, of the young, of his country, of his city, and of his neighborhood. The invitation to each Salesian Cooperator personally and to the Salesian Cooperators as Association is to "cooperate" with Christ for the success of His plan of salvation. If this is so, then how can he not be "decided, available, and generous" in his various tasks? Or, with a word which is perhaps even more typically Salesian and one already applied to St. Francis de Sales – How can he not be "zealous"? This "zeal" is burning and impassioned activity. It suffices to note that such activity is *motivated and animated* interiorly

[27] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*... Introduction: "To the Reader".

and “rooted in union with God”, for Whom it is done, in the final analysis. Don Rinaldi found yet once again the perfect summary formula: one must acquire "that untiring activity sanctified by prayer and by union with God, which must be *the* characteristic of the Sons of Don Bosco."

**B.** This activity has some characteristics which are decidedly Salesian:

1. *Attentiveness to reality:* Anyone who reads the life of Don Bosco realizes that all the works which were successively launched had been decided upon through contact with lived reality, after having recognized some need or some urgency in some time and place, and in which a call from God was discerned: "I have always gone forward as the Lord has inspired me and circumstances have demanded." Thus, the Salesian Cooperator makes himself sensitive to the development of ideas and to the concrete immediacy of persons and events.

2. *Creative initiative:* Don Bosco was "creative" and full of pastoral imagination – not for the pleasure of launching out into new realities – but to test *efficacious* solutions which responded to those needs and urgencies. More than once he had to risk and to brave the criticism and the incomprehension of others. One day, he wrote to a Salesian Cooperator to encourage him in the foundation of a Salesian work: "In those things which turn to the advantage of youth-at-risk or which serve to gain souls to God, *I push ahead with temerity*!"

3. *Functional flexibility:* or, rather, fidelity to life and to its movements more than to certain rules and structures. People and environments evolve, above all, among the young, who are the most sensitive to the future. To do this, two tasks need to be accomplished: 1) the periodic verification of one's personal action so as to evaluate its true efficacy; and 2) the continual re-adapting of it so as to maintain its efficacy according to the rhythms of life.

**C**. A perspective emerges from this article into which a reflection must be inserted. It was proposed by Vatican Council II in *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 75, where it is stated:

> All Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good. In this way they are to demonstrate concretely how authority can be compatible with freedom, personal initiative with the solidarity of the whole social organism, and the advantages of unity with fruitful diversity. They must recognize the legitimacy of different opinions with regard to temporal solutions, and respect citizens, who, even as a group, defend their points of view by honest methods… Great care must be taken about civic and political formation, which is of the utmost necessity today for the population as a whole, and especially for youth, so that all citizens can play their part in the life of the political community.

If we take these words of the Council Fathers into serious consideration, then the challenge is to show that in the relationship between faith and life, between the worship we celebrate and the life which unfolds in the course of every day, there is no need to produce rifts within a social context which cannot remain indifferent to the believer, and in which every Christian is called upon to spend himself with all his faith. In such a sense, then, one understands why "each Christian must become aware of his or her special personal vocation within the political community". The *Polis*, the City of Man characterized by a sense of community, is the principal place where the believer in the

Salesian Cooperator also emerges. Therefore, it also ought to be the task of the Association at the various levels to take on the responsibility of forming all the Salesian Cooperators, right from the period of initial formation, to this attentiveness to society so that no one should feel extraneous to what happens where he or she lives.

Being realistic, we must say that unfortunately this is not something that can be taken for granted and that one does not always find attention paid to the impact of faith on life and that some discussions are not broached, sometimes simply due to a lack of preparation. People don't speak about them because they don't know what to say or they lack the cultural tools to confront topics such as liberty, democracy, social justice, work, economic life, safeguarding of the environment, and all the other themes so well-presented in the *Compendium of the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church*, without falling into generalities.

The Salesian Cooperator is convinced, then, that greater space must be given in formation initiatives and programs, including the self-initiated and personal ones of individual Cooperators, to the study of the Social Justice Doctrines, as is stated in an explicit way in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* in no. 41, where we find this written about the Social Justice Doctrines: "Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behavior."

*The Word of God and the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church* constitute a binomial which offers the content for an authentic formation to socio-political commitment. The Word of God is not always known despite its great relaunching by Vatican Council II through the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*. And yet, in the Bible we find the ethical foundations of social and political commitment on the part of each person. In different contexts and languages, the various Books of the Old and New Testaments demonstrate a personal and social ethic which was assumed by Jesus. The Word made Flesh shows the way of love and invites every man and woman to do as He did. The Commandment of Love finds concrete expression in the way in which Jesus accepts the Cross and dies forgiving His persecutors and taking upon Himself the sins of the world.

Jesus' Gospel is applied to the modern day in the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church which the Popes present to us in historical time so as to confront and respond to the needs which rise up within the social reality. Social Justice Doctrines are to be inserted into the history of Christian thought, which is made up of both men and facts and deeds. In this sense, formative itineraries ought to foresee some moments in which to present earlier witnesses and also some contemporary men and women who have incarnated in their lives the values of the Gospel and have been examples of it. These personages tell us that it is truly possible to live as Christians within society.

Some references to the Magisterium are rather opportune here:

> In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life", that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. (*Christifideles Laici* no. 42)

Also: “young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society.” (*ibid*., n. 46). And “An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better that we found it. … All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world.” (*Evangelii Gaudium* no. 183).

Many are the curricula that can be created for this content. The topics for such curricula are given to us in “grid form” in the index to the *Compendium of the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church*. The principles of putting the person at the center and of a solidarity connected with subsidiarity in the search for the common good find their application in the big questions concerning social life which are treated of in the Compendium: the family, work, economic life, the political community, the international community, the safeguarding of creation, and peace. The content is vast and each curriculum can be adjusted with freedom and begin with those aspects which one feels are the most urgent.

In the proposed curricula, the Salesian Cooperator must be made aware of how the Theological and Cardinal Virtues are involved. The purpose of such formation is to help the one who is studying have those criteria necessary to discern about the times in which he or she lives. The formation of one's conscience remains the true foundational and underlying objective and for this reason we are called to pay particular attention to the method proposed: “Political institutions and various other social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people’s awareness” [forming consciences, lit.]. (*Laudato sì* no. 214) It is a matter of becoming aware of what is happening and of "discover[ing] what each of us can do about it.” [recognizing what is the contribution that each person can give, literally] (*Laudato sì* no. 19).

The Salesian Cooperator will follow the method of experience in seeking a path which opens up the heart and the mind. The purpose is to form persons who are free and able to think about the present time utilizing as their foundational criteria those suggested by the Church, both in the Word and in the Social Justice Doctrines. The goal is to help raise up men and women who are not only knowledgeable but who also desire with a passion to get involved in society and to be protagonists in the “City of Man”. This does not mean that all must be directly involved in political life or Political Parties. Some will choose to put themselves at the service of public administration; others, however, will animate the Association from within. Along with this objective, there is another fundamental one: to form persons who cultivate the difficult art of listening and of working with others. In fact, one of the characteristics of postmodernity is precisely that fragmentation that has generated great individualistic lifestyles and excessive protagonism. The *Polis*, on the other hand, is something that needs to be created together, in collaboration. For this reason, forming people to work together is an urgent task of every area of the Church, as well as of the socio-political sphere.

The first great challenges are to introduce the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church in such a way as to render them interesting and to find a way to present them to the young which will rouse their interest in them so that they set about reading the Magisterial texts on their own. Max Weber states: “For nothing is worthy of man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion.”

In the area of education, the Salesian Cooperator realizes that educational passion is the fundamental characteristic for transmitting values; the same can be said for the socio-political realm: we need people who are passionate so they can transmit, even by the timbre of their voice, their great zeal for what they are recounting. “Passion” also means accepting pain and suffering when we see that things are not as they ought to be, along with

a profound desire for them to be improved, and believing that it is possible to build the city more to the measure of Man – where the poor and the least are not forgotten.

A second element emerges from a writing of Norberto Bobbio, from the 1950s: “What matters today is to debunk the enchantment of magic formulae which nourish hope for what will come and put to sleep any urgent searching”. It takes much to comprehend socio-political dynamics. Intellectual honesty and uprightness, which are devoid of pre-fabricated, pat answers, are required of one who accompanies others. The Social Justice Doctrines of the Church themselves point out the paths which can be traveled and the things that can be put into effect in everyday life. We must not be content with superficial answers for we know that the method to follow is that of the farmer who sows the seed and waits patiently while the crop grows and who knows that every attempt to hasten its growth by pulling on it is useless because the result will be precisely the opposite: the shoot will break.

Finally, a third element is evoked by a poem of Padre David Maria Turoldo. This Religious and poet of the 1900s expressed himself thus:

I am a wanderer like the wind
Freedom is my temple and my home.
Let others accumulate treasures
That thieves will steal.
For me the joy of singing is enough.
At least the poor man will be a sure friend
Every gypsy a long-time brother
Every lost woman a sign
And every child
The certainty that life…

This poem expresses very well the style of one who continues to place persons at the center of his action and his prayer. It says that accumulating treasures serves for naught and that the Gospel calls us at all levels always to have our eyes focused on the poor. Whoever forms himself for socio-political engagement, if he is a Christian, must always have his gaze fixed on Jesus, following His Way of loving right to the last, of His detachment from material goods, and of His carefulness to look beyond appearances. It would be a sad thing to form politicians who only take care of those who vote for them and of those who "count" while forgetting the poor and the excluded of the Earth.

## Art. 18. Style of Relationship

*Salesian Cooperators, taking their inspiration from the Preventive System of Don Bosco, practice loving-kindness*[28] *in their relationships as a sign of the love of God and as a means to re-awaken His presence in the heart of all those whom they meet. They are always ready to "take the first step" and to welcome others with goodness, respect, and patience. They tend to establish rapports of trust and friendship so as to create a family atmosphere of simplicity and affection. They are peace workers and seek clarification, consensus, and accord in and through dialogue.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Loving-kindness in Their Relationships with Others
2. Privileged Style: Creating a Family Atmosphere
3. Resolution of Conflicts

### Keys to Understanding

**A**. Salesian *loving-kindness* represents an attitude of goodness which is both interior and exterior and which characterizes the relationships of the Salesian Cooperator, not only with the young, but with all: brothers and sisters, friends, colleagues, those with whom free time is spent, brother and sister Salesians, and persons encountered from time to time. If an efficacious educative relationship is to begin, *loving-kindness* answers the deep need the young have not only to be loved but to know that they are loved; it is a particular style of relationship and of "wishing well," of "wanting the other's good" – of love – which reawakens the energies of the heart in the young and makes them mature to the point of total oblation.

*Loving-Kindness* was introduced by Don Bosco in the first Oratory in Valdocco. It is a style overflowing with fraternal love: everyone sees the other as a brother or a sister, accepts him or her openly, with a smile, and ready to share life. This is so because the "sense of the person" exists and each one is regarded as the image of God. In this way, one is loved personally, without discrimination, just as does Christ the Good Shepherd Who recognizes His Sheep and calls each by name. Every person is a universe, a Mystery, and a brother or sister for whom Christ sacrificed Himself.

*Joy* is an unmistakable characteristic of the Salesian Spirit. Salesian joy is not defined as "a good sense of humor" or as being "loud" or "boisterous"; rather, it is a profound reality that the Salesian Cooperator "nurtures in him or herself" in an on-going manner. It is the state of mind of one who, with a living faith, places his or her life and concerns in the hands of a Father of infinite goodness. He or she is conscious of the fact that his or her vocation is a call to complete and unselfish oblation. Salesian joy is, therefore, a *serene* joy which springs from union with the Risen One. It is a joy which refuses aggression. It is manifested on one's face and in amiable gestures. It is nourished with and in the presence of the Lord because Salesian joy is a fruit of the life of Grace.

The Salesian Cooperator is open *and cordial, ready to make the first step and to welcome others always with goodness, respect, and patience.* He or she is aware of being a man or a woman called to relationship and a

[28]Pietro Braido, SDB. "I molti volti dell'amorevolezza." *Rivista di Scienza dell'educazione*. 37.1 (1999) 17-46. Print. (available in Italian only)

Christian apostle who has received from the Father the mission to evangelize the world and so does not behave as a hermit. What is more, he or she knows how to approach others and to receive another who comes to him or her and to make the first step to encounter someone who is timid or fearful or who, due to an exaggerated sense of respect, keeps quiet and at a distance. He or she knows how to shrink distances, to approach with empathy, to "come down from the pedestal" and to "become little with the little ones." If, then, it is the other person who approaches first, he or she always extends welcome, carries him or her in their own heart, listens with empathy and takes interest in the other's concerns. This all comes into play with an attitude of goodness which seeks the good of the other, with esteem and respect each person's dignity, and with patience that is none other than constant and persevering love.

**B.** The Salesian Spirit is a "Family Spirit": it makes it such that everyone feels "at home", "at ease", and, at the same time, responsible for the common good. It is a style which is characterized by mutual confidence which is principally expressed in two attitudes: intense intercommunication, i.e., where thoughts and plans, joys and sorrows, experiences and initiatives, and even material goods are shared. The members enrich each other in their mutual relationships and they grow in communion. Relationships are not ruled by having recourse to the law and to authority or to regulations and conveniences but by appealing to one's interior capacities of reason, freedom, the heart, and faith. One trusts more in persuasion than imposition; initiative and co-responsibility than duty and obedience; joyous love freely given than precise and strict discipline. Don Bosco used to say: "God is not pleased by those things done by force. Since He is a God of Love, He wants everything to be done out of love. The Family Spirit finds its roots in the Eucharist. Indeed, any education which tends to form to the Family Spirit takes its inspiration from there.

**C.** Conflicts are always possible and are most probably inevitable. Even Don Bosco found himself in situations in which he was misunderstood or there was a clash. He didn't lose his calm or get discouraged. He knew how to avoid a frontal attack. He was attentive to prevent possible opposition. He knew how to pray and to wait with fortitude. In the case of a conflict, the first move that the Salesian Cooperator is to make is to seek to clarify the situation through sincere and serene dialogue so as to find common ground because "charity believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things."

## Art. 19. Style of Prayer

*§1. Salesian Cooperators are convinced that they can do nothing*[29] *if they are not in union with Jesus Christ. They invoke the Holy Spirit Who enlightens them and gives them strength day by day. Their prayer, rooted in God's Word, is simple and trusting, joyous and creative, permeated with apostolic ardor, holding tight to life and extending into it. So as to nourish their prayer life, Salesian Cooperators have recourse to the spiritual resources offered by the Church, by the Association, and by the Salesian Family. They participate actively in the liturgy and value the forms of popular piety which enrich their spiritual life.*

*§2. They reinvigorate their faith through the Sacraments. They find nourishment in the Eucharist for their apostolic charity. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they encounter the Mercy of the Father, Who impresses upon their life a dynamic and continuous conversion and makes them grow in their capacity to forgive.*

*§3. They reinforce their interior and apostolic life with spirituality moments, including those offered by the Association.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Prayer: Simple, Vital, and Inspired by the Life of the Divine Trinity which is Transformed into Daily Life
2. Growth in the Spiritual Life in Communion with the Church and the Association

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** As a Christian called to follow the Salesian path, the Cooperator perceives in a greater way his or her need for communion of faith and love with Christ, and "through Him" with the Father, in the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian Love inspires every Salesian Cooperator to put pastoral charity at the center of his life so he may be a sign and bearer of the love of the Good Shepherd to the young, more so because he receives from that same Lord the Spirit which gives him the light and the strength that he needs. Intimate union with Christ is transformed and experienced in daily life and grows in the measure in which the Cooperators carry out their own activities according to the Divine Will. In their care for their own family and for their secular commitments, everything is done "in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." They keep their communion with Jesus alive through daily prayer which is both simple and profound.

**B.** The prayer of the Salesian Cooperator is concerned with the Universal and Local Church, with the Salesian Family, and with the Association. It is prayer for and with the young, in a youthful style. A Salesian Cooperator keeps vigil so that there be no dichotomy between his prayer and his life: he prays with a sincere heart, fleeing from every type of conformism and formalism.

Salesian Cooperators participate actively in the liturgy of the Church. They are open to the liturgical renewals promoted by Vatican Council II both for themselves and for the animation of the liturgy within their family, in the parish, and among the young. They voluntarily enter into the three rhythms by which the Church

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[29] Jn. 15:5.

Vatican Council II. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Par. 4. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html

sanctifies time and the life of Her members in the Liturgy of the Hours (as much as is possible), at Holy Mass on Sundays, following the annual rhythm of the Liturgical Year and, in particular, of the Paschal Triduum. Vatican Council II and the renewed Liturgy have given great preeminence to the place that the Word of God must have in the life of the Church and of the Faithful, particularly of the laity. The Salesian Cooperator participates in these strong moments of reflection on the Word of God and in common celebratory moments in the liturgy proposed by the Local Church and by the Association for these are the "fonts from which the Church draws life." The Salesian Cooperator ought to take time every day to meditate on some passage of the Gospel and to maintain an intimate relationship with the Lord. The use of a daily missal is of great help in this.

The Council approves the *pious exercises of the Christian people* by harmonizing them with the liturgy. The Salesian Cooperator is a Christian with a simple soul who appreciates these forms of piety and makes use of them for himself and for others with a pedagogical and pastoral Salesian sense, just as Don Bosco did, without falling into “devotionalism”. He or she lives devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament through personal and/or community Adoration, and/or by paying a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, just as Don Bosco used to recommend so greatly.

Don Bosco insisted very much on two Sacraments: Holy Communion and Confession. He used to recommend that people approach the Sacraments, *in truth*, that is, regularly and frequently while seeking to avoid the temptation to make it a mere habit. In the Eucharist, the Salesian Cooperators find "the nourishment for their apostolic charity." Eucharistic Communion, made in intimate dialogue with Jesus, permits us to take on little by little the charity of the Good Shepherd. Confession, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is the "celebration, here and today, of the Father’s limitless mercy for his weak and sinful children." This Sacrament, received with faith and regular frequency (at least monthly), impedes the Salesian Cooperator from becoming spiritually drowsy and helps him or her continuous conversion, in authentic Christian and Salesian growth.

## Art. 20. In Communion with Mary and Our Saints

*§1. Salesian Cooperators, like Don Bosco, nurture a filial love for Mary Help of Christians, the Mother of the Church and of humanity.*[30] *She cooperated in the salvific mission of the Savior and continues to do so also today, as Mother and Helper of the People of God. She is the special guide of the Salesian Family. Don Bosco entrusted the Salesian Cooperators to Her so that they might receive protection and inspiration in their mission.*

*§2. They turn with particular affection to St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. They have trustful recourse to the intercession of St. John Bosco, "Father and Teacher"*[31] *of the young and of all the Salesian Family.*

*§3. Among the models of apostolic life, they venerate, with predilection, St. Francis de Sales, St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Alexandrina da Costa, Mamma Margaret, and all the other Saints, Blesseds, and Venerables of the Salesian Family. Knowledge of their lives is a font of inspiration and prayer.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core themes

1. Filial Love for Mary, Mother of the Church and of Humanity
2. The Saints and Blesseds: Heavenly Intercessors for the Salesian Family

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** In Don Bosco's life, Mary held a place of special privilege. The Salesian Cooperator nurtures a *filial and strong* devotion to Mary, in imitation of our Founder's devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Perfect Servant of God and the model for every Christian, and to Mary, the Mother of the Church and the Help of Christians, as his or her special *guide* and the guide of the entire Salesian Family. These are the titles which warrant and demand the Salesian Cooperator's particular veneration. More than being expressions of devotion only in intense moments, we are dealing with a continuous attitude: "Mary is our home." Three are the particular attitudes for expressing a love for Mary: *invoking* Her frequently; *celebrating Her Feasts* with fervor (especially December 8 and May 24); and *making Her known and loved.* Every Salesian Cooperator ought to take to heart both the reading and the study of Marian documents which treat of Mary and Her role in the Church and in the Salesian Family.

The Salesian Cooperator keeps alive that communion that unites "Pilgrim and Militant Church" with the "Triumphant Church" in Heaven: The Saints help us build the Kingdom of God. *St. Joseph* is Patron of the Universal Church. Don Bosco made him a principal Patron of the Salesian Family and presented him as a model and a Patron for the artisans, as a model of trust in Providence, as the Protector of the Church, and as the Patron of a Happy Death.

They invoke our *Founder* as *"Father and Teacher".* They constantly deepen their knowledge of his life and sanctity. This aspect becomes a fundamental nucleus of their initial and on-going formation.

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[30] *Salesian Family Charter*. 53-55

[31] John Paul II. *Juvenum Patris*. Trans. Direzione Opere Don Bosco. Par. 1. n.d. Web. 1 May 2014. www.sdb.org/ENG/doc/JuvenumPatris-eng.doc

**B**. **The Models of Apostolic Life:**

*St. Francis de Sales*

Not only do we take our name of "Salesian" from him, but he is also our model of sweetness and pastoral zeal. Salesian Cooperators deepen their knowledge of his pastoral method and love for the Church.

*St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello*

They take from her life her boldness in the apostolate and her trust in God.

*St. Domenico Savio*

He is the example of apostolic solicitude and of contemplation.

*Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa*

She is the example of union with Jesus in His suffering and a model of faith in Jesus present in the Eucharist.

*Mamma Margaret*

She is the witness of God's presence, of awe at His works of Creation, of gratitude for His gifts, and of obedience to His Will. She also teaches how to educate her children to trust and to the Faith.

The Saints and the Blesseds of the Salesian Family form a patrimony of Salesian Sanctity which becomes a motivating force for spirituality.

*Alberto Marvelli* is a splendid example of a young professional, of a layman involved in the apostolate and in the construction of a better world, even as a politician. He died at 28 years of age. He was born in Ferrara on March 21, 1918, but it was Rimini that became the center of his work and his life. Right from his adolescent years, he had a strong desire for sanctity, which he conceived not only as a need of his soul but also as an indispensable means with which to cooperate in the salvation of his neighbor. To the moral formation he received in his family was added that of the Salesian Oratory in Rimini and that of Catholic Action, among whose ranks and organization he had his first experiences with an apostolate. His was an apostolate suffused with the Salesian charism through personal contacts, discussions, lessons, and conferences. He animated a great number of charitable and social assistance initiatives. He was a member of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul and had a special predilection for the poor and abandoned. He even began the "Mass of the Poor" for the needy, followed on Sundays by a peaceful lunch which he himself served. The animating force behind this great dynamism was the Love of God, nourished by assiduous prayer and daily Communion. In his "Diary", which was printed posthumously, certain stages of his constant and progressive maturation in his interior life can be verified – to the point of arriving at the heights of the mystics. Among other things, he writes: "Jesus is inviting me to climb, to ascend. I have an intense desire to become a Saint by the life which the Lord has in mind for me." He was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II on September 5, 2004, at Loreto, Italy.

*Attilio Giordani* is, before all else, a model of family life. He was present both as a husband and a father at all times and was a man rich in great faith and serenity, living a self-willed austerity and Gospel poverty for the benefit of those most in need. His marriage with Noemi, in May of 1944, was, to him, not only a "word given" but, above all, a Sacrament of Christ which he strove to express in its sanctity and indissolubility in daily life and in the education of their children. The family remained united because Attilio and Noemi supported each other with prayer and the practice of charity. He is a model of lay Salesian sanctity lived in joy. Having become a Salesian Cooperator, he lived his Faith in the midst of his lay reality, taking his inspiration from Don Bosco's project of apostolic life. He

built his personality as a man and as a Christian on joy. His sense of humor was the direct expression of a conscience ruled by faith in Christ. Moreover, he gave witness with courage and joyful goodness to his Christian Faith even in difficult environments or situations (as during his period of military service and in the war or at his job) *by living in the world without being of the world*, swimming against the current. He concluded his earthly life by sharing with his family the choice to do mission work, leaving the enthusiasm of a life given for others as his "Last Will and Testament": "Our faith must be life" and "The measure of our belief is manifested in our being." Venerable Attilio Giordani is a limpid incarnation of Salesian Spirituality as a layman. This aspect always raised up special admiration in the Consecrated Salesians who recognized the providential presence of one such model and they themselves did not fail to have recourse to him for counsel on how to be an apostle among the young.

The Groups of the Salesian Family have numerous lay people involved in their mission. We are aware that there can be no complete and total involvement if there is not also the sharing of the same spirit. Living Salesian Spirituality as lay people who are co-responsible in the work of the education pastoral is, therefore, a fundamental task. The attractive figure of Attilio Giordani is, in this sense, a font of inspiration for formulating a lay Salesian Spirituality.

# Capitolo IV

## THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR
## IN COMMUNION AND COLLABORATION

*«…walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called,*
*with all humility and meekness, with patience,*
*bearing with one another in love, careful to preserve*
*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...»*
*(Eph. 4:1-3)*

After having reminded the Christians of their new condition by merit of Christ's action, the apostle Paul begins his practical exhortation to the Churches of Asia Minor, giving it a particular tone. His language is not legalistic but encouraging: "I exhort you." With this invitation, he calls them to a conduct which is in conformity with the Call they have received. The first topic he tackles is *the unity of the Church*, indicating that this is the premise of every authentic relationship in Christian life. Unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, in unison with each person's effort: so Paul states, first of all, those attitudes in which the Christian must mature, listing three virtues and two behavior styles: detachment from every form of ambition (humility); maintenance of a sweet and amicable deportment (meekness); and, in imitation of God, a merciful response to evil for the sake of bringing back one's brother or sister (patience). Such virtues are realized in the loving *welcome* extended to one's neighbor and through concern to preserve and safeguard the bond which the Holy Spirit has generated among believers; i.e., *Peace*, the gift of the Risen Christ. (Eph. 2:11-18)

Paul takes up again his vision of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) which has been called to give witness to the world of the Mystery of God's Will to save all mankind and in which the Spirit of the Risen One is active. (see Eph. 1:8-10) All believers have been called to this reality by their Baptism; it is not a sociological thing. The goodwill of individuals is not what unites believers: it is God the Father, in His Son, who reconciles "those who were once far off". The Ephesians knew very well just how "far off" they had been from God at one time! *Unity*, therefore, is a gift before it is anything else. It is a good which needs to be safeguarded and protected lest we despise the dignity with which we were clothed in our Baptism. This is what Article 21 of the *Statutes* reminds us: "*Their common apostolic vocation and membership in the same Association makes Salesian Cooperators spiritual brothers and sisters*."

Christ has already ascended to the Glory of the Father. He has been given power over every cosmic sphere. This finds its historical earthly expression in His Body, in that Perfect Man, who testifies in history to the universal extent of His Dominion; therefore, the gifts of the Lord Who ascended into Heaven which have been offered to believers have a specific finality and purpose. This purpose is expressed in an original (and slightly daring)

interpretation of Psalm 67/68. Alluding, perhaps, to Pentecost, Paul shows that the One Who has ascended into Heaven now enriches the Church with gifts which allow Her to live as both an earthly and a celestial reality at one and the same time. Christ's triumph over death bears a fecundity which concerns all created reality. He ascended above the heavens "to the fullness of all things." The riches of life which Christ has poured out on all have a universal and cosmic extension. The Church does not exhaust the fecundity of this salvific action but makes of it a sacrament: inasmuch as She is united to Christ, the Head, She, too, is called "His Body, the fullness of the One who is the perfect fulfillment of all things" (Eph. 1:23) but She is also invited to "grow in all things, tending to Him, Who is the Head, Christ."

***United in one heart and one soul alone***

This ideal to which to strive still remains. Placing value on individuals is one of the great conquests of modernity. It has been understood that the person is not a number and that he or she is unrepeatable and has a right to a personal plan. This shows a propitious respect for intimacy and for making free decisions and has augmented dialogue and free, trusting exchange between persons. But sometimes this appreciation for individuality has degenerated into individualism and indifference. Individualists are persons who refuse whatever does not serve them or whatever they do not like. They do not put themselves out or commit to anyone or anything. They refuse to create bonds and their aversion to them is transformed into "an allergy" where commitments made by others are concerned. They find difficulty in sharing projects and plans; they want to take control and do it by themselves; they defend their own plans and ideas and make decisions alone.

Individualism is at the root of divisions within Communities and among peoples. We cannot call ourselves Christians unless we return to a Christianity which has a strong communal significance. It has already been a while that the virus of individualism risks "drying up" Christianity and the life of the Association as well. Freedom understood in this way does not leave room for getting involved in any common project but struggles to commit itself to the good of others. It is tempted to impress upon its relationships a utilitarian logic, centered on its own advantage. Individualism generates loneliness and isolation. The call to care for the following is strong in this chapter:

- communion and collaboration with the other Groups of the Salesian Family;
- the ministry of the Rector Major; and
- the apostolic service of the Delegates.

## Art. 21. Brothers and Sisters in Don Bosco

*Their common apostolic Vocation and membership in the same Association makes Salesian Cooperators spiritual brothers and sisters. Indeed, "united with one heart and one soul alone,"*[32] *they live their communion with those bonds characteristic of Don Bosco's spirit.*

*They joyously take part in the "family life" of the Association through getting to know each other, growing together, exchanging faith experiences, and working on apostolic projects.*

*They foster the associative life by welcoming each other reciprocally.*[33]

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Themes**

1. Spiritual Brothers and Sisters in Don Bosco
2. Family Life as Expression of Communion

**Keys to Understanding**

**A.** Salesian Cooperators are, before all else, brothers and sisters in Christ. This Christian fraternity of theirs is enriched by the strength of their common Salesian vocation. Christian fraternity is sacramental in nature because its existence is created by the Sacraments. It is "charismatic" by nature because it is linked to a specific vocation to follow Don Bosco and is a vocation which owes its existence to a gift, or a charism, of the Holy Spirit. This Salesian fraternity is to be understood in the light of the specific mission of the Founder, Don Bosco.

As the first article of the *Statutes* states, the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco in the Church and destined him to have secular witnesses who, while living in the world, prolong his mission throughout time and live his spirit. As charismatic Founder, he is at the center of the charismatic constellation formed by those who have received the Salesian Vocation. He is called "father" by the vocational Groups of his apostolic Family on account of their Salesian Vocation. For this reason also, the Salesian Cooperators are brothers and sisters in Don Bosco, their Spiritual Father.

All of this fosters in the Salesian Cooperator a profound *sense of belonging* to the Association and nourishes the conviction that each one is a living part of a communion of persons committed to a common mission. Following the example of the Early Christian Community, they live the Gospel values which, among other things, are fraternity and communion. How? By imprinting upon their relationships with every brother and sister sentiments of respect and sincere affection and by assuming behaviors which effectively manifest such sentiments; therefore, the sharing and the exchange of spiritual values, such as ideas, projects and plans, joys and sorrows and sufferings, and reciprocal help, even as concerns economic aspects, are perceived as shared participation: all of this is part of the Salesian Spirit.

**B.** The Salesian Cooperators are invited to live fraternal communion in their everyday life by remaining in communion of thought, affection, and prayer with the other members. They can show this through informal or formal gatherings with the frequency and modalities dictated by what is possible for them. Besides this, the

[32] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*…Art. I.

[33] Ibid. Articles V, 7 and VII, 4-5.

Association as such, at its various Levels (Local, Provincial, Regional, and World), provides moments of "family life." These include gatherings, spirituality days, celebrations, weeks of study or updating, spiritual retreats and exercises, etc. The objectives of all these initiatives are to:

- *get to know one other*: mutual knowledge in an atmosphere of serene and joyous Salesian "closeness," one-on-one, or in a group, or in an assembly: these are the first steps to create communion by spending time together;
- *share experiences and apostolic plans and projects*: this exchange may be accompanied by sharing and approval, suggestions, encouragement, promise of support, of help, and of comfort; they can uncover the creative possibilities present in every person, youth or adult, and in every area of the apostolate, great or small, and they motivate imitation and emulation; and
- *grow together*: better knowledge of each other and the sharing of experiences and plans inevitably produces an individual and collective growth, a process of maturing, a more illumined and courageous Salesian apostolate, and stronger bonds among all those belonging to the different Levels of the Association.

This idea of "communion" of all Christians with God and with each other is inherent in the concept of Gospel fraternity. "Communion", in the Biblical sense, defines one's manner of being and acting and one's relationship with God and with others and marks it with the characteristic of the Christian Community: intimate and vital union with Christ. This communion is realized concretely through sharing with others and receiving from them, while respecting each one's personality. In this way, all the members of the Church are in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit, participating in His fullness and in communion with all their brothers and sisters to form with them one "Community", this very Church.

This communion is dynamic and destined to transform itself on the level of action – in collaboration and in service. When Saint Luke says in the *Acts of the Apostles* that the Christians, beyond being "persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the breaking of the bread, and in prayers" made "communion", he meant to make reference to a very concrete Community which expressed its profound communion in interpersonal relationships: "They were of one heart and one soul alone." There was no duality, therefore. It was a Community called and joined together by the presence of the Risen One and the power of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, it was spiritual but expressed this fraternity with tangible signs.

This ecclesial communion does not occur within each single Community only but also defines the relationships among the Local Churches. These Churches express this communion in their mutual recognition and acceptance and they realize it by means of the exchange of spiritual goods, visits, the sending of apostolic workers, and also through concrete acts of solidarity.

The documents of Vatican Council II give ample space to this Gospel message. They present *fraternity* as the fundamental component of Christian existence and of the reality of the Church. She is, in fact, by definition, a *Community of brothers and sisters* since all its members have received the same Spirit of the Lord. Christian fraternity must preside over and inform all relationships in the ecclesial sphere: those of the Faithful among themselves and with their Pastors; those of the Priests, among themselves and with the Laity; those of the Bishops, among themselves and with their Priests; and those of all who belong to Religious Institutes. Only in this way will the Local Churches and the Church Universal become sign and witness of fraternity before all men.

Vatican Council II took the Early Church as its very own concrete *model* in addition to the *values* and the *demands* inherent to it and applied them to the present-day situation. It defined both the Local Church and the Church Universal as "communion" – a reflection of and participation in the ineffable and mysterious communion that in God, the Holy Trinity, unites Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In effect and before all else, this dynamic of

*communion* cuts across the entire composition of the Local Church and of the Universal one, animating them from within. For this reason, the Church is a communion of faith, of hope, and of charity; it is a Community which participates in Christ's common priesthood and in His mission to give witness to and to animate the temporal order with Christian values. The fruit of this ecclesial communion is *radical Christian equality*, as underlined by Vatican Council II when speaking of the laity: "And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 32)

This dynamic of "communion" thus implies that the entire activity of both the Local Churches and the Church Universal be carried out in *cooperation*, *collaboration*, and *solidarity*. It is the principle to be put into practice in the apostolate of the laity, in their relationship with their pastors, and in their work with Catholics and non-believers alike. It marks the dynamic ties among Priests and between the Priests and their Bishops, the laity, and with the Religious. It characterizes the relationships among the Bishops themselves and with the Pope and the Priests. It interests, directly, at all Levels, the relationships among Religious themselves, with the Bishops, with diocesan Priests, and with the laity. It guides the entire ecumenical and missionary activity of individuals and of the various Christian communities. It is open to a vaster collaboration and cooperation with all men of goodwill. Thus, all members of the Christian Community are tied to each other by a *common responsibility*. All, as active members of the Mystical Body of Christ, are called to collaborate responsibly in the apostolic mission.

## Art. 22. Co-responsible in the Mission

*§1. The Salesian Cooperator feels responsible for the common mission and carries it out according to his or her own conditions in life, competencies, and possibilities, giving it valuable and substantial support. He or she shares educative and evangelizing co-responsibility in the Association. Each Cooperator must participate in the meetings for programming and evaluating the various activities and in choosing those who will undertake specific responsibilities.*

*If called to take on particular responsibilities, he or she commits him or herself to carry them out with fidelity and in a spirit of service.*

*§2. With responsibility and a sense of belonging, every Salesian Cooperator supports the economic autonomy of the Association so that it can carry out its mission.*[34]

**CONSIDERATIONS**

**Core Themes**

1. The Salesian Cooperator: Responsible for the Common Mission
2. Economic Solidarity

**Keys to Understanding**

**A.** If every Salesian Cooperator feels responsible for the common mission, that means that the Association *has* a particular mission and that each Salesian Cooperator is an active subject in it due to his or her membership in said Association. The mission is a common one but it is carried out by *individuals* who are held to act in communion and not in an individualistic manner; i.e., as *co-responsible* for it.

The article specifies the *ways* in which every Salesian Cooperator carries out the common mission: "according to his or her own conditions in life, competencies, and possibilities." The impossible is not asked of the members, but each one is to be reminded that he or she should accomplish whatever he or she can. Specific amounts and modalities are not specified; both are left to the inventiveness and the willing availability of each member according to personal responsibilities to their families and to their job. The article also points out *two areas* in which each member offers his or her responsible collaboration "with a spirit of initiative." This treats of, in practical, concrete terms, 1) planning and evaluation meetings concerning their various activities and 2) their participation in choosing the leadership for animation and governance (the Councilors). These are two crucial areas for the good running of the Association at the various Levels, for the solid and up-to-date formation of its members, and for the vaster and more efficacious Salesian apostolate of the same.

Within the Association, the Coordinator carries out his or her responsibility with a spirit of service according to the principles of communion and co-responsibility. The Association has chosen a "collegial" organization at the various Levels, based precisely on these principles. This implies that every task is to be carried out as a service.

These are Gospel principles and are indicated by Vatican Council II in reference to the ordained Ministers – Bishops, Priests, and Deacons – and to all those who have a task, or who have a role to play in the Church.

[34] *Salesian Family Charter*. 20-21.

Ordained Ministers and Institutes carry them out in "hierarchical communion" and as an authoritative and qualified service to God's people. Every other role is carried out in "ecclesial communion" and as a service to others. In all those who welcome Him with faith and charity, Christ has instituted through the Gift of His Spirit a new fraternal communion in His Body, which is the Church, in which all members give reciprocal service among themselves according to the various gifts they have received.

**B.** As concerns economic solidarity, it needs to be stated that in the various drafts of the *Statutes* and *Regulations*, Don Bosco vacillated between requiring obligatory dues to be collected at established times and the invitation to make free-will offerings. He finally decided on indicating that free-will offerings be made "monthly or annually *according to the oblation that the charity of their hearts suggests"* and extended his thought to include indispensable moments of participation which are: "at least the two [annual] Conferences" – the one near the Feast of Mary Help of Christians and the other near that of St. Francis de Sales. He also prescribed that "all these offerings be sent to the Superior General in support of the works promoted by the Association." Further, he added that "when someone is unable to be present at the Conference, they should see to it to send their offering by the easiest and most secure means." (see *Rule* of 1876, chap. VI, par. 3&4) This choice for *free-will offerings* is preserved in the *Project of Apostolic Life*, even if some forms of mandated participation in these offerings are permitted according to the choice of the Province.

The article articulates some reasons in support of this choice:

- a sense of belonging to the Association;
- a sense of co-responsibility and of participation of every Salesian Cooperator; and
- the sense of solidarity expressed in the article's title "Economic Solidarity."

Reference is made in the article to the solidarity lived in the Early Church – an ever-motivating and persuasive remembrance. In fact, Don Bosco reminded the Cooperators of this solidarity on the part of the Christians of Jerusalem. Above all, the article wanted to be in sync with the practice introduced by the Founder and conserved all throughout Salesian tradition.

The offerings and the other forms of funding (owing to its juridic personality, the Association can acquire and possess temporal goods) are not ends in themselves and much less are they made or administered to get rich. They have specific purposes that regard the Salesian mission: the funding of the Councils, whose functioning always creates expenses; that of the various initiatives at the different Levels: workshops, participation in gatherings, resources, networking tools, etc.; and, finally, the solidarity initiatives of the Salesian Family.

The article does not indicate any *particular modalities* which are uniform across-the-boards in the Association and that are to be followed regarding the donation of free-will offerings: on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, it leaves the entire matter in the hands of the Councils at the various Levels.

## Art. 23. Participation in and Ties with the Groups of the Salesian Family

*§1. In fidelity to Don Bosco's vision that "weak forces, when united, become strong, and if one cord taken by itself is easily broken, it is rather difficult to break three united,"*[35] *Salesian Cooperators care for the communion and the collaboration with the other Groups of the Salesian Family. They do this by means of reciprocal knowledge and information, reciprocal spiritual and formative help, and involvement in common apostolic tasks, with respect for the identity and autonomy of each Group.*[36]

*§2. Participation on the Salesian Family Consulta/Commission*[37] *at the different Levels and the link with the pastoral structures of the Church and civic institutions foster the common search for new initiatives. The Salesian mission promotes and gives witness to the rich spiritual and apostolic inheritance it has received.*

*§3. Salesian Cooperators feel close to all the Groups belonging to the Salesian Family because they are all heirs of the Salesian charism and spirit.*

*They are open to and foster every form of collaboration, especially with lay groups, respecting the identity and autonomy of each one.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Collaboration with the Salesian Family
2. Values to Be Promoted Together

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** Horizons are broadened in this article: attention moves from the Association to the Salesian Family and focuses on *how* the Salesian Cooperator and the Association can *put into effect* communion, collaboration, and co-responsibility within the sphere of the Apostolic Family founded by Don Bosco.

To every gift from God, there is a corresponding *task* so as to render it proficuous to the benefit of others. Because of its "vocational and apostolic" bond, belonging to the Salesian Family requires the *commitment* to live in communion and to collaborate on a co-responsible plane with the other Groups.

Communion and collaboration "with the other Groups and members of the Salesian Family", therefore, is to be understood as being with *all* and not just with *some*. It is clear, nonetheless, that the ties among the vocational Groups founded by Don Bosco himself are tighter and more exigent. With these Groups, the Salesian Cooperators are co-responsible for the life of Don Bosco's apostolic project inasmuch as they are bearers of the same Salesian vocation. Co-responsibility implies a mutual "coming together" and action on the part of all those concerned by putting in common their individual work and their respective responsibilities.

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[35]*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*...Art. I.
Eccles. 4:12.

[36]Ibid. Art. VI, 1-2.

[37]*Salesian Family Charter*. 66-67.

**B.** On the level of interpersonal communication and collaboration, the article enumerates three types of values that are to be promoted together: "reciprocal knowledge and information, reciprocal spiritual and formative help, and involvement in common apostolic tasks."

The first value is the foundational basis for any and all collaboration which seeks to be sincere and lasting. The different forms of encounter experienced among the various Groups in these last years, (the Salesian Family Spirituality Days and the Salesian Family Consulta, etc.) demonstrate how truly necessary are reciprocal knowledge, the human and Christian wealth of persons, and the apostolic initiatives of the Groups. All these things create family and render us visible within the Church and within the areas in which we live and work.

The profound sense of belonging to one Family fosters the sharing of the riches of each Group so that they can become the riches of all. This is dynamic fidelity to the Holy Spirit and to His Gifts, so that each Group can realize the Salesian Family's "common cause." Through such intercommunication, we will all be more illumined concerning *the authenticity of the gift* given to Don Bosco and of those gifts which, in line with it, the Holy Spirit bestows upon each one of us.

In their circular letters to the *Salesian Family*, the Rectors Major (first Don Viganò and then Don Chavez) vigorously highlighted the specific value that each Group can bring to the common Family. It is beautiful and enriching to feel that one is a member of a Spiritual Family in which the various differences bring clarity of identity and the beauty of harmony – and not confusion or a leveling of the individual Groups but, rather, esteem for each one in its own identity.

Involvement in common apostolic tasks is the area in which communion and collaboration have considerable incidence and effect. Putting into motion such shared apostolic involvement occurs on a practical level through initiatives oriented to two possible ends: *those activities which have a Salesian appeal and a richer service rendered to the Universal and Local Churches.*

In moving forward as a *Salesian Family*, four *concrete objectives* are to be met "together":

1. reviving and reinvigorating knowledge of Don Bosco and, consequently, of our pastoral charity;
2. evangelization of our young people;
3. privilege given to the specific formation of each Group and the co-involvement of the laity; and
4. a unified vocation pastoral.

Courage in doing good and trust in positive resources become two keywords in this shared journey.

For Don Pascual Chavez, Rector Major emeritus, the effective instruments of communion are the Local and Provincial Consulte of the Salesian Family. Giving greater solidity to them means seeking the most adequate forms to establish them so that they become not only an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and experiences but, above all, a tool for reflecting together on the challenges of the mission in one's own area and for sharing some fundamental lines of action with which to respond to them – which each Group will make an effort to take on according to their possibilities. Beyond this, it is a matter of seeking ways to collaborate in an effective and well-coordinated manner in projects of education and evangelization which are, above all, at the service of the young.

The Salesian Cooperator cannot belong at one and the same time to another Association with a different Charism. He or she can participate as a faithful lay person, if wished, in moments of prayer and spirituality or of relaxation and can help with them as a Salesian Cooperator, considering it as one area of his or her apostolate. This,

however, does not authorize him or her under normal circumstances to forgo his or her commitments to the Cooperator Association, especially where planning and evaluation meetings of the Local Center are concerned for these are formative moments having great import. If it be necessary, then, a discussion and an agreement with the Coordinator and the Delegates of his or her Center must be made so as to plan, with discernment and flexibility, other ways that he or she can link with the Local Center.

## Art. 24. The Ministry of the Rector Major

*§1. The Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales is the successor of Don Bosco*[38] *through the explicit will of the Founder, he is the Superior of the Association and carries out the function of Supreme Moderator within it. He guarantees its fidelity to the Founder's Plan and promotes its growth.*

*§2. In his ministry, exercised also through his Vicar or the World Coordinator, he normally avails himself of the World Council and the World Executive Secretary (the SEM), above all, to animate the entire Association and to coordinate the various formative and apostolic initiatives.*

*§3. The members of the Association nourish sentiments of sincere affection for the Rector Major and of fidelity to his guidelines.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Successor of Don Bosco, Father and Center of Unity in the Salesian Family
2. Superior of the Association

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** The article dedicated to the Rector Major is significantly placed between the one on the entire Salesian Family, in which he is the *Father and Center of unity*, and the one on the bonds with the Salesian Congregation. In his position as successor to Don Bosco and the representative of his charismatic fatherhood, the Rector Major has the identical bond as far as a charismatic spiritual order goes in relation to the various Groups of the Salesian Family. He is the charismatic promoter, animator, and guarantor of unity in this Family and of fidelity to the apostolic project and spirit of the Founder.

Article 126 of the 1984 Salesian *Constitutions* states: "The Rector Major is the successor of Don Bosco, the Father and Center of unity of the Salesian Family. His principal concern is to promote… the constant fidelity of the Salesian confrères to the Salesian charism so as to accomplish the mission entrusted to our Society by the Lord." Article 3 of the 1982 FMA *Constitutions* reads: "The Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales – as Don Bosco's successor – is the animator and the Center of unity in the Salesian Family."

**B.** The "fatherhood" which the Founder left as a precious heritage to his successors has the authority of the Rector Major taking on a characteristic Salesian face – comprised of animation and goodness – and orients such authority to be at the total service of the vocation of the persons and of the vitality of the Association. Not for nothing is it defined as "ministry." The article presents three *ways* in which the Rector Major exercises this charismatic and juridic ministry to the Association:

1. personally or in collaboration with his Vicar or the World Coordinator;
2. availing himself of the World Council and the World Executive Secretary (SEM); and
3. being present, on the Provincial and Local Levels, through the ministry of both the SDB and FMA Provincials.

[38] *Salesian Family Charter*. 23.
*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*… Art. V, 3.

The article also points out the functions of the Rector Major. They are to: guarantee the *fidelity* of the Association to the Founder's plan (such a plan regards the identity of the Association); foster its numerical *growth*, animating and motivating it; care for its internal *unity*, given that the Association has an international character and a strongly Catholic physiognomy; and care for its *communion and collaboration* with the other groups of the Salesian Family and with ecclesial entities.

**C.** As to what concerns the *juridic* aspect, his role differs in relation to the distinct Groups. He is the "Apostolic Visitor" of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, as the 1982 FMA *Constitutions*, Article 111, states. To the Salesians of Don Bosco, he is the Superior or Rector Major, and, to the Salesian Cooperators, he is the "Supreme Moderator." Obviously, he himself is the first to understand that he is the Superior of the SDB *Religious* and of the *laity* and *secular Priests* who are Salesian Cooperators. For this reason, he governs and animates the two Groups keeping in mind their very different nature, in the light of Vatican Council II doctrine, and respecting the authority that the *Project of Apostolic Life* recognizes as belonging to the Councils and the Coordinators at the various Levels. As the Supreme Moderator of the Association, the Rector Major has ordinary powers of governance, which he exercises according to Canon Law, over the entire Association, its Councils, its Centers, and its members. This juridic function of being the Superior actualizes, on the functional level, his charismatic role as Father and Center of Don Bosco's Spiritual Family.

The World Council is a body that was initially established in 1974 (under Coordinator General Luigi Sarcheletti) as the "World Consulta" to the Rector Major, of which he availed himself for the animation of the Association when the new *Rule ad experimentum* was approved. It was composed of members by right and also members who were either appointed or elected. Its role was one of subsidiarity to the Rector Major for the World-Level governance and animation of the Association. When the seven-year term of the members of the second Consulta was completed (1981-87 Coordinator General Luigi Sarcheletti), a third was established (1987-94 Coordinator General Paolo Santoni) made up of World Councilors and some others who were given the task of preparing the Second World Congress and of seeing, via commissions, to the revision and updating of a new *Rule*.

Following the Fourth World Consulta (1994-2001 Coordinator General Roberto Lorenzini), and during the term of the fifth World Consulta, extended to an eleven-year term for the purpose of drawing up the new *Project of Apostolic Life* (2001-2012 General World Coordinator Rosario Maiorano), with the approval *ad experimentum* of the *Project of Apostolic Life* in 2007, the World Consulta took the name of World Council and, as such, became a collegial governing body, as did the Provincial and Local Councils. Starting in 2012 (2012-2018 World Coordinator Noemi Bertola), the World Council is a body created to aid the Rector Major directly in the animation and governance of the Association and has a six-year term. Its task is two-fold:

1. to animate the entire Association and
2. to coordinate the formative and apostolic initiatives of the World Council, on which the SDB and FMA World Delegates take part by right.

For “animation” is intended an activity which makes one grow from within in one's sense of belonging and participation. It is put into motion by means of a process which tends to enable co-responsibility as an expression of a mature conscience. It presupposes the capacity for dialogue, an attitude of listening, of communication, and of discernment. Salesian animation is essentially spiritual and is defined simultaneously as vocational and pastoral.

In regard to the importance and the modalities of *coordination*, the indications of *Gaudium et Spes* are to be kept in mind:

> There are also various Catholic associations on an international Level which can contribute in many ways to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal Community of nations. These should be strengthened by augmenting in them the number of well qualified collaborators, by increasing needed resources, and by advantageously fortifying the coordination of their energies. For today both effective action and the need for dialogue demand joint projects. Moreover, such associations contribute much to the development of a universal outlook—something certainly appropriate for Catholics. They also help to form an awareness of genuine universal solidarity and responsibility.

Coordination on the World Level does not mean substituting those apostolic forces already at work on the lower levels or to level their initiatives but, rather, to make it such that forces converge so as to construct an organic whole to reach the goals and the objectives of the Association more efficaciously.

## Art. 25. Particular Bonds with the Society of St. Francis de Sales and with the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

*The Association of Salesian Cooperators has a "bond of stable and secure union"*[39] *with the Society of St. Francis de Sales and particular charismatic ties with the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.*

*Every Salesian Community (SDB and FMA), at both the Provincial and Local Levels, feels involved, as Don Bosco wished, in the task of "supporting and increasing" the Association, of contributing to the formation of its members, and of making known and promoting their Project of Apostolic Life.*[40]

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Secure and Stable Bonds with the Salesians of Don Bosco
2. Charismatic Ties with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** The article reflects a precise and incontrovertible will of the Founder. This will was authoritatively interpreted by the SDB Special General Chapter (see paragraphs 732, 734, 742, & 743): "1) We know that we are the secure and stable bond that Don Bosco expressly wished us to be – as a guarantee of unity in the same spirit, of apostolic efficacy in the common mission, of perennial vitality of the Work founded by him, and of the strength of vocational enthusiasm in re-launching a vast and organic movement for the salvation of poor or at-risk youth […] 2) we know that we must always be more and more the motivating center of this apostolic movement of baptized men and women who, in Don Bosco's spirit, put themselves completely at the service of the Church for the salvation of the young."

The Salesian Society, according to the express will of the Founder, has "a specific role of responsibility" in the Family – so states article 5 of the SDB *Constitutions* – "to maintain the unity of spirit and to stimulate dialogue and fraternal collaboration for reciprocal enrichment and for a greater apostolic fecundity."

**B.** Faithful to the Founder's thought, the Special General Chapter of the Salesians made its own the statement made to the Cooperators by the then Rector Major, Don Ricceri: "May you become conscientious and integral collaborators at our side and not under us; therefore, not only docile and faithful workers, but ones capable of roles of responsibility in the apostolate." This will allow us "to institute at every Level a relationship of true fraternity which constitutes from this moment forward the new style of Salesian life within educative communities and outside of them." (*Salesian Bulletin*, April 1970)

**C.** Between the FMA and the Salesian Cooperator Association "particular charismatic ties" exist, owing to a profound and vital reciprocity. Through their Delegates, the FMA animate those Centers established near their works, in a manner which is 100% equal to that of the SDB Delegates. On the basis of this, the Institute of the

[39] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*… Art. II

[40] Salesian Society of St. Francis de Sales. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. Regulations*, art. 38. Trans. (Rome: Esse Gi Esse, 1984) 154-155. Print.

Daughters of Mary Help of Christians enters directly into the life and the activities of many Centers and the organization of the Association at the various Levels, through the participation of their Delegates.

Since 1953, the FMA have directly animated the Salesian Cooperator Centers. The rapport between the SDB and the FMA Delegates are guided by the spirit of Salesian fraternity and, from 1970 onward, by the norms contained in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. Beginning with 1970, an accord regulated the relationship between the SDB and the FMA in relation to their animation of the Association. From 2007 on, the same Association made an agreement with the Delegates (FMA and SDB) through the Rector Major who has delegated to Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians the ways they provide the service of animation within the Association.

The articles take into consideration the following topics: the task of the two Institutes to observe, as far as is their responsibility, the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Association; the life of the Centers; their fusion or suppression; understanding and collaboration between neighboring Centers; and their belonging to their respective Province/Province groupings. As regards the Delegates: the naming of them; their mutual relationship in reference to the Centers and the Councils; the naming of the SDB and FMA Delegates to the World Council and to the SEM – on the part of the Rector Major as concerns the SDB and for the FMA, according to the indications of Mother General; and the competence of the Rector Major and of Mother General in carrying out the interpretation of the article pertaining to the Delegates.

## Art. 26. The Apostolic Service of the Delegates

*§1. Within the Association, the Delegates, of whatever Level, take part by right and with active voice on the respective Council, assure the "bond of secure and stable union" with the Salesian spirit, and share the charismatic and spiritual experience of the Founder.*

*In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, they are committed to offering their own specific contribution, even through participation in the collegial decision-making tasks of the Association.*

*§2. They motivate the Councils in their responsibilities and advocate for organizational autonomy in charismatic communion with the Society of St. Francis de Sales and with the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.*

*§3. They offer the service of being a spiritual, educational, and pastoral guide to support a more efficacious apostolate of the Salesian Cooperators in their area.* [41]

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Who They Are
2. The Roles of the SDB and FMA Delegates
3. The Leadership at Various Levels

### Keys to Understanding

**A**. The Delegates are members of the Salesian Congregation and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He or she is part of the Council in a responsible and collegial manner, with a specific task: the Salesian apostolic formation of the Salesian Cooperators. For this reason, according to the norms of Vatican Council II, the Delegate must: have formation to this task; be faithful to the doctrine and the spirit of the Church; be capable of nourishing the spiritual life of the laity and of their apostolic sense; be able to counsel the laity wisely, assisting them in their apostolic undertakings and fostering their initiatives; be capable of dialogue with them so as to render their mission efficacious; and be persons who esteem the apostolic works of the laity and promote them. It is particularly recommended that the Religious dedicate themselves with a willing spirit and that they promote the works of the laity according to the spirit and the rules proper to them.

**B**. The Delegates are called on to motivate vitality from within the Association. This happens by recalling the attention of the Salesian Cooperators to:

- the nature and purpose of the Group inasmuch as it is an Ecclesial Group;
- the motivations to belong, the sharing of responsibility, and the specific tasks required by every role;
- the particular style of governance;
- Salesian authenticity;
- apostolic commitment and task; and
- living the spirituality of the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle*.

[41] *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way*… V, 5.

It is a priority of the task of animation to help both the individual Cooperator and the group in this vocational growth. But, above all, the Delegates must be aware that their animating action seeks to make the Cooperators "grow" – above all the leaders – helping them discover their talents and putting them at others' disposal.

In addition to this, the Delegates are the bond of communion between the Religious Community and the Salesian Cooperators. Many difficulties between the Cooperators and the Religious are due to a lack of communication, with the consequent problem of reciprocal uneasiness. The Delegate facilitates the fraternal and apostolic relationships between the Community and the Association.

- ***Co-responsible for Salesian apostolic formation.***

The Delegate is defined as the **formator** in what regards Salesian and apostolic aspects. "Formator" is the term which is most apt to his functions. He or she is a spiritual guide, a prayer guide, and a guide as concerns the apostolate. He or she has to be an expert in the following things, caring for them in co-responsibility with the Council and with the Cooperator in charge of formation:

- the human formation of the Cooperator;
- their Christian and ecclesial formation; and
- their Salesian formation.

Don Bosco wanted the Association to distinguish itself for its operative charity – at the heart of which is the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* – in an untiring commitment to the salvation of the young and in the search for apostolic interiority. The presence of the Delegate must assure the Salesianity and the apostolic commitment of the individual Cooperator and of the Association. His or her task is not carried out only in the specific moments of formal formation (e.g., moments of spiritual direction and planned gatherings) but also in the fraternal atmosphere of trust and in the external conditions of prayer life and of communion.

It is the task of the World and Provincial Delegates – and of brother and sister Delegates – to accompany and animate the formative service of the other Delegates. The Delegates, as members of the Councils at the different Levels, participate in the decisions to be made and give their contribution along the process of discernment. The obligation to be present at Council meetings stems from this, without taking to themselves the presidency of the gatherings and meetings or those tasks which belong to the Coordinator and to the Council itself. Further, the Provincial and World Delegates visit the Cooperator Centers under their animation to care especially for their formative journey.

**C**. The naming of the Delegates is done:

- for the Local and Provincial Level: by the respective Provincial after he or she has listened to the thoughts of the Cooperator Council concerned;
- for the Regional Consulta: by the Regional for the SDB and by the Interprovincial Conference for the FMA; and
- for the World Council: by the Rector Major for the SDB and by the Rector Major on the proposal of Mother General for the FMA.

- ***The Lay Delegate and the Diocesan Priest Delegate: a particular case***

When a Center is not established at an SDB or FMA work, the SDB Provincial may name a Cooperator who is adequately prepared to be the Delegate. Today Cooperators who are Delegates do exist. Those persons to whom one's thoughts go immediately, in consideration of the theological and pastoral preparation, are Diocesan Priest Cooperators or Permanent Deacon Cooperators. But this does not preclude that lay Cooperators who are well-prepared can also be named to this task. The requisite necessary for this type of Delegate is adequate

preparation, particularly in Salesianity and in the apostolate. This naming is done by the SDB Provincial following the same *iter* required for SDB Delegates.

It is opportune that the appointment of the Cooperator Delegate be carried out with the knowledge of the Bishop, in consideration of the fact that the Center was established with his permission. Inasmuch as the Cooperator is a Delegate, he or she must be invited to participate in Province Delegate meetings. The Delegate who is not an SDB or an FMA carries out his or her role in the same way as the SDB and FMA Delegates, with the exception – if the Delegate is a lay person – of those priestly functions which are not proper to him or her. It is important that the lay Delegate take care to respect the role proper to the Coordinator and to the other members of the Council and that he or she should not take upon himself those responsibilities which belong to other persons' roles. The fact that he or she is a member of the laity and is also the Delegate does not place him or her in a position of superiority in respect to the other members of the Council.

# Chapter V

## MEMBERSHIP AND FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

*«May the Lord make you to increase and abound in charity towards one another, and towards all men just as we do towards you, that He may strengthen your hearts, blameless in holiness before God our Father»*
*(I Thess. 3:12-13)*

After having asked God to allow him to return to Thessalonica to see the ones to whom he had written his letter, Paul intercedes for them: “And may the Lord multiply you, and make you abound in charity towards one another, and towards all men: as we do also towards you”. (I Thess. 3:12) They had already given proof of a committed love but there was still a long way to go. The object of this intercession is the growth and the superabundance of mutual love and love for all; as their model, Paul points out yet again his own love for them – one of unconditional dedication and attentive and thoughtful care.

Paul then makes another request which is linked to the preceding one inasmuch as it points out his motivation: "to confirm your hearts without blame, in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His saints." (I Thess. 3:13) The gaze is here turned to the moment of the "Second Coming" (the *Parousia*) of the Lord Jesus who will be escorted by His holy ones; that is, by the angelic hosts. Paul asks God, in view of this event, to make firm and irreprehensible in sanctity the hearts of those who have already received Baptism. This must happen "before God the Father." A true fraternal love which is open to all, even to those who are not part of the Community, represents the best preparation and the best guarantee for the decisive encounter of that final day. Waiting for the Final Coming of Christ, then, does not consist of “standing around doing nothing” but of a constant commitment to build new relationships based on love. In this prayer, which closes the first part of the Letter, are noted those attitudes of love, of holiness, and of irreprehensibility.

Also for the Salesian Cooperator, belonging to the Association must trigger a new dynamism which brings one to continual progress in his or her relationship with God and with one’s brothers and sisters. The gift of God, while being completely free, does not exclude, nay, it *requires* man's collaboration. In other words, God does not make use of man as a passive instrument; on the contrary, the fact that He intervenes first serves to enable in man the exercise of his freedom and creativity. Loving and faithful adherence to Christ and to the community is the master road of a holistic development of the human person. All the above requires a journey of formation.

By itself, the Call of the Lord to be a Salesian Cooperator does not mean that one possesses, right from the beginning or in full development, all those things that this vocation requires; nor does it mean that one is already living sufficiently the demands which it brings with it.

The vocation to be a Salesian Cooperator is an invitation to put oneself on a journey to develop little-by-little one's Baptismal life by committing oneself to the realization of the Salesian mission and by living Don Bosco's spirit. Such a vocation to be a Cooperator is original in its identity, is rich in its content, and is demanding in its requirements.

Along with the new *Project of Apostolic Life*, the Association revised the *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of the Salesian Cooperators*. Knowing them will reinforce one's sense of belonging. This global vision is to be adapted – whether for persons or for the Association – because the *Project of Apostolic Life* leaves space for local initiatives so that formation programs may respond much more accurately to the accentuated differences in situations. In conclusion, formation is a personal business: each one takes on him or herself the responsibility to be formed in the area of his or her roles and responsibilities. Realistically, it does not demand, even as far as formation is concerned, more than what each one is able to commit to do with generosity.

This chapter illustrates the vocational path that every Cooperator must follow personally so that his or her identity as a secular Salesian apostle might mature. Such a path foresees three successive stages:

- a prior and opportune preparation;
- entrance into the Association by means of making the *Promise*; and
- daily and progressive fidelity to one's vocation and to the commitments it brings with it.

This *iter* is sustained and animated through a lively and profound sense of belonging to the Association.

## Art. 27. Entrance into the Association

*§1. The commitment to become a Salesian Cooperator demands a personal, free, gradual, and motivated choice which matured under the action of the Holy Spirit and the accompaniment of those who have this responsibility.*

*The person who desires to become part of the Association accepts a formation process, which must cover the fundamental points of the Project of Apostolic Life and which takes into account the Aspirant's personal experience. In this way, a proper institutional formation is guaranteed while still being personalized. This personal plan of formation will be adapted by those who are responsible to carry out this role in the Association.*

*§2. When the Aspirant has reached a sufficient assimilation of the Salesian charism, as recognized by those who are in the position of responsibility in the Local Center, he or she shall present a request for admission. The Aspirant must have reached legal age.*

*§3. Membership in the Association begins with the pronouncement of the personal Apostolic Promise, by which the Aspirant expresses his or her will to live his/her Baptismal commitments in the light of the Project of Apostolic Life.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. The Dimensions of Choice and of Belonging
2. Formation: Initial and On-going

### Keys to Understanding

The basic condition needed to become a Salesian Cooperator: a free choice. This expression, seemingly taken for granted, causes us to reflect on what it means to speak of the "freedom of choice". It implies verifying the conditions for it not only right from the start but also along the course of one's life and, therefore, is the reason why the adjectives "motivated and gradual" were added.

If it is true that the commitment of the Cooperator is to respond to a vocation (*Statutes* Art. 2), it is just as necessary that one feel and know he or she is called to a life of faith through an interior call from the Holy Spirit which is often mediated by human persons (SDB, FMA, Cooperators) and which is present at the beginning of a free choice. At the start, one asks him or herself the question, "What needs to be done to become a Salesian Cooperator?" Generally, the answer consists of collaborating and putting into action Don Bosco's educative and pastoral project. But there are also underlying discussions that are more complex still: to be a Salesian Cooperator means to take on a way of life in conformity with the Gospel, to participate in the mission of the Church, and to live a life of faith in the everyday with commitment and effort. Therefore, besides the dimension of "doing," that of "being" is highlighted: welcoming God as Father, encountering Christ, the Only-Begotten Son, and living in union with the Holy Spirit. From this, one understands that the choice acquires a profound interior dimension which is not only based on action for the good of poor youth but also on a complete living of the Gospel.

On account of this, the acceptance of a progressive formation program, the fruit of experience, is required. It is a path that helps one discover that the true worth of man lies in the quality of his or her Christian lifestyle and

that “man fully-realized” is a “saint” and not a “celebrity” as understood from a human perspective, historically-speaking.

During the process of maturation, formation plays an important role: initial formation is based on organized meetings in which formators seek to help the Aspirant deepen his or her knowledge and understanding of the Salesian charism and of the Magisterium of the Church and of Salesian teaching, as well as through experiencing life in the Association with the Cooperators – which has great weight and has an important role to play in initial formation if it is true that it is life that forms us. Therefore, seeing as how we are constantly called to re-conversion of our hearts and to correct our behaviors in the light of the Gospel, strength is also given to us by our brothers and sisters who share our same path. If the response to one's vocation is personal, the path of growth and of maturation will, without a doubt, be fostered by confronting one another, by encounters, and by sharing openly one's difficulties, doubts, successes, and experiences. For this reason, each Salesian Cooperator is invited to undertake a process of self-formation for his or her entire life, in constant growth, and in a deepening of his or her interior life in the light of God's Word and in harmony with the *Project of Apostolic Life*.

Reaching the point of making one's *Promise* is the first goal one attains after having become fully aware of the commitments required of a member and of one belonging to the Salesian Family. This is the moment in which, by a public act, the Aspirant makes the decision to commit him or herself to an ideal to which to tend after having followed a path of initial formation and of interior maturation.

The *Promise* is also understood as an act of humble abandonment to the Lord: each Aspirant, while aware of his or her own fragility, trusts in the infinite Mercy of the Father, in the salvific Love of the Son, in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in the powerful intercession of Mary. He or she is also aware that being invited into an Association will sustain and comfort him or her along the journey and, because of this, he or she will live the sense of belonging with joy and will be prompt in the service of others.

## Art. 28. The Value of Membership

*§1. Salesian Cooperators are aware that membership in the Association nourishes their faith experience and that of ecclesial communion. It represents, moreover, a vital element in support of one's own apostolic Vocation.*

*§2. Membership demands concrete signs which are expressed both in an active participation in the life of the Association and in a fitting demeanor on the part of the member in his/her daily and professional life.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Theme

Belonging: its Formal and Spiritual Value

### Keys to Understanding

To belong to any human and social Association presupposes some formal aspects which are executed through the formulation of a question, in a welcoming by the organizational structure of the Association, and by the inclusion of the new member in its life and work. Some formal moments are respected for the Salesian Cooperator as well: the Aspirant seeks to be welcomed into a Local Center and, through it, enters into a Province/Provincial Grouping. After an initial formative journey, the Aspirant who has been found suitable pronounces his or her official *Promise* during a public ceremony and thus enters the Association.

Alongside these formal aspects, other realities are also to be given their proper value. First, there is the vocational aspect. If becoming a Salesian Cooperator is to respond to a Call from the Lord, then it is very important not to forget along the course of one's life in the Association that the initiative belongs to God. This is inscribed in one's will to follow Christ according to the fascinating example that the figure of St. John Bosco exercised on the Aspirants. It is recognized in the same passion for poor, abandoned, and marginalized youth to whom one wants to dedicate his or her educative action and to give witness to as a convinced Christian. It is for this reason that every Salesian Cooperator shares his or her love for the young with other men and women who are attracted by Don Bosco's charism and feels that he or she is an integral part of one same spiritual Family.

Belonging brings with it many consequences. It implies a life of communion with the other members, the sharing of one and the same spirit, and collaboration in a common mission which is translated into actions which are adequate to meet the needs of a specific place, area, or territory. It is expressed in active and joyous participation in important initiatives but also in simpler, everyday ones. This fidelity is demonstrated by being present at the monthly meetings and at the provincial and national gatherings where the "visibility" of the Association plays a major role. Besides this, communion among all the Salesian Cooperators makes it such that each one feels part of one same living "body" – just as happens in the Church, in which all the baptized live their belonging as brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord. To consider oneself part of a dynamic reality that is in continual growth allows one to "dream big," to exchange enriching experiences, and to draw up significant pastoral plans for one's area in the knowledge that one is never alone but can count heavily on spiritual and human fraternity. These bonds of communion must be reinforced also through a commitment to constant prayer which is expressed both in the daily entrustment of the Association to God's Mercy and to the maternal guidance of Mary, as well as in sharing in the moments of reflection in the Center, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – all of which increase fraternity and help to smooth over the inevitable difficulties in human relationships which are all too often at the base of tensions and misunderstandings.

The most precious fruit of a belonging lived in fullness is joy: joy is not a superficial and fleeting good humor but a profound one which is grafted from and finds its roots in shared faith and is realized in works done for the good of the young.

## Art. 29. Responsibilities and Initiatives as Regard Formation

*§1. Salesian Cooperators are the first ones responsible for their own human, Christian, Salesian, and professional formation.*

*§2. The Association promotes and supports personal and group formation through the action of qualified Salesian Cooperators, Delegates, and other members of the Salesian Family.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Responsibility and the Dimension of Formation
2. Formation Initiatives

### Keys to Understanding

The Salesian Cooperator is the first one responsible for his or her own formation. The Association supports them in their personal formation and in that of the group. Three dimensions which must be kept in mind regarding formation can be listed:

1. *Human and professional formation:* The Salesian Cooperator assumes the vocational condition of his or her proper state in virtue of his or her Baptism and of the invitation to the "Follow Me" of the *Promise*. With this *Promise*, he or she commits him or herself with responsibility to an on-going formative journey in faith so as to nourish and mature his or her vocation along the continuous process of the many and different changes in a society which is becoming ever more secular.

2. *Christian formation:* Before all else, one must practice a living "personal" faith of attachment to Jesus and to the Church, as a branch is attached to the vine and is nourished in the “dynamic” Faith of the Church. In fact, growth cannot be individual and lived outside the immense assembly of believers; instead, it is a kind of positive response on the part of the assembly to the three inseparable calls which beckon us to the wellspring that is the Lord. “Come!” “Listen!” “Go!”

3. *Salesian formation*: The charism of Don Bosco, the Founder, and the pastoral on the role of the laity are assured to the Councils and to the Salesian Cooperators through the sharing of experiences lived as Cooperators (meetings, reflections, readings, etc.); by formative resources made by the Association which help growth and which are carried out by qualified Salesian Cooperators, Delegates, other Salesian Family members; and also through their personal commitment to an apostolic service sustained and accompanied by their Center, with particular attention given to the young and the poor.

## Art. 30. Fidelity to Commitments Assumed

*§1. With the Apostolic Promise, the Salesian Cooperator responds to a Vocation which lasts his or her entire life. He or she expresses it in daily life through witness, the apostolate, and various forms of service. He or she places self at the service of the mission of the* Church *with availability, living the Salesian charism with authenticity. He or she collaborates with commitment in initiatives that are promoted by other ecclesial, religious, and civic organizations. Each one's fidelity is supported by the affection and solidarity of the other members of the Association and of the Salesian Family.*

*§2. In order to reinforce the value of belonging to the Association – and through this, to the Salesian Family as a whole – membership commitments assumed with the making of the Apostolic Promise are renewed according to those modalities which are most opportune, as established by the Regulations.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Apostolic Commitment and Task
2. Fidelity

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** To be a Salesian Cooperator requires a free vocational response based on the call to adhere to one's Baptismal Promises and to the apostolic project wished by Don Bosco. For one's entire life, apostolic commitment and the fidelity of the Salesian Cooperator are strictly bound to each other and attain full efficacy in response to the gift received from the Lord for the Church. Conscious of the fact that being a Salesian Cooperator is not an honorary title and that it conforms to one's personal abilities and situations, the Cooperators:

- live their faith and their spiritual life in the knowledge that these cannot be divorced from *daily life*;
- develop their Baptismal commitment as disciples of Christ and as members of the Church, keeping in mind both the Divine and human aspects;
- live the Gospel of Christ and assimilate the Salesian Spirit and educational method at the school of Don Bosco;
- get involved in the Church and in the Association with availability and an attitude of service both to the parish and in the diocese;
- place particular importance on participation in and support of the development of the ecclesial pastoral; and
- give witness by upholding the values of the Faith in the Salesian way, as true missionary apostles of their Christian responsibilities in their family, at work, and in their social and civic duties.

**B.** Salesian Cooperators support each other, united on their journey of faith, in their commitment and in developing their human, personal, spiritual, and apostolic gifts in:

- fidelity to the commitments requested of the Salesian Family by creating living environments and lively communities which are at the service of poor youth after the manner of Don Bosco. In an educative spirit, they put into practice Jesus' compassion and Don Bosco's heart;

- fidelity to the Church, to the Religious Community, and to their Center, by living their Baptismal Promises and their Cooperator *Promise* of fidelity to their vocation, with a precise identity within the Salesian Family;
- fidelity to the true message of God's Word which asks us to be countercultural by taking a stand against the main thought of modern society which seeks to lay claim to and exalt individualism and libertinism;
- fidelity to God, which is not egocentric but, rather, open to others, based on the faith that God is always our Father, in all the many situations of one's personal life: successes and failures, falls and picking oneself up again;
- fidelity to the Christian life begun in Baptism. The Lord is merciful, ever ready to forgive and to fortify our faith;
- fidelity to Don Bosco, our spiritual guide and teacher. The *Project of Apostolic Life* traces out the way to make the recommendations of our Spiritual Father materialize, constituting a pedagogical tool for reaching sanctity. It is a help and not a code of law; it does not impose but proposes; and
- fidelity to the Renewal of the *Promise*. This is a moment of public, privileged, and meaningful celebration which is to be carried out autonomously in the modality defined by the individual Council. One particular modality is foreseen for those Salesian Cooperators living at a distance from a Center: they may renew their *Promise* with their Center of reference or at a different time – foreseen by the local Council – in which certain Salesian Cooperators go to pay them a visit; however, communication lines are always to remain open with them regarding the life of the Center. The affection and prayer which unite them as members of the Association and of the Salesian Family are always to be underlined.

The Local Council of the Center to which the Cooperator belongs, being the depository of sensitive data, notes the date of renewal in its register of members.

## Art. 31. Leaving the Association

*§1. The Salesian Cooperator who, through personal choice, intends to cease to be part of the Association will communicate this to the Local Council with a written declaration. The Local Council will send a copy of the declaration to the* Provincial Council.

*§2. The decision to dismiss one of its members from the Association for grave reasons, must be taken by the Provincial Council, at the justified request of the Local Council, in the spirit of charity and of clarity, after having verified a lifestyle which is incongruous with the fundamental duties expressed in the Project of Apostolic Life. This decision shall be communicated to the interested party in writing.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. A Personal Choice
2. Dismissals from the Association

### Keys to Understanding

As an encouragement to the Cooperator, the *Project of Apostolic Life* reminds us that the personal commitment of each one to be faithful to his or her vocation also involves the commitment on the part of the other Cooperators and of the Salesian Family.

No matter what might befall them in their lives, Cooperators will never find themselves standing alone before these realities and responsibilities. They will always find brother and sister Cooperators ready and willing to support and help them "with affection and solidarity". The entire Chapter III, "In Communion and Collaboration," affirms this. If we want this assurance not to remain a dead letter but to become a lived reality, every Cooperator, every Center, and every Council must be conscious of this responsibility and renew it constantly. The sense of fraternity must be strong and their mutual affection real.

In keeping, then, to what Don Bosco wanted his apostolic Salesian Family to be, the SDB and the FMA must be aware of this their task and must take interest in it through deeds and through efficacious support of their brother and sister Cooperators along the path of fidelity to their vocation.

The foregoing reflections help us understand that belonging to the Association can cease only for *grave reasons*, substantively two: a personal choice of the Cooperator or a decision of the Provincial Council.

### A. *A Personal Choice*

In the first case, it might be that the Cooperator, with or without blame, *no longer feels in profound agreement with the ideal chosen previously* and, through a clear understanding of the situation, wants to be freed from the commitments assumed, even (and, perhaps, most of all) from the external ones. Given that he or she pledged him or herself before God and before the other Cooperators when making the *Promise* and thus entered into a public ecclesial Association, it is more than right that the *Project of Apostolic Life* require of him or her an attitude or seriousness: he or she must have "seriously" matured this decision by considering that the choice made previously was by no means a small matter; and he or she must manifest this new decision in an explicit request made to the Provincial Council, in such a way that the Association may be officially up-to-date as regards this situation.

**B.** ***Dismissals from the Association***

The second type of leaving is more grave and rather delicate: it does not concern the case of a Cooperator who merely does not participate anymore in the activities of any Center (he or she may always come back!) but of *one who lives in stark contrast with the commitments he or she had freely assumed*. We are not speaking of an unseen sin which only God can judge but of obvious, well-known, and confirmed behaviors which constitute a *public scandal* and which seriously compromise the witness of the Association, and in the final instance, throw discredit on the Church itself. We need to pray that the Lord preserve the Association from this! Evidently, when making this decision, the members of the Council must let themselves be guided by the two attitudes suggested to them in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. On the one hand, they will treat their brother or sister with a "spirit of charity"; i.e., with respect, understanding, and dialogue; on the other, they must investigate the situation to obtain "clarity" – which means, with realism, without delay, and being concerned for the good name of the Association, thus considering this dismissal a painful necessity.

## Art. 32. Meaning and Formula of the *Apostolic Promise*

*§1. The meaning and purpose of the Promise is to express the Aspirant's will to live his or her Baptism according to the Project of Apostolic Life. Don Bosco himself proposed the Promise as an apostolic expression of the Salesian Vocation in society.*

*§2. The Promise* [42]

*"O Father, I adore You because You are good and love everyone.*
*I thank You for having created and redeemed me,*
*and for having called me to become part*
*of Your* Church
*and for having me come to know in Her*
*the* Apostolic Family *of Don Bosco,*
*which lives for You at the service of the young*
*and of ordinary folk.*

*Drawn by Your merciful Love,*
*I wish to love You in return by doing good.*
*For this reason,*
*I PROMISE*
*to live out the Project of Apostolic Life of the Association of Salesian Cooperators with commitment (as a Priest). That is:*

- *to be a faithful disciple of Christ in the Catholic* Church*;*
- *to work in Your Kingdom, especially for the advancement and salvation of the young;*
- *to deepen and give witness to the Salesian spirit;*
- *to collaborate, in Family communion, in the apostolic initiatives of the Local* Church.

*Give me, O Father, the strength of Your Spirit,*
*so that I might know how to be a faithful witness*
*to these commitments.*
*May Mary, Help of Christians, Mother of the* Church*, assist me and guide me in this life choice. Amen."*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. The *Promise*
2. The Commitments

### Keys to Understanding

Different from other Catholic Institutes or Ecclesial Groups, the Salesian Cooperators are not the simple result of human interest on the part of Christians – men and women committed to an apostolate – even if this was

[42] The present formula may be adapted according to the differing situations, as long as the contents are respected. When the *Promise* is renewed, say: "I renew the promise to..."

evidently so. Nor are they the fruit of a particular intervention on the part of the Bishops and the Holy Father as, e.g., in the case of Catholic Action or other associations that rose up through the initiative of individual clergy.

The Cooperators arose and were destined to last throughout time by means of a particular act of the Holy Spirit, which, historically-speaking, was manifested first in Don Bosco and in the creation of the distinct Groups of his Apostolic Family and, then, by being accepted and approved by the Church as a new reality, and finally, in the Centenary history of the Salesian Family and, within it, of the Cooperators. This active presence of the Holy Spirit makes the Salesian Group of the Cooperators assume its own physiognomy or identity, and, through their collaboration, renews it so as to attune it to the signs of the times.

**A. *The Promise***

Official entrance into the Association happens with the making of the *Promise*. It is the prayer of a good Christian who wants to be involved. It is a prayerful, free, and public expression of the Aspirant who "expresses his or her will to live" as a Salesian Cooperator.

It is not a "vow"; it is a simple proposal of one's *conscience* taken in dialogue with God the Father in the communion of the Church through his or her belonging to the Association. By such an act, the Salesian Cooperator freely *commits him or herself* to follow the path chosen and to know and to feel he or she is accompanied by many brothers and sisters and, most of all, strengthened through the mediation of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Above all, it is the attainment of a joyous goal for one who has passed through a formation process and arrived at the maturation of his or her Baptismal Call according to Don Bosco's apostolic project. It is also the *point of departure* for a life given to Christ for the young and for common folk.

Beyond this, it is a manifestation of a *proposal of fidelity* to God Who called him or her to live the Gospel in a concrete form in the Salesian Family and Who gave birth to pastoral charity in him or her. The Aspirant recognizes this gift and, grateful for it, commits him or herself to make it bear fruit in such a way that his or her life is a witness of operative love – of a love that acts.

It is also a *commitment of fidelity to the* Church, which has welcomed him or her among its members, has nourished his or her Christian life, and now invites him or her to participate co-responsibly in the mission of salvation. By the making of the *Promise* before the Community, the new Salesian Cooperator joyfully accepts growing in the Salesian experience, which is considered "a specific way of living the Gospel and of participating in the mission of the Church."

Finally, it is the will *to belong faithfully to the Association* in which he or she takes part by a free decision because it offers him or her a concrete path of Christian life and of apostolate within the context of the Family founded by Don Bosco.

The Association responds to the offer of the Aspirant through a fraternal welcome and a commitment to accompany him or her in one's formative apostolic task and fidelity to the commitments assumed.

The idea of the "*Promise*" harkens back to Don Bosco himself. In the famous chapter on "the extern members" that one reads in his first drafts of the *Constitutions*, he established the following: "the member ought to make at least a promise to the Rector to commit himself in those things which he shall deem to be for the greater glory of God." (*Memorie Biografiche* vol. VII 885 – in Italian version only) In the plan entitled

Association of Good Works (1875) and in the first editions of the definitive *Rule* of 1876, Don Bosco inserted two declarations that correspond to the present *Promise*, and to the attached Certificate: "To the Salesian Cooperators is proposed the same harvest of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, to which they intend to associate themselves." (*Memorie Biografiche* vol. XI 545)

The entrance of a new Cooperator into the Association and, therefore, into the Salesian Family is reason for great joy on everyone's part. In Salesian tradition, it constitutes a special occasion for a beautiful family celebration!

Since becoming a Salesian Cooperator is a free choice which defines one's whole life, the *Promise* is to be made only after serious preparation. It is a matter of an act which must not be improvised or be taken lightly or happen for inadequate motives; nor must it be procrastinated indefinitely without serious reason.

**B. *I Promise***

The act of promising something to God which is pleasing to Him is part of the virtue of "Religion." This is the virtue directed at making things such that relationships with God are inspired by and correspond to one's situation as His creatures and His sons and daughters. It is rooted in the Theological Virtues and is expressed in external deeds, both individual and social. This is precisely what making a promise to Him is. With this, the Salesian Cooperator manifests his or her firm will to make an effort to respond faithfully to this personal Call received from on high. Such a promise does not bring a new style of life to the Cooperator. It simply expresses before God and before his or her brothers and sisters in the Association that he or she intends to assume the *Project of Apostolic Life* and to fulfill the commitments inherent to it: it is an act of love and of docility to God and is also an act of joy.

**C. *The Commitments***

The Christian Vocation is at one and the same time a *gift* and a *commitment* because everyone receives a personal invitation from God to realize him or herself by putting his or her very life at the service of the Kingdom. In the course of one's existence, everyone encounters a set of possibilities which allow him or her to concretize and to mature such a Call. These possibilities, without excluding one's own initiative, are the fruits of Providence and of Divine Grace which allow us and help us remain loyal to our Faith.

But such a gift also brings with it a *commitment* because God never acts without the consent of the person. This is a call to open oneself and to cooperate with God's transforming action in such a way that one's whole life is guided by the Holy Spirit. This presupposes a preparatory *iter* without which, even if it is simple and adapted to a person's possibilities, would remain a purely ineffectual desire.

When considered in its totality, the commitments that one assumes with the *Promise* consist in living the Gospel project of the Association of Cooperators as it is presented in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. Such a commitment *is specified according to its principal aspects*, each one of which presents, in summary form, the contents of the various chapters of the *Statutes*.

- "*To be a faithful disciple of Christ in the Catholic Church*," as a Catholic called to be a true Salesian in the world – as a layman or a Diocesan Priest or Deacon – inserted into a Public Association of the Faithful, which is part of the Church. (Chapter I)
- *"To work in Your Kingdom, especially for the promotion and the salvation of the young,"* by carrying out a secular apostolate according to one's specific ministry, in one's family, in one's marriage, in one's work and living environments, and in social and cultural reality, offering a service of Christian education

to the young – who are the privileged focus of our work – through typical activities carried out in different structures. (Chapter II)

- "*To deepen and to witness to the Salesian Spirit*", the precious heritage of the Founder and gift of the Lord to the Church. (Chapter III)
- "*To collaborate, in Family communion, in the apostolic initiatives of the Local Church,*" knowing that they are brothers and sisters in Don Bosco, are co-responsible in action, and participate in the life of the Salesian Family: availing themselves of the ministry of the Rector Major, maintaining the particular bonds with the Salesian Congregation and with the other Groups of the one Family; and all done in solidarity with the Local Churches. (Chapter IV)
- "*Belonging to an Association through a Promise*" (Chapter V).

***Invocation for Divine Help to be Faithful***

The formula ends with a prayer to the Father and an invocation to Mary. In it, the Cooperator requests the strength of the Holy Spirit from the Father, in Whom alone, there is a sure guarantee to be faithful to the commitments assumed. By such a prayer, the Cooperator, while humbly manifesting that he or she knows him or herself to be incapable of carrying out the promised commitments by his or her strength alone, asks with hope and with filial trust for the abundance of Divine assistance. From Mary, Mother of Tenderness and of Faith, he or she asks assistance and guidance along this path which leads to love for She is *the* model of every believer who acts with charity. Besides this, it declares his or her generous will to be faithful to the *Project of Apostolic Life* which he or she has chosen in full freedom.

# Chapter VI

## ORGANIZATION OF THE ASSOCIATION

*«According to the gift that each one*
*has received, administer it to one another*
*as good stewards of the manifold grace of God»*
*(I Pt. 4:10)*

**Like Jesus, whoever wishes to be great… let him be a servant**

> And James and John the sons of Zebedee, come to him, saying: 'Master, we desire that whatever we shall ask, You would do for us'. But He said to them: 'What would you want Me to do for you?' And they said: 'Grant to us, that we may sit, one on Your right hand, and the other on You left hand, in Your glory.' And Jesus said to them: 'You know not what you ask. Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of: or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' But they said to Him: 'We Canon' And Jesus said to them: 'You shall indeed drink of the chalice that I drink of: and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you shall be baptized.' But to sit on my right hand, or on my left, is not Mine to give to you, but to them for whom it is prepared.' And the ten hearing it, began to be much displeased at James and John. But Jesus calling them, said to them: 'You know that they who rule over the Gentiles lord it over them: and their princes have power over them. But it is not to be so among you: whoever will be greater, shall be your servant. And whoever will be first among you, shall be the servant of all.' (Mk. 10:35-45)

John – not just any Apostle, but the favorite one, the closest one, the most intuitive one – asks for himself and for his brother to have the places of honor. The entire group of the Ten immediately rebels, unanimous in envy. It is as if up until now Jesus had spoken in a vacuum: "You do not know what you are asking!" You do not know

what barriers you destroy with this hunger to be first. You do not understand the dark force that is born from this being drunk with power or how impoverished is the heart from which it springs.

And behold the words Jesus uses to show forth the Christian difference: "it is not to be so among you". The great ones of the earth dominate the others… Among you it is not this way! They think that governing needs to be done by force… Not so among you! Whoever wants to be great among you… The desire for greatness is in man: the not being satisfied, that "little bit more," the restless heart. Jesus does not condemn all of this. He doesn't want men and women in His Kingdom to be unfulfilled and unrealized or dull, but fully-realized, regal, noble, bold, and free.

Sanctity does not consist in an extinguished passion but of a converted one. Whoever wants to be great must be a servant. The conversion is from being "first" to being a "servant". This is not something that is all that easy because we fear that service is the enemy of happiness and that it demands a wealth of courage of which we will be deprived and that it is the challenging definition, the very challenging definition, of love. Yet, the term "servant" is the most surprising of all the ways in which Jesus defined Himself: "I did not come to be served but to be a servant." These are words that make our head spin: "Servant," then, is a name for God; God is my servant!

All the old ideas about God fall apart: God is not the Master of the Universe, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings. He is the Servant of all! He does not hold the world under His Feet; he kneels down at the feet of His Creatures. He does not have a throne; instead, He girds on a towel. How would humanity be if every one of us showed God's humble and active care and concern to each other? If each one of us would kneel – not before the powerful – but before the "last"?

We have not yet thought enough about what it means to have God as our servant. Masters engender fear; the servant, no. Christ frees us from the fear of fears: the fear of God. The master judges and punishes, the servant never does; He does not break the damaged reed but he binds it up as if it were a wounded heart. He does not finish extinguishing the smoldering wick but fans it so that it burst again into flame. God does not expect us to be luminous already; He works in us and with us so that we become so. If God is our servant, who will be our master? The Christian has no master and still, he is the servant of every fragment of life. And he does this not out of a reserve of cowardice but as a marvel of courage – of God's courage in us – of God Who is All in all. The incorrect, or partial, understanding of Christ is a distortion of ecclesiology. Jesus' reminder of the Chalice that is to be drunk and of the immersion to be undergone, i.e., the bloody Death awaiting Him, corrects their understanding of Him but also reminds them that the Church draws its life from Her being grafted onto the life-giving Death of Christ, thanks to Baptism and to the Eucharist. This is a grafting which confers upon someone a different form in respect to worldly institutions: not power, but service is its internal logic. From Jesus the Servant is born the Servant Church.

The initiative of the two brothers raises up conflict within the Community: "And the Ten hearing it, began to be much displeased at James and John." (Mk. 10:41) Competitiveness and clericalism *ante litteram* are already present among the Twelve – so much so that Jesus calls them together and instructs them in the logic that must prevail in the Christian Communities, opposing the one that reigns among the powerful of the world. "Among you, it is not this way": This word from Jesus places before us a criterion that distinguishes the Church from "non-Church."

The first political witness that the Church gives consists of its internal structure, in the organization of its structures of authority and in the way it lives authority, which must be conformed to what Christ lived and to what

He requested of His Disciples. Jesus' word condemns the logic of worldly powers, but, above all, is directed to the Church: to the temptation to mimic worldly mechanisms. Jesus opposes this with the Christian difference – founded on all making themselves each other's servants.

If the Church is witness to the Servant Christ throughout history from the Cross to the *Parousia*, then its form shows that it is neither a homologous Community nor one enslaved. And so, using a quip: The Church is not a State: "among you, it is not this way." The Church, is, instead, according to the beautiful words of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, "*Alternative Community*," or as Blessed Paul VI said, "*the Servant of Humanity*."

The key word in this chapter is "service." The entire structure and the different Levels of governance and animation are at the service of the members of the Association.

In reading this chapter one must be attentive not to put the juridic-canonical aspects on the same level with the merely technical-organizational ones. The former bring us back to the ecclesial norms which define the purpose, nature, composition, and establishment of the organization and of its bodies. The latter, instead, generally concern modalities, times, and forms to achieve this goal.

The chapter follows an ascendant line which begins with the foundational reality – the Center – and ends with the World Council.

## Art. 33. The Reasons for This Organization

*Salesian Cooperators, called to live their apostolic Vocation in society and in the* Church, *have an appropriate organizational structure. The Association of which they are part is the means to live out mission and communion according to this Project of Apostolic Life.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Spirit and Purpose of This Organization
2. Organizational Aspect in the Light of the Magisterium of the Church
3. Principles Which Govern the Organizational Aspects of the Association

### Keys to Understanding

Don Bosco, as a zealous and realistic man concerned with the logical union of forces for good and seeking great efficacy, wanted the Cooperators to form, right from the start, an "organized" Association. With mental agility and practical spirit, he delineated the major infrastructure of his organization: these are described in chapter V of the *Rule* of 1876.

He wanted such an organization that would be appropriate for many and various local realities and that would be at the service of the Local Churches. He was, however, aware that an organization on an international Level was important for the Church Universal so he gave the Cooperators, through his Congregation already at work in different nations, the same international scope and an ampler organization than that of a local group. Such an organization was established, in substance, by the Decurions and by the Salesian directors who were *representatives*, on a local Level, of the one central Superior; i.e., of Don Bosco himself.

This is not the place to reconstruct the history of the Association with all its structural modifications as introduced from time-to-time. The *Project of Apostolic Life* is limited to indicating the spirit and purpose of the present organization and also its configuration.

### A. *Spirit and Purpose of This Organization*

The article presents the necessary infrastructure of the Association in view of the fulfillment of its specific purpose under two aspects: personal and communal. In fact, communion ties the Salesian Cooperators among themselves in all that concerns the life of the Association including, therefore, the norms also. These establish some fundamental aspects through which the Cooperator realizes his or her own personal formation – both initial and on-going – through the means and the structures furnished for him or her by the Association and through fraternal communion with the other Cooperators according to the *Project of Apostolic Life*.

Collaboration, then, necessarily requires organization. Without it, the Association would have no concrete efficacy. The infrastructure of an Association such as that of the Cooperators is not an end in itself but is instituted precisely so as to render the achievement of the purposes of said Association simpler. And this is not in the form of a spontaneous group but of a union of persons who are animated by the same spirit and are involved in achieving a common objective using the same means. This does not eliminate or preclude individual or group initiatives but, rather, makes them easier and gives them strength by inserting them into the action of the Association in a harmonious manner.

Concretely-speaking, this communion and this collaboration are manifested through an essential availability to live some irreplaceable moments prescribed in the *Regulations* with one's brothers and sisters, according to the availability permitted by one's own work, family situation, and apostolic commitments. The organization must, therefore, motivate, coordinate, and support the "availability" of its own members.

**B. *Organizational Aspect of the Association in the Light of the Magisterium of the Church***

Catholic Associations make reference to the authoritative pronouncements of Vatican Council II, as contained in the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. According to number 18 of this *Decree on the Lay Faithful*, its group apostolate sinks its roots deep into the very nature of the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit: "The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'." (Matt. 18:20) Such an apostolate has many positive effects on the members of the Association and on those to whom their ministry is directed.

> The group apostolate is very important also because the apostolate must often be performed by way of common activity both the Church communities and the various spheres. For the associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own.

In the present-day situation, group apostolate is presented, under many aspects, as the only manner in which to have a Christian impact in the various environments. The document states further in number 18:

> In the present circumstances, it is quite necessary that, in the area of lay activity, the united and organized form of the apostolate be strengthened. In fact, only the pooling of resources is capable of fully achieving all the aims of the modern apostolate and firmly protecting its interests. Here it is important that the apostolate encompass even the common attitudes and social conditions of those for whom it is designed. Otherwise those engaged in the apostolate are often unable to bear up under the pressure of public opinion or of social institutions.

From among the multiple forms of group apostolate, Vatican Council II attaches particular importance to certain ones in number 19 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: "Among these associations, those which promote and encourage closer unity between the concrete life of the members and their faith must be given primary consideration." Finally, the same document of Vatican Council II, again in number 19, underlines the unique role that lay organizations which operate on an international Level can play in the universal mission of the Church – precisely

what the Association of Cooperators is. “Now, in view of the progress of social institutions and the the [*sic*] fast-moving pace of modern society, the global nature of the Church's mission requires that apostolic enterprises of Catholics should more and more develop organized forms in the international sphere.”

**C. *Principles Which Govern the Organizational Aspect of the Association***

In the post-conciliar period, all Catholic associations underwent a crisis – some more, some less profound – and made considerable efforts to reorganize and revitalize themselves for the purpose of putting into effect the directives of Vatican Council II and of responding better to the challenges placed before them by the rapid social and ecclesial changes. The Association of Salesian Cooperators also participated in an ample and serious way in the work of organizational renewal. The present draft of Chapter VI reflects such a prolonged labor. In it, the irrevocable principles of Don Bosco are retained; indeed, they were re-proposed by the Special General Chapter of the SDB. Some are, for example: the principles of unity, flexibility, and adaptability. Moreover, the importance of the Local Center was confirmed for it is the foundational nucleus of the Association’s organization and is to be the privileged Provincial reality in respect to the national Level which now may be present in more than one Province.

Then followed the Vatican Council II directives concerning the principles of subsidiarity, which take away any rigid and pyramidal aspect from the Association – and articulate, in a timely way, the responsibilities of the various Levels – Local, Province, and World – while leaving ample "freedom of movement" to the Local Centers so as to foster their vitality and creativity.

Finally, the determinations expressly required by the new *Code of Canon Law* – above all, as regard the composition and competencies of the Councils, direction of centers, the juridic figure of the Delegates, and the administration of the goods of the Association – were inserted.

## Art. 34. Flexible Organization

*Faithful to the will of the Founder, the Association has a flexible and functional structure, established on three levels of government: Local, Provincial, and World.*

*The efficacy of the Association's action in its area, and its openness to the universality of communion and of mission, are assured through this structure of organization.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Flexibility
2. Functionality
3. Three Levels of Government

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** ***In order to render communion effective and collaboration efficacious, the Association… has a flexible organization adaptable to the various area and ecclesial situations.*** This foundational statement allows us to see the spirit that animates the entire chapter, which is characterized by a more markedly juridic-positive intonation. It clearly indicates the double purpose of the organization: to make collaboration efficacious and to confer concrete effectiveness upon the work of the Salesian Cooperators among themselves and with the other apostolic forces of the Salesian Family and of the Church.

The article states that the Association has a *flexible and functional structure*. This characteristic is due to the fact that the specific vocation of the Lay Faithful involves him or her in diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts. It is also so due to the fact of the international physiognomy of the Association which works in religious and cultural contexts which differ greatly among themselves.

This concept of flexibility demands reflection on the part of the Salesian Cooperators present in religious contexts which differ, but are not hostile to, the Catholic Church (the Orthodox Christians of the Middle East, for example). The Cooperators, even in these contexts of today, represent more than ever before an indispensable support for the maintenance of the mission in that territory – to the point that the very SDB and FMA Religious, urged on by this motivation and by the tangible fruits of the collaboration which already exists, consider it necessary to count much more on such a figure.

There is great interest in establishing closer contact to gather materials, documents, and whatever else might be of use to reinforce the Cooperators already in existence or to promote the profile of the Cooperator in those Houses in which the Cooperators are not officially present today, but where there do exist laity who work like Cooperators. The following are the advantages of a flexible organization:

- creativity to set in motion contact through the various spiritual itineraries with the young and adults;
- adaptability so as to invent manageable and realistic plans and projects; and
- the ability to exist in structures and manage situations better – in the measure in which interpersonal abilities and systems are reinforced.

Excluded from this, however, is an interpretation of flexibility and functionality understood in terms of "approximation" or "superficiality." Both the one and the other are to be understood, rather, as "what is possible and doable" even in precarious or difficult situations. In other words, respect for persons is reiterated here so that they can find a way to put Don Bosco's apostolic project into motion even while living in very disparate social conditions, environments, areas, political situations, and ecclesial structures – with a minimum of the forms of the Association and its representative bodies. This explains why the organization of the Association foresees three Levels of government – Local, Province, and World.

**B. *The Three Levels: Local, Provincial, and World***

The sphere that assumes the greatest importance is the Local Center because on it the vitality of the Association depends. It is defined as "The fundamental nucleus of the Association is the Local Center... [which] gathers together Salesian Cooperators who work within a specific territory… near a Salesian work – either of the Salesians of Don Bosco or of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians." (*Statutes* Art. 36 §1)

In effect, the Center is an indispensable structure; the cell vital to the achievement of the goals of the Association; the nucleus and the foundation of the Association, inasmuch as it gives it energy and support; and the basic unit of operation. The other bodies of the superior Levels (Provincial and World) are at their service: these motivate, empower, and help them along their path while respecting their autonomy – not to be confused with "independence" – because they foster their communion with the entire Association and with the other Groups of the Salesian Family and with the Supreme Moderator and Superior, the Rector Major. Therefore, not only the personal bond of the Salesian Cooperator to a certain Center for a variety of reasons – from the formation received to tradition or something else – takes on considerable importance but, also and above all, the finding oneself in the same territory commensurate with the ideal frontiers in which the Religious Communities of the SDB or the FMA work: this due to the life of communion and collaboration with them and, also, through the solidarity of the Salesian Cooperator with the Local Churches.

One area of notable organizational importance is the "grouping of the centers" on the *Provincial* Level. Such a grouping is to be retained necessary. The purpose of such a grouping is to allow the centers to develop and grow through the increase in the number of Cooperators and of the centers themselves. Moreover, this grouping allows them to work in a wider and more concrete way. This is so thanks to the relationships of communion and collaboration established precisely on the Provincial Level.

When considering the different situations of the Association in various countries, wherever this Provincial Level does not exist, the establishment of such is requested – not necessarily immediately – but as soon as possible. This is an example of the application of the principles of adaptability and flexibility as regard the organization of the Association.

The *World Level* underlines the universality of the Association's communion and its mission. Yet again, this sense of organizational structure at the Local, Provincial, and World Levels is the same: each is at the service of unity and of communion within the Association of Salesian Cooperators – who are workers in the Vineyard of the Lord so as to render the Salesian Mission concrete and efficacious in the world.

## Art. 35. Governance and Animation at the Local, Provincial, and World levels

*With the authority of the Rector Major safeguarded, and represented normally by his Vicar, or by a Delegate named by him, the governance and animation of the Association is entrusted to its own Local, Provincial, and World Councils, which also include the presence of Religious members nominated by their respective SDB or FMA Provincial for the Local and Provincial Councils, and by the Rector Major for the World Council. Legal representation of the Association is entrusted to the Coordinator of the respective Council.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. The Autonomy of the Association
2. The Coordinator of the Respective Council

### Keys to Understanding

**A. *The Autonomy of the Association***

The considerations that follow complete the discussion on the ministry of the Rector Major (*Statutes* Art. 24 and *Regulations* Art. 30) and of the Delegates (*Statutes* Art. 26 and *Regulations* Art. 23). For this reason, they should not be considered separately but within the framework of the entire discussion on the autonomy of the Association and its particular union with the Salesian Family.

It is necessary, first of all, to recall the principles of Vatican Council II which flow from the renewed *Code of Canon Law* on the topic, "the Associations of the Faithful": "The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3a) Given, then, the close relationship between the apostolate and the nature of the Church-communion, a second principle is drawn: "Maintaining the proper relationship to Church authorities, the laity have the right to found and control such associations and to join those already existing." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 19d)

The various Groups of the Salesian Family enjoy, in fact, a proper autonomy in all its dimensions: formative, economic, governmental, missionary, and apostolic so that they might express in a holistic way their own wealth and harmonize their own intervention with the overall project shared by all the Groups – as an expression of that vitality which is the fruit of fidelity and creativity in the Salesian charism.

The originality of the Association within the Salesian Family must be recognized and promoted. This gives the ability to seek fearlessly all the opportunities that exist for the good and benefit of the young.

This communion in autonomy invites all to be co-responsible in the mission but does not necessarily imply co-responsibility in all the works that the individual groups present in a particular area carry forward. Rather, it is a matter of a co-responsibility which requests from all a mutual commitment to follow through on some shared objectives: all the Groups are called to spread, along with Gospel values, the characteristic traits of the charismatic and spiritual identity of Don Bosco's apostolic Family. All, even individual members, are personally responsible for animating and promoting the spiritual heritage received. (*Salesian Family Charter* 15-17)

As regards autonomy, when revising the *Project of Apostolic Life*, more than one model was taken into consideration. Purposely excluded were both absolute autonomy and no autonomy because, at their base, they are contrary to what was just stated. *Statutes* Article 35 says: "the governance and animation of the Association is entrusted to its own Local, Provincial, and World Councils." The *Project of Apostolic Life* defines the establishment, composition, tasks, and functioning of said Councils and guarantees ample space for the decision-making authority of the Salesian Cooperators. These discussions will be dealt with in a more exhaustive manner in the following articles. Therefore, in the measure in which this choice for the principle of "autonomy in communion" is to be kept in mind, it will certainly help us avoid useless and damaging convergences and will instead foster a sincere, Salesian, and mature collaboration at all Levels.

**B. *The Coordinator of the Respective Council***

It seems opportune to list here some elements to keep in mind when considering the profile of the Coordinator so that it emerge that the service of animation and of responsibility in the Association is explicitly indicated by the *Project of Apostolic Life*, as a particular, specific, and important apostolate of the Salesian Cooperator. (see *Statutes* Art. 11; *Regulations* Articles 17, 22, 26 and 31).

The Coordinator's fundamental purpose is that of helping the Association grow and mature:

- in communion;
- in the spiritual life; and
- in the Salesian mission.

This objective is fulfilled when the Coordinator accompanies each member of the Association along his or her path of growth in these three areas so that the member may be ever better informed as to the identity traced out in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. The relevance of a good choice for Coordinator becomes evident in this – so that he or she might undertake his or her service of governance and animation with greater clarity and competence.

a) His or her principal tasks:

- Be the bond of communion at all Levels: Local, Provincial, and World and with the other Groups of the Salesian Family, and participate actively on the Consulta of the Salesian Family.
- Animate and govern according to the Salesian charism.
- Represent the Association legally.
- Bolster participation in the Church and in society.
- Assure that, in all the educational proposals made, the explicit *raison d'être* of the Association of Salesian Cooperators is present: the salvation of the poorest and most abandoned youth.
- Preside over the meetings of the Council.
- Help the other members of the Council to be co-responsible.
- Use different instruments of communication so as to be able to communicate at various levels.
- Promote active and co-responsible participation of all the members of the Association on the Consulta and in decisions to be taken.
- Foster the formation process and self-formation at all Levels.
- Animate economic solidarity and the sense of belonging to the Association at all Levels.
- Make authoritative decisions on his or her own cognizance in the case of particularly important situations which demand a prompt solution and immediate execution and then give an account of it afterwards to the Council.
- Represent the Association in an appropriate and responsible way in his or her own sphere of authority: Local, Provincial, or World.

- Receive the apostolic *Promise* of an Aspirant to become a Salesian Cooperator. (*Regulations* Art. 13)
- Prepare, together with the Council, the evaluations at the end of the triennium, invoke the elections for the renewal of the Council, and care for the handing over of the leadership from the exiting Councilors to the new ones.

b) Other specific tasks of the Coordinator:

✓ *The Coordinator of a Center*

- Receives from the Aspirant Salesian Cooperator the request for admission. (*Statutes* Art. 27)
- Receives the eventual written communication to leave the Association on the part of the Salesian Cooperator. (*Statutes* Art. 31; *Regulations* Art. 13)
- Passes on the various opinions of the Local Council to the Provincial Council.

✓ *The Provincial Coordinator*

- Issues the Decree of Dismissal of the Salesian Cooperator from the Association. (*Statutes* Art. 31)
- Issues the respective Decrees of Fusion, of Transfer, Declaration of Non-Dependence, and Suppression of a Center.
- Issues the Decree of Belonging of a Center to its respective Provincial grouping.
- Collaborates with the Regional World Councilor, promoting his initiatives and informing him on the life of the activities of the Association.

✓ *The World Coordinator*

- Collaborates directly with the Rector Major and his Delegate in the governance and the animation of the Association.
- Accompanies the World Councilors in the animation of their region.
- Creates bonds of communication at all Levels.

c) Competencies, abilities, or necessary requisites:

- An equilibrated person in his or her human, Christian, and Salesian dimensions.
- Fraternal, welcoming, and proactive.
- Open to mutual listening, with a vision to the future, and attentive to reality.
- Authoritative in exercising his or her mandate, but at the same time humble and willing to critique self, to listen to others and to change, and to attend to the signs of the time.
- Available, if not full-time, at least for a significant amount of time.
- Grows in autonomy in such a way as not to put him or herself in competition with the others and knows how to value the gifts of each one.
- Matures an authentic spirit of service so that co-responsibility in the mission is translated into a co-responsibility in action.
- Possesses a great love for the Church, for the Salesian Family, and for the Association.
- Has the gifts of wisdom and governance: is capable of exercising authority and of making decisions in the light of the Gospel and of the *Project of Apostolic Life*.
- Is competent in his role.
- Treasures every opportunity for self-formation.
- Promotes a teamwork mentality and networking with other entities.

## Art. 36. The Local Level

*§1. The fundamental nucleus of the Association is the Local Center. Ordinarily, it gathers together Salesian Cooperators who work within a specific territory. Every Center has a Delegate appointed by his or her respective Provincial. The Center is preferably established near a Salesian work – either of the Salesians of Don Bosco or of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.*

*§2. The Local Centers are directed collegially by a Local Council which is elected by all the members comprising the Assembly of the Local Center. The Council elects from among its members a Local Coordinator and defines the specific roles of the Councilors. The Delegate is part of the Council and has an active voice.*

*§3. Men and women of good will, even if of a different Christian Confession, or of a different religion, and/or culture, who feel an affinity with the Salesian charism, can share in the initiatives of the Local Center and offer their collaboration as "Friends of Don Bosco."*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. The Local Center: Basic Cell of the Association
2. Collegiality
3. Ecumenism

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** From its very origins, i.e., starting with Don Bosco's specific will, the Salesian Cooperators were organized into groups called Local Centers, and were united like "little interwoven threads" for the purpose of doing good in society – in particular, to poor and abandoned youth – by responding to the specific needs of a particular place. The Association, therefore, was organized so as to be able to fulfill its purpose better: to serve our littlest brothers and sisters in the area of the Local Church.

It is with this spirit that each Salesian Cooperator realizes his or her own vocation in fraternal communion within the life of the Association in his Center. The Center allows the Salesian Cooperators to mature spiritually and to provide enrichment for each member through sharing and confronting. At the same time, collaboration in apostolic charity permits the growth of the Center as a whole. In effect, the Local Center is the cell vital to achieving the purposes of the Cooperators, giving energy and support as the operational base of the entire Association.

The juridic act of giving consent to the birth of a Center on the part of the SDB or FMA Provincial is a tangible sign of the charismatic bonds which tie together the Salesian Congregation, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Association of Salesian Cooperators – the three Vocational Branches of the one Family conceived in Don Bosco's huge apostolic heart.

**B.** In the second number of this article, the keyword is "collegial" – this is the modality for conducting a Center. The Local Council, elected by all the members of the Center, is the body proposed to direct and animate the activities of that Center: to give directives; to propose formative journeys both for initial and on-going formation, in concert with the Provincial and World Councils; and to give life to the initiatives and projects which realize their educative apostolic goals in their social reality. The action of the Council is carried out and is expressed in the spirit of

communion, of fraternal sharing of objectives, and, therefore, of undertaking “collegially-made” decisions. This is not a mere exercise of democracy but, rather, is a sign of unity of intent and of values and a marked sense of co-responsibility.

**C.** The third number underlines the universality of Don Bosco's charism. The educational intentions of the Founder, translated into the Preventive System, are valued and shared by men and women even belonging to other Religions and Cultures. Work done in favor of poor and abandoned youth has conquered the hearts of so many who recognize the social value of such a commitment and the importance of human, spiritual, and social promotion of the young who are the future of humanity. On account of this, the Local Center, wherever the opportune opportunity exists, fraternally welcomes anyone who wishes to share the values of the Charism and facilitates the collaboration of these persons of goodwill who desire to put themselves out for the benefit of the young. In this way, the "Friends of Don Bosco" are born. They offer their enthusiasm and their labor even while they do not belong to the Association for it is composed of Catholic Christians.

This fraternal welcome as regards those who appreciate Don Bosco, even if they do not belong to the Catholic Church, is a sign of openness to the different realities in the world where the Salesian Cooperators work and is in keeping with the Magisterium of Pope Francis who advises us to reach out to the geographic and psychological fringes and to show that we are ready for dialogue with all men and women of goodwill.

## Art. 37. The Provincial Level

*§1. Local Centers are organized into Provinces established by the Rector Major, subject to a proposal by the World Council.*

*§2. In consideration of the "bond of union" and of the charismatic ties among the Association of Salesian Cooperators and the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Association's Provinces are related to the reality of the respective SDB or FMA Provinces.*

*§3. Every Province has a Provincial Council elected by the Local Councils in sede at the Provincial Congress according to the modalities foreseen in the Regulations of the Congress.*

*§4. The Provincial Council is organized collegially, electing a Provincial Coordinator from among its Council members. The Council itself defines the specific tasks of each of the Councilors. Every Provincial Council has an SDB and an FMA Delegate among its Councilors. These have an active voice and are named by the respective SDB and FMA Provincials.*

*§5. For the animation of the Association, the Provinces, with respect for the autonomy of their governance, are organized into Regions according to affinity of language, culture, and territory, by the decision of the Rector Major, with the agreement of the World Council. The SDB and FMA Provincials concerned, in common accord, name one SDB Regional Delegate and one FMA Regional Delegate.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Theme

Province organization, collegial direction, the bond of union and the charismatic ties with the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Regional Consulta.

### Keys to Understanding

**A. *Province Organization***

The article indicates the possibility of a Provincial grouping composed of the Local Centers of a given area – as established by the Rector Major with the World Council. This grouping constitutes a Province. On this Level, the Association is governed by a Provincial Council which, according to the precise dispositions of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, acts in a collegial manner. For the structure of the Provincial Council, the norms of Canon 119 are taken into consideration. They establish the procedures for carrying out their functions and for the election of their members.

- *The composition of the Provincial Council* (*Regulations* Art. 24): The Provincial Council is composed of members selected by the Councilors of the Local Centers during the Provincial Congress. It is comprised of a suitable number of Councilors – from three to twelve – plus one SDB and one FMA Provincial Delegate.
- *The election of the members of the Provincial Council:* The Councilors who are on the Local Councils are convoked to participate in the Provincial Congress by the Provincial Coordinator. In the case that this is the first establishment of the Provincial Council, the SDB Provincial is the one who makes the convocation.
- *The term of mandate of the elected members:* The Councilors elected remain in office for three years and can be re-elected for one consecutive triennium. For a third consecutive triennium, recourse must be made to the Juridic Institute of the Postulation, per the *Code of Canon Law* (Canons 180-183), with the corresponding dispensation on the part of the Rector Major.

**B. *Collegial Direction***

A fundamental element in the organization of the Association, as already has been stated, is collegiality – from the very first minute of a Council's creation at any Level. For this reason, what is meant by and what are the norms for defining collegial acts are presented in detail – both as to what regards the elections (see Canon 119, number one) and as to what concerns the other tasks which enter into the scope and responsibilities proper to a Council. (see Canon 119, number 2)

In order for an act to be considered *collegial*, according to the norms of Canon 119, three previous conditions are necessary:

1) the convocation of all the members of the respective Council, made according to the norms of Canon 166;
2) the presence of an absolute majority of the members of the respective Council;
3) the computation of the absolute majority for the vote is made on the number of members effectively present for the collegial act. The majority is absolute when it surpasses half (half +1 constitutes a majority); i.e., the arithmetic half of the complete number of members present +1.

If the collegial act under consideration is an *election*, for example, for that of a Coordinator of the Council:

1) an absolute majority is necessary for the first and the second ballot;
2) "after two indecisive ballots, the choice is between the two candidates who have obtained the greater number of the votes, or, if there are several (with the same numbers)," – whether in the case that all the candidates receive an equal number of votes, or in the case of a difference in votes between one candidate with a relative majority and other candidates who have an equal number of votes – [the choice is] "upon the two who are senior in age";
3) "after a third ballot, if the tie remains, the one who is the senior in age is considered elected";
4) the third ballot is definitive in every case and therefore, once it has been made, the voting process is prolonged no longer.

If, however, the collegial act concerns other matters:

1) an absolute majority on the first vote is necessary;
2) if the first vote should be inconclusive, a second vote takes place, still requiring an absolute majority;
3) if no majority is obtained in the second vote, the decision in question is not approved; if there is a tie, then the Coordinator, who presides over the Council according to the norm of *Statutes* Art. 21 §1, can add his vote publicly to break the tie and thus decide the question.

These juridic issues, however, ought not make us lose sight of the vital importance of the persons in the Association who carry out the collegial act, precisely because they are the ones who direct the Association. From this is derived the need to elect leaders who have the appropriate qualities for the responsibilities which will be theirs and are in a situation which makes it possible for them to give such service.

**C. *The Bond of Union and the Charismatic Ties with the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians***

The bond of union and the charismatic ties with the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians remain strong despite the diversity of the organizational structures of these individual branches of the Salesian Family.

**D. *The Regional Consulta***

The article specifies that, in order to animate the Association, the Provinces, with respect for their autonomy and governance, are organized into Regions based on affinity of language, culture, and area.

The World Council, with the consent of the Rector Major, can foster and favor the establishment of a Regional Consulta. (*Regulations* Art. 34) When a number of Provinces that share affinity as concerns language or culture belong to a nation or a geographical area and see the opportunity to unite themselves so as to better their own journey as an Association, they can make the request for this to the World Council which, after having examined the matter attentively, and having deemed it opportune, will present its favorable opinion to the Rector Major to obtain his consent for the establishment of this body of animation within the Association.

By its nature, one can say that it is not a collegial, governing body as are the Local, Provincial, and World Councils (*Statutes* Art. 34) but that it is a body of animation and of direct aid to the World Councilor for an efficacious co-responsibility in the diverse initiatives – whether apostolic or formative – within the Region. Another important element is that it is the bond of union and of collaboration between each individual Provincial Council and the World Council.

The Regional Consulta is comprised of the World Councilor of said Region (who presides over it in the name of the World Council), by the Provincial Coordinators, by the SDB Regional Delegate, by the FMA Regional Delegate, and/or by other members according to the needs of the region.

Knowledge concerning other points about this Consulta can be deepened by reading Don Pascual Chavez's *Lettera sul ruolo delle Consulte regionali* from 2012 so as to clarify the *raison d'être* for the Regional Consulta.

## Art. 38. The World Level

*§1. The World Council is composed of:*

- *the World Coordinator, named directly by the Rector Major;*
- *the SDB World Delegate, named by the Rector Major, and the FMA World Delegate, named by the Rector Major on the proposal of the Mother General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians;*
- *the World Councilors, elected by the respective Regional Congresses;*
- *the World Treasurer and World Secretary, elected – by secret ballot – by the Councilors themselves.*

*§2. The World Executive Secretary (SEM) is composed of the World Coordinator, the World Treasurer, the World Secretary, the SDB World Delegate, and the FMA World Delegate.*

*The SEM has the function of seeing to the ordinary acts of administration which do not require the convocation of the World Council. Within the World Council, it assumes the task of "Council for Economic Affairs" within the Association according to the terms of Canon 1280.*

*§3. The term of office for members of the World Council is six years.*

*§4. The directives of the World Council come into force upon the approval of the Rector Major.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Composition of the World Council
2. Tasks and Length of Term

### Keys to Understanding

Article 30 of the *Regulations* specifies that the "Rector Major avails himself ordinarily of the World Council of Salesian Cooperators, above all in the animation of the entire Association and in the coordination of the formative and apostolic initiatives." This is so that the apostolic missionary purpose of the *Project of Apostolic Life* may be reached and also that it may have a more efficacious vitality. The World Council, therefore, collaborates with the Rector Major for the governance and the animation of the Association: it furnishes general guidelines as regards the formative, organizational, and administrative initiatives. (*Regulations* 31)

The tasks and the composition of the World Council are well-defined in the *Regulations*, Articles 31 and 32.

**A. *The Composition of the World Council:***

- the World Coordinator named directly by the Rector Major;
- the SDB World Delegate named by the Rector Major and the FMA World Delegate named by the Rector Major on the proposal of Mother General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians;
- the Regional World Councilors elected by the respective Regional Congresses; and
- the World Council Treasurer and the World Council Secretary elected – by secret ballot – by the World Councilors themselves.

**B. *Roles within the World Council***

Within the Council, some specific roles are foreseen:

- The first role expressly foreseen as necessary is that of the World Coordinator. He or she is named by the Rector Major from among the members, whether nominated or elected, of the World Council and according to what is provided for in article 32 §2 of the *Regulations*.
- Another role foreseen as necessary is also that of the Treasurer. He or she is one of the members of the same Council, according to the norms of *Regulations* 32 §2. The task of the Treasurer is what is assigned to him or her by said article: to present the financial statement to this same Council so that it can be presented, in turn, through the World Coordinator, to the Rector Major for his approval on the basis of what is provided for in article 39 §3 of the *Regulations*. Not to be forgotten are other tasks foreseen by the universal legislation of the Church in regard to the administrators of ecclesiastical goods as stated in the *Code of Canon Law*.

**C. *Election of the World Councilor for a Region***

Article 29 of the *Regulations* gives the norms of the establishment and the functioning of the Regional Congress. It specifies that the Provincial Coordinators and their Councils are the ones who will elect the World Councilor for each Region. To these are added the SDB and FMA Delegates designated to it by the Provincials concerned – in such a way that their total number not surpass one-third the total in the assembly of those having the right to vote.

The way to proceed in carrying out this task is specified by the Congress Regulations, approved by the World Council. All possibilities remain open, therefore, on the condition that a true representation on the level of a single Region is guaranteed and, together with this, the availability of the electors to participate effectively in the election of the World Councilor is assured.

For this reason, beyond the multiple formalities that could be proposed, there is also foreseen and, therefore, possible, voting via correspondence, according to the norm of Canon 157 §1. Naturally, this ought to be such as to guarantee the essential conditions for the canonical validity of the vote, which, in every case ought to be free, secure, secret, absolute, and designated according to the norms of Canon 172.

*Approval* of the modalities proposed by the World Council is included among the competencies of the Rector Major, as Supreme Moderator of the Association; this is expressly contemplated by number four of Article 38, according to which the directives of the Council "become executive only after the approval of the Rector Major."

**D. *Length of the Term of the World Council* (*Regulations* Art. 32 §3)**

All the members of the World Council, with the exception of the Delegates, *have a six-year term.* The option for this length of time was suggested after a serene evaluation of the experience matured during the *ad experimentum* period: this is a length of time that permits the Council, on the one hand, to carry on good work for animation and coordination and, on the other, to be able to renew itself with the turnover of its own members.

**E. *Tasks of the World Council* (*Regulations* Art. 31 §4)**

The sphere of competency of the World Council is determined by Article 31 of the *Regulations* and concerns the Association universally. Such an article also indicates its general tasks concerning the animation and coordination of the formative and apostolic initiatives. Besides this, the World Council also has a characteristic judicial-administrative function, competent to resolve doubts and controversies which may arise within the Association.

**F. *The Functioning of the World Council* (*Regulations* Art. 32 §4)**

In reference to the tasks of the World Council, the article specifies the fundamental condition that must exist: "The directives of the World Council become executive only after the approval of the Rector Major." This is required by the fact that the Rector Major "is the Superior of the Association" and avails himself of the World Council specifically for the exercise of his authoritative pastoral ministry to the Cooperators. Consequently, in order to render operative the decisions made collegially during the meetings of the Council, it is necessary to present them for prior approval of the Rector Major. This task falls to the World Coordinator.

**G. *The World Executive Secretary (The SEM)***

The World Executive Secretary, or the SEM, is comprised of the World Coordinator, the World Treasurer, the World Secretary, the SDB World Delegate, and the FMA World Delegate.

Article 31 of the *Regulations* specifies in individual paragraphs: the composition of the World Council and its tasks; the election of the Councilors; the modalities of such election; the term of service of its members; the value of its directives; and the establishment of the SEM.

This body is foreseen in *Statutes* article 38 §2. The text says that the Council avails itself of a central World Executive Secretary. This can be composed of a number of persons guided by a leader. The purpose for which it was established is "to function where ordinary acts of administration are concerned." It can have a Head Officer in the person of the Secretary who acts under direct dependence upon the World Coordinator.

## Art. 39. The Administration of the Goods of the Association

*§1. The Association of Salesian Cooperators, in that it is a public ecclesiastical juridic person, has the ability to acquire, possess, administer, and alienate temporal goods, according to the norms of the Law. The goods owned by the Association as such are ecclesiastical goods.*

*§2. The Rector Major, with the World Council, administers the goods of the Association at the World Level and is the competent authority in granting to the Local and Provincial Councils the permissions needed to establish acts of extraordinary administration and alienation which do not require the intervention of the Apostolic See.*

*§3. The Councils, through a Treasurer chosen from within the Council, care for the management of the goods of the Association. The Treasurer also prepares the "Statement of Cash Flow" to present annually to the Council of the next higher Level.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Administration of Ecclesiastical Goods
2. The Legal Representative
3. Administrative Functions

### Keys to Understanding

**A. *Administration of Ecclesiastical Goods***

In order to deepen one's understanding of the topic "administration," we must clarify, first of all, what it means to be an Association which is recognized by the Holy See as a "public juridic ecclesiastical person" in such a way that everyone has the same vision regarding action and operation in our Centers and on our Councils. The term "administration" has a double semantic meaning which ought not lead us into error. "To administrate," in fact, can mean to carry out the proper function of the ecclesiastical authority, which differs from that of legislating and judging and which consists of acts of governance within the law. Alongside this meaning belonging to the sphere of the power of jurisdiction, there is another of an economic kind, which seeks to preserve funds, to make money, and to improve the patrimony. It must be kept in mind, then, that the ecclesiastical Legislator uses the term in both senses: when, for example, he regulates the administrative act, he is evidently making reference to the first definition; when, however, he establishes the need for a public juridic ecclesiastical person to have a Treasurer, he is using it in the sense of the second definition of "administering". (see Canon 1279)

It is important to be aware of this distinction when it comes time to evaluate, in particular, "the administration of goods" because, in such an evaluation, the Legislator will use both senses of the term 'administration' in respect to Church property. Concretely-speaking, when Canon 1273 qualifies the Roman Pontiff as the supreme administrator of ecclesiastical goods, he refers to the power of jurisdiction of the Pope over the Church and, therefore, over the goods of public juridic persons for the purposes proper to the Church, rather than to an administrative function of an economic power based on the power of an owner over his goods.

The administration of the assets of the "public juridic ecclesiastical person" points out, first of all, the attribution of supervision of administration to the Ordinary. This supervision includes the right of inspection; of

requiring accounts, of establishing the modalities of a fair and orderly administration; of granting permission for certain administrative acts of a certain weight or relevance. (See Canons 1277, 1281, 1285, 1292). This supervision *does not* include, therefore, the right to *substitute* the representation in administration, except when other legitimate titles or the general law (e.g., for the Religious) give him greater permission. *The canonical norm stipulates that the Ordinary can make up for the representation only in case of negligence of the legal representative, or, where that is attributed to him by particular law or by the statutes.* (See Canons 1276,1277, 1279, 1281, 1285, 1292)

It also attributes to the Ordinary *regulatory* authority over *the administration* of ecclesiastical goods in accordance with instructions given in conformity with the universal and particular law, and taking account individual rights and legitimate customs and circumstances. The Ordinary, therefore, as appropriate, may issue instructions to clarify and specify the manner and timing of the implementation of laws concerning Church property, in the spirit and within the limits of the universal law, both complementary and particular (Episcopal Conference, Assembly of Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces, Diocesan Laws), effective for all juridic persons subject to him. (see Canon 1276; and "Animating Economic Solidarity")

The temporal goods of the Association are governed not only by the norms cited in the *Statutes* and *Regulations* of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, but primarily in the Canons of the *Code of Canon Law*, which are integrated into its articles.

The possession and use of the Association's temporal goods, inasmuch as they are ecclesiastical goods, must be commensurate with the achievement of the ends proper to the Association; those responsible for the goods of the Association, on the Local, Provincial, and World levels are held to respect the cited norms, adjusting themselves to the same principles. This administration of ecclesiastical goods falls to the one who governs first-hand the persons to whom the goods pertain. By applying this principle in different areas, within the competence of the administration of the goods of the Association, the Salesian Cooperators make use of the general principle offered in Canon 118 concerning the canonical representation of ecclesiastical entities, which states: "Representing a *public juridic person* and acting in its name are those whose competence is acknowledged by universal or particular law or by its own statutes. Representing a private juridic person are those whose competence is granted by statute."

**B. *The Legal Representative***

Since the Association of Salesian Cooperators (ASSCC) is a *public juridic ecclesiastical person*, it draws its origins from the authority of the Church (Canon 301 §3), acts in Her name (Canon 116 §1) and derives from the Church its ability to administer its goods (Canon 1255) and to pursue those ends proper to the Church. (Canon 301 §1).

Within the Association, the Ordinary is the Rector Major at all levels – Local, Provincial, and World – and he carries out the functions of the Supreme Moderator of it. He is the guarantor to the Holy See on the universal scope in his capacity as the "Superior of the Association." To exercise this function, he ordinarily avails himself of the World Coordinator and the SEM. Given his great personal responsibility to the Association, he can commission:

- As his delegate, the SDB Provincial for the Provincial and Local Levels, from the moment that: "within the area of the specific responsibilities to the Society of St. Francis de Sales, he makes the ministry of the Rector Major present." (*Statutes* 35) and
- The respective Council as regards the specific nature of the role of the public juridic person: this is assumed directly and freely by the World, Provincial, and Local Councils of the Salesian Cooperators. In its autonomy,

it is represented by its own Coordinator. It has the ability to administer, to acquire, and to alienate goods of the Association in all those operations which are pertinent and relative to property, possessions, and contracts.

In order to carry out acts of extraordinary administration, the Local, Provincial, and World Councils of the Association of Salesian Cooperators must request permission from the competent authority according to the norms of law and sanction it under the rule of law only after gaining the consent and approval of the Rector Major. (*Statutes* 39 §2) It falls to the Rector Major, availing himself of the SEM concerning economic affairs, to concede to the Councils (Local, Provincial, and World) the permission to carry out acts of extraordinary administration and alienations which do not require the intervention of the Apostolic See* – without which the Acts could be made invalidly.

*[§2. The permission of the Holy See is also required for the valid alienation of goods.
§3. If the asset to be alienated is divisible, the parts already alienated must be mentioned when seeking permission for the alienation; otherwise the permission is invalid.
§4. Those who by advice or consent must take part in alienating goods are not to offer advice or consent unless they have first been thoroughly informed both of the economic state of the juridic person whose goods are proposed for alienation and of previous alienations.
Canon 1293 §1. The alienation of goods whose value exceeds the defined minimum amount also requires the following:
1/ a just cause, such as urgent necessity, evident advantage, piety, charity, or some other grave pastoral reason;
2/ a written appraisal by experts of the asset to be alienated.
§2. Other precautions prescribed by legitimate authority are also to be observed to avoid harm to the Church. (*Code of Canon Law*)]

**C. *Acquisition and Alienation of Goods***

In that the Association is a public juridic ecclesiastical person, it can acquire temporal goods by every just means of natural or positive law permitted to others, except for the term "Church" in Book V of the *Code of Canon Law*. One particular way of acquiring temporal goods is foreseen in the Convention for the Local Centers and the Provincial Council:

- in the fusion of Centers, the new Center assumes the active and passive relationships of the two previous ones, except if there is a different disposition stated in the Decree of Fusion;
- in the suppression of Centers, “the temporal goods and suppressed Centers, including the active and passive economic relationships, pass to the Provincial Council, except if a different disposition is stated in the Decree of Suppression” (see *Code of Canon Law* Book V No. 4); the transfer of the rights of ownership of the goods of the Association of Salesian Cooperators is understood as being from the Association itself to a different subject.

According to the *Code of Canon Law*, "any transaction which can worsen the patrimonial condition of a juridic person" also falls under the topic of alienation. (Canon 1295)

"The permission of the authority competent according to the norm of law is required for the valid alienation of goods which constitute by legitimate designation the stable patrimony of a public juridic person and whose value exceeds the sum defined by law". (Canon 1291)

The object being alienated, as in other pejorative contracts, is, therefore, that which constitutes, through allocation done according to the norms of Civil or Canon Law, the stable patrimony of the Association as such; in other words:

- acts of transfer concerning the rights to patrimonial contents to another subject such as through a sale, exchange, or a donation, whose value is superior to the maximum amount whose imports has been established by the Bishops' Conference of one's respective country, which, in practice, is different according to the economic situations of the various regions of the world;
- acts which bring with it burdens regarding the patrimony and put its solidity in danger (such as mortgages, easements, loans, leases, guarantees, perpetuity, waiver of accepting donations or modal legacies, usufruct, transaction); or
- acts of management which, in the economic context of the moment, may carry with them a risk as concerns criteria of prudent and honest administration, even under a pastoral profile even under the pastoral profile, specifically:
  - ✓ starting, entering into, or assuming participation in entrepreneurial activities (whether industrial were considered commercial, and having fiscal ends);
  - ✓ introduction of third parties as regards the possession of immovable goods outside duly-approved negotiations;
  - ✓ investments for works of construction, remodeling, or restoration; or
  - ✓ change in the destination of the use of immovable goods.

By applying the dispositions of Canon Law and of the Association of Salesian Cooperators, the World, Provincial, and Local Councils, within the sphere of their competence, may validly alienate immovable goods of the Association, under two conditions:

- ✓ only if the price falls below the maximum amount fixed by the Bishops' Conference; and
- ✓ only after the approval of the Rector Major and after having received the prior permission on the part of the World Council.

Besides such permission, the *Code of Canon Law* also demands the intervention of the Apostolic See regarding the validity of alienation in the following cases:

- when the value exceeds the maximum amount,
- when under consideration are goods given to the Church by vow, and
- when under consideration are goods precious for artistic or historical reasons.

It seems opportune also to recall that the general and particular provisions which the civil law in a territory has established for contracts and their disposition are to be observed with the same effects in Canon Law insofar as the matters are subject to the power of governance of the Church unless the provisions are contrary to Divine Law or Canon Law provides otherwise, and without prejudice to the prescript of Canon 1547, regarding witnesses in various cases.

[Translator's Note: The following two works may be of help in understanding the legalities and reality of the interplay between Canon Law and Civil Law in the USA and Canada: *Church Property—A Commentary on Canon Law Governing Temporal Goods in the United States and Canada* by John A. Renken. Ottawa: Saint Paul University, 2009. Also, please see: *Guidelines for the Administration of the Assets in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*.]

## Art. 40. Final Dispositions

*§1. The Association of Salesian Cooperators is governed by the present Statutes. Other norms are contained in the Regulations at the World Level, or in the Handbooks at the various Levels.*

- *The Statutes define the apostolic Vocation of the Salesian Cooperator: his or her identity, spirit, mission, and communion, and the principles of the organizational structure of the Association.*
- *The Regulations contain those practical points which specify and regulate its action, methodology, structure, and organization. It renders concrete the principles of the Statutes, to which it is subordinate, so they may be lived out in a practical manner.*
- *The Handbooks (formerly called Directories) list those particular dispositions of the Association to adapt the Project of Apostolic Life to the concrete functioning in the diverse territorial realities. They are approved by the respective Councils and ratified by the Councils of the immediate higher Level, who must guarantee that the dispositions conform to the Statutes and the Regulations.*

*§2. The present Statutes can be modified at the proposal of the Supreme Moderator, of the World Council, or of the Provincial Councils. The proposed modification must include a clear and detailed presentation of the motives which justify said modification, must define the concrete objectives which follow from it, and the principles on which it is articulated. It pertains to the Superior of the Association to evaluate and accept the proposed modification.*

*The process of modification will be defined by the World Council with the consent of the Rector Major.*

*The modification must be approved subsequently by an absolute majority from among the participants at the World Congress, by the Superior of the Association, and by the Apostolic See.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. Structure and Value of the *Project of Apostolic Life*
2. Modalities and Modifications of the Documents Comprising the *Project of Apostolic Life* or Integrated into It

### Keys to Understanding

**A.** At the base of the plan for revision of the prior *Rule of Apostolic Life*, we found it necessary to subdivide the documents into two parts:

- the *Statutes*, thin in form yet essential in substance, which intend to represent the true identity card of the Salesian Cooperator and of the Association, and, precisely for this reason, it is less subject to variations along time;
- the implementing *Regulations*, which are more easily subject to modifications and integrations, and which seek to gather together the organizational and governmental aspects of the Association.

Such parts are completed by the Handbooks, which are texts prepared at the different Levels of the Association's structure (and subject to the necessary approval and ratification of the Council of the next higher Level). They integrate and/or apply specific aspects of the *Regulations* regarding the governance and the animation

of the Centers so as to render the principles and the prescriptions contained in them flexible and adapted to the reality of the given area.

**B.** The need for statutes for an ecclesial Association is directly set forth in the *Code of Canon Law*, in Canon 304 §1, where it states:

> *All public or private associations of the Christian faithful, by whatever title or name they are called, are to have their own statutes which define the purpose or social objective of the association, its seat, government, and conditions required for membership and which determine the manner of its acting, attentive, however, to the necessity or advantage of time and place.*

The same *Code of Canon Law*, foresees the intervention and the approval of the ecclesiastical authority for the modification of the *Statutes* of every public Association. (see Canon 314)

"*The statutes of each public association and their revision or change need the approval of the ecclesiastical authority competent to erect the association according to the norm of can. 312, §1.*" On account of this, the *Statutes* are subject to a particular and complex *iter* of approval by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The presence of rules which define the origin, the identity, and the organization of an Association is always viewed from the angle of an inter-relationship between the lay aggregations within the Church, whether for a reciprocal recognition or for a more fruitful communion. Paragraph 30 of *Christifideli Laici* states, in fact:

> *It is always from the perspective of the Church's communion and mission, and not in opposition to the freedom to associate, that one understands the necessity of having clear and definite criteria for discerning and recognizing such lay groups, also called "Criteria of Ecclesiality". The following basic criteria might be helpful in evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church:*
> *- The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful"(109) and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity(110). In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith"(111).*
> *- The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the*

*lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.*

*- The witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church(112), and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity"(113) in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate"(114). The communion with Pope and Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both Pope and Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.*

*- Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life"(115). From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization.*

*- A commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person. Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society.*

*The fundamental criteria mentioned at this time find their verification in the actual fruits that various group forms show in their organizational life and the works they perform, such as: the renewed appreciation for prayer, contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life, the reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; a readiness to participate in programmes and Church activities at the local, national and international levels; a commitment to catechesis and a capacity for teaching and forming Christians; a desire to be present as Christians in various settings of social life and the creation and awakening of charitable, cultural and spiritual works; the spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty leading to a greater generosity in charity towards all; conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized members who have fallen away from the faith.*

**C.** The importance of the Rule was suggested to Don Bosco by direct intervention from heaven, when in the "Dream of the White Ribbons", the Blessed Mother recommended to him the importance of binding his collaborators to himself by obedience, which was translated into the realization of the rules to be respected and followed. Here following is the account as given by Don Bosco himself: (*Biographical Memoirs* vol. II 233)

*In the meantime, I found myself being surrounded by a very vast and ever increasing number of boys, but, as I kept looking to the Lady, the premises and the means were also growing accordingly. I saw then a very grand church* [the actual Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Torino] *on the very spot She had pointed out as the place where the soldiers of the Theban legion* [*sic*] *had been martyred. There were a great many buildings all around, and in the center stood a beautiful monument. While these things were taking place and I was still dreaming, I saw that priests and clerics for helping me, but after a while, they left. I tried everything to get others to stay, but after a while they too left me alone. Then I turned once more to the Lady for help. 'Do you want to know what to do to keep them?' She asked. 'Take this ribbon and bind their foreheads with it.' Reverently I took the white ribbon from Her hand and noticed the word* Obedience *written on it. I immediately gave it a try and began to bind the foreheads of these volunteers. The ribbon worked wonders, as I went ahead with the mission entrusted to me. All my helpers gave up the idea of leaving me, and stayed on. Thus was our Congregation born.*

**D.** If the request for a revision of the *Statutes* is indeed considered a very rare act, the discussion is different where modifications to the *Regulations* are concerned. In this case, as article 35 §3 of the same text says: the *Regulations* can be changed and on the proposal of the Supreme Moderator, of the World Council, or of the Provincial Councils. In every case, though, it falls to the Superior of the Association to approve the initiative for modification, which will then be published in a timely manner. This is certainly a simpler and more flexible possibility, respecting, at all times and in every case, collegiality and being sensitive to the evolution of the times and of the needs which present themselves from time to time.

## Art. 41. A Way to Sanctity

*Salesian Cooperators choose to share the Gospel way traced out by the present Project of Apostolic Life.*

*They commit themselves in a responsible manner to this way which brings one to sanctity: the Association of the Cooperators "is designed to shake many Christians from the languor in which they lie, and to spread the energy of charity."*

*The Lord accompanies with the abundance of His grace all those who work in the spirit of the "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle," doing good to youth and to ordinary folk.*

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Theme

The vocation of the Salesian Cooperator brings one to sanctity: It is a free choice, passion for the *Da Mihi Animas; Cetera Tolle*, and the strength of the Grace which never abandons us.

### Keys to Understanding

**A. *Called to Sanctity***

The dignity of the Lay Faithful, is revealed in its fullness if we consider *the first and fundamental vocation* that the Father, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, makes to every person: the vocation to sanctity; in other words, the perfection of charity. It can be stated that the Saint is the most splendid witness of the dignity conferred upon the disciple of Christ.

Vatican Council II had the courage to give to all the members of the Church the irrepressible reality of the Mystery of the Church: She is the Chosen Vine through which the branches live and grow from the same holy and sanctifying lymph of Christ. She is the Mystical Body, whose members participate in the same life of sanctity of the Head, who is Christ; She is the beloved Spouse of the Lord Jesus, Who handed Himself over to sanctify Her. (see Eph. 5:25 and following) The Holy Spirit Who sanctified Jesus' Human Nature in the virginal womb of Mary (see Luke 1:35) is the same Spirit Who dwells in and works in the Church to communicate to Her the sanctity of the Son of God-made-man. (see *Christifideles Laici* 16)

The Salesian Cooperator in his secular lay state has personally received the call from God to be a saint. It is a matter of choosing a normal life in the world, where one's family, study, work, friendly social relationships, as well as professional relationships, and cultural ones, etc., find in Jesus Christ the fullness of their significance. (*Statutes* Art. 2) This vocation to sanctity sinks its roots in Baptism and is re-proposed in the other Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and in Confession. One might say that here is where the Salesian Cooperator finds his strength, is configured to Jesus, and is enabled and given the task of manifesting the sanctity of his being in every action, with joy and optimism, in responsible service to and within the ecclesial community and civic society. (*Statutes* 13, 17, and 19)

The *Project of Apostolic Life* for the Salesian Cooperator becomes the sure path to reach sanctity. It is the "book of life" which guarantees fidelity to the original inspiration of Don Bosco; spiritual, theological, and pastoral harmony with Vatican Council II and the Magisterium of the Church; and the Christian and Salesian response to the new challenges of the world. From this arises the importance of taking it on as a precious treasure which one must know, interiorize, love, and give witness to. In the *Project of Apostolic Life*, there is found delineated the

profile of the Salesian Cooperator which makes him perfectly suited for his vocation and mission; in other words, to be a true Salesian in the world. ("Presentation" of the *Project of Apostolic Life*)

**B. *Passion for the "Da Mihi Animas; Cetera Tolle"***

For Don Bosco, this was the unifying idea of his entire life: the salvation of his young people – and it was the heart of his heart, it was his essential and un-renounceable core; the most profound root of his interior activity, of his dialogue with God, of his very work on himself, and of his untiring work in the apostolate. Truly, his heart beat always to the impulse of the *da mihi animas*. All his passion, his labors as a teacher, as a Shepherd, as a catechist, a writer, and a Founder were to bring his young along the way of salvation, to help them to be good, and to save them eternally; therefore, all the rest was considered only an instrument or a means.

His labors, his Institutions, the founding of the Salesian Society, of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and of the Salesian Cooperators – all have this as their supreme goal. The only goal of the Oratory is to save souls. And it is a goal that he knew he could not reach alone. For this reason, he gave the invitation to others to be united with him in spirit, to work for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls. And he was wont to say: "*The most Divine of all Divine things is cooperating with God and the salvation of souls and is a sure path to sanctity*."

This article invites us yet again to shake the souls of the young who have "fallen asleep" due to so many proposals from society which draw them away from the road to sanctity.

It falls to us to live the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* with passion, making it a concrete reality by:

- Responding to the material and rudimentary needs of youth who are poor and abandoned to their own devices, offering a home, clothes, and food so as to help them become capable of earning their daily bread honestly through acquiring a skill and the job.
- Accompanying them with a wise pedagogy which has as its Center and summary the apostolic charity of Christ, along with that delicate process of their human, cultural, and moral transformation; enabling them to exercise a responsible freedom and to give of themselves; helping them to become aware of their role in life, in society, and in their neighborhood.
- Educating them in a Christian manner in the Faith, bringing them to live their Faith with growing intensity and to have a personal encounter with Christ, the Perfect Man, through listening to the Word, through prayer, through the Sacraments, and through love of neighbor.

In this summary, we find the mystic of the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* which indissolubly unites human promotion and supernatural promotion, with special insistence concerning the religious aspect. This intrinsic bond is repeated today in all the Magisterium of Pope Francis who invites us to go to the geographical and existential fringes of human society so as to respond to the deepest needs of the person and to offer them an authentic path to sanctity.

**C. *The Strength of the Grace Which Never Abandons Us***

"Without me, you can do nothing": the need for the Lord's help and the certainty of receiving the support of the Father's Grace are the two conditions which accompany every is Salesian Cooperator along his or her entire life as an honest citizen and good Christian who gives all for the salvation of souls, with the certainty that God does not abandon those who offer Him their willingness to work in His Kingdom with Don Bosco's spirit, for the salvation of the young.

Let us listen to Don Bosco: *May God, so rich in grace and blessings grant many favors to all those who help to win souls for our Divine Savior, doing good to young people so much in danger, preparing good Catholics for his Church and good citizens for society, so that all may one day find themselves eternally happy in heaven. Amen.* (*Rule* of 1876 "To the Reader")

And let us listen to the Lord: *Whoever would save his very life will lose it, but whoever loses his very life for Me will save it.* (Lk. 9:24)

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*[N. B.: Unless otherwise noted, all text publications marked "web" can be found here: https://donboscosalesianportal.org/official-family-groups/salesian-cooperators in addition to the listed site of origin. The language of the entry indicates the language used in the actual text.]*


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