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36^e Giornate di Spiritualità della **Famiglia Salesiana**

18 - 21 gennaio - Torino - Valdocco - 2018



“Signore, dammi di quest’acqua”

COLTIVIAMO L'ARTE DI ASCOLTARE E DI ACCOMPAGNARE

Presentation Days

Every year the groups of the Salesian Family have the opportunity to meet and reflect on an important issue.

I propose to start from the Strenna of the Rector Major: adhering to this proposal, we also show that we recognize the Rector Major as "centre of unity of the whole Family". With this year's Strenna, he proposes to the Salesian Family to focus our attention on a particular aspect of the Salesian mission. At the beginning of the spirituality Days, I would suggest that we appreciate the Rector Major's proposal, starting from now.

Basically, we are called upon to listen to others. In these days, we can put this listening into practice, discovering more the originality of various groups of the Salesian Family present in the spirituality days. Let us listen attentively to the word that describes the life of each of these groups. A careful look and generous sharing among us will make this vital listening possible. Let's get out of us and see what others are telling us!

The Rector Major also invites us to become experts in the accompaniment of others. The complementarity of our groups becomes an excellent opportunity to understand what accompaniment means and how we can do it in our daily lives. We need others to grow and enrich our own Salesian charismatic experience and that of our group. We welcome many opinions that will be expressed here these days. Let us take to heart the answers we will receive to our questions and, above all, to our challenges. Let us accompany others and allow others to accompany us!

In conclusion: we listen, accompany and let ourselves be accompanied to make decisions that are more consistent with our own lives and our group. In these days, we can better understand how sharing is of decisive importance in responding to the permanent call of the Spirit. Communion among us can be the final destination of a journey with serene listening and a wise accompaniment. The maturing of this experience leads us to pray together, reflect together, form together, celebrate the feast together, thus responding together to the mission received from God. By doing so, the central objective of the spirituality days will become a reality in these days. Let us commit ourselves to a solid experience of communion!

These spirituality days can help us make sure that the Strenna becomes a reality. The experience of listening, accompaniment and making the appropriate decisions will allow us to better understand that we need the living water that God offers us, which often comes to us through others. We are lucky to belong to a Family like the Don Bosco Family that brings us so much water!

Let us place these Days in the hands of Our Lady Help of Christians, permanent bearer of the water of Life.

Hearty Welcome and let us have fruitful Days!

Don Eusebius Muñoz, SDB
Delegate of the Rector Major for the Salesian Family

Listening to the Young

Paula Casalis, FMA

Foreword – Starting Points: Two Experiences

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to [sic] God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear.

So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too.

This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 1938).

I believe that the Lord had asked me to subscribe to the service of LISTENING when, many years ago, I experienced my first change of House and went to live in a Formation House with the Postulants. That four-year experience obliged me to give space and time to others. It is not that I didn't use my time before this to listen to others for it had often happened that I came to know the life of the young whom I encountered. But I understood that this new obedience was requiring of me a greater depth, a qualitative leap. I no longer was to listen to the "what," but to the "how"; not to the "things to do" but to the interior movements, nameless silences, and unexpressed desires of these young women whom I encountered and who were asking me to make a specific space within me for them.

This vast dimension was thus opened and was a call to which I do not know if I responded adequately, but today I realize that it is part of me and that the Lord is asking me to cultivate this always more and more. The realization that listening is not simply an attitude but a necessary condition helps me make it a priority among the many urgent things, activities, processes, programs, and deadlines which fill my days and agenda now.

I tried asking myself how I could summarize this experience of listening in a few words or in an image. I chose this icon which represents Our Lady of Silence:

Mary. This icon is part of a mural dated between the 12th and 13th centuries and is found in a cave in the region of Faras, Egypt. It is a Coptic icon. These bear the stylistic trait of huge, open eyes. The divinity listens with his eyes, and understands the other and the world through his gaze.

This is an image which is very dear to me. More than an image, it is a space in which God manifests Himself. Icons are characterized by being not only a representation of a divinity but, thanks to the Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, it is a sacramental; i.e., it is the place where God is present and can be encountered.

What the Gospel says with words – as affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea - the icon, the dense and substantial image of a Presence, announces it in colors and renders it present.

Standing before this icon, I am always able to encounter a precious traveling companion, who has understood everything by listening and has made it her constant condition. She is completely focused on the other, on the Son, and also on me. When I look at her, she has the power to watch over me and to put me in my place – she takes me off center stage and says: *You are relative; you are not important; God is the one who is important and listening to Him is our true place.*

These two experiences are my starting points: Living with the Postulants made me "stand still", even physically. Contemplating Mary asks me to "take myself off center stage" so as to be all eyes, listening to God.

1. Listening as a CONDITION

Two years ago a girl attending high school was in the midst of a very difficult situation. Every now and then we would "chat". One day, she wrote me a message: *"Sr. Paola, I have to ask you a favor. Can you listen to me even when I tell you nothing or I cannot tell you?"* I replied, "Of course!" As I answered her, I understood the request she was making: she was asking me to listen to her at all times, beyond her words, beyond our meetings, and to take care of her and remember her, for a long time to come.

This was and is most surely demanding because the persons whom we meet are not books to put in order in a closet, but are lives to be taken on. Making listening a condition has helped me expand my heart: listening to the young means restoring their dignity as persons – persons who not only have needs but who have the power to change their life. When Don Bosco used to say that the "young are our salvation," I believe, before all else, he meant this: to allow ourselves to modify our way of being, to change our inner priorities.

*"To listen, it is truly difficult. To do so seriously produces a certain panic or dizziness. It means risking encountering ourselves with another distinct person. 'To live listening' means to open ourselves to communion, to allow ourselves to be surprised, to develop a passion for closeness. 'To live listening' means to take a gamble on being faithful to the teachings of reality." (J.C. Bermejo. *L'ascolto che sana*, 2004).*

To live listening as a condition permits us to unhinge time, at least on a symbolic level, and, therefore, not to make the other person feel that he/she is just a number but is all that truly interests us at that moment.

And speaking of the young, welcome the young. This is a third and rather difficult thing. The young make us tired because they always have something up their sleeve, they make noise, they do this or that... And then they come and say, 'But, I would like to speak with you...' 'Yes, come'. And they ask the same questions, have the same problems: 'I already told you'. They weary us. If we want vocations: keep your door open, pray, and stay nailed to your seat to listen to the young. 'But they are full of fantasies!' May the Lord be blessed! It is up to you to 'bring them back down to earth'. Listen to them: this is the apostolate of the ear. 'They want to confess, but they always confess the same things'. 'And so did you, when you were young. Have you forgotten?' Have patience: listen, so they feel at home and welcomed; and they feel loved. And at times they will act like little kids: thank God, because they are not old. It is important to "waste time" with the young. Sometimes they can be annoying, because – as I said – they always come with the same things; but our time is theirs. More than speaking to them, you must listen to them, and only give them a 'little drop', a word here or there, and off they go. And this will be a seed that will work inside them. But he or she will be able to say, 'Yes, I was with the pastor, the priest, the Sister, the president of Catholic Action, and he or she listened to me as if he or she had nothing else to do'. This is something the young understand well. (Pope Francis. Audience with the participants in the Congress promoted by the national Office for the Pastoral Care of Vocations of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 5 January 2017).

I think that an important realization that helps us live listening as a condition is **knowing that we are already inhabited** – the space the other occupiers within me has already been given to me, and it is a gift... True encounters will allow me to attribute it a name and to enlarge my heart ever more according to the physical reality (history, character, desires, etc.). These two elements depend upon each other: we will not be able to listen if we have not already created a space within us to give to the other person, nor can we listen if we do not know the other through the sharing of true stories and experiences.

2. Listening as a GAZE

Listening happens with our eyes - through what we look at and how we look. We know well that nonverbal communication is much stronger, more spontaneous, and more eloquent than the words we say and hear. God listens with His eyes. His gaze delves deep into our hearts and He reads what is there, inside, but it is not an "investigative" gaze that seeks out our failures or weak point: it is a gaze that loves and that makes Him happy recognizing our heart is His Home.

One of the most beautiful, strongest, and most convincing experiences that I am having in this area of Torino is praying the rosary as I walk the streets: Porta Palazzo, the area of Corso Principe Oddone, and the "Balòn". [translator's note: one region of Torino's northern section, the city's industrial area, where a system of canals connecting to the Dora River offered the necessary water power. These sectors, from west to east, were Martinetto, Valdocco, Borgo Dora, Pallone (or

Balòn), and Vanchiglia. Between 1830 and 1850 zoning laws required all industrial operations to relocate to these areas; they had been scattered throughout the city, including the residential city center. (St. John Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1989. Notes, ch. 28.*)] This land has remained, as it was in Don Bosco's time, a land of immigrants, of poverty, and of degradation. Listening to the needs, the diffidence and skepticism, and the fear, but also the superficiality and the estrangement of these young people helps shake me out of a sterile peace and tranquility. I go to sleep saying: "Your people cry out and suffer, Lord, and what do I do about it?" I realize that just knowing this intellectually is not enough to make me question myself – I need to see and to intercept the gaze of these young people to feel they are part of me.

Listening with one's eyes means not getting lost in any one particular about you: your face, your expressions, how you move or dress, how you see, etc., and to try to read what you are from the clues on your face. Faces carry clues to our being in their beauty and their complexity. Every face is to be contemplated!

"Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth." (Simone Weil).

The face is the form [essence] of the Beloved, the goal of our seeking, and the encounter that happens: "*My heart has said to you: My face has sought you: Your face, O Lord, will I still seek. Turn not away Your face from me*". (Ps. 27:8) In every face, there is the Truth that we seek:

For Don Bosco also, the gaze is a powerful educational tool because he himself grew up under a good gaze: that of Mamma Margaret, of Don Calosso, and of Don Cafasso. He himself says this about his encounter with Don Calosso, in these words:

"[These bold words] impressed the holy priest. He never took his eyes off me while I was speaking." (MO, 45)

"Don Calosso never took his gaze from John." Here we are dealing with a rather weighty detail, that of the reality of the gaze; in fact, it is one of the most important and decisive phenomenological experiences in a relationship because it speaks of the intentional use of one's freedom, and of the interest of the one who gazes upon the object-subject that raises up wonder and awe. Many times in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, Don Bosco entrusts to the power of the gaze the communication of the importance of an encounter, of an event, or of a mission. We know very well how the first generations of his students from the Oratory have testified to the almost supernatural attractive force of his gaze, of Don Bosco's eyes.

'One day – continued Roda – during recreation, a bad word escaped from my lips; I clapped my hand over my mouth, but it had already escaped. My companions heard it. Dominic approached me and said: 'Have you forgotten our resolutions not to use bad language? Go immediately to Don Bosco and tell him the whole story of this unfortunate thing that happened. He is so very good; you'll see – he will fix everything. In the meantime, I will pray for you.' I did not

hesitate; I went straightaway. But where could I find Don Bosco? He was in the parlor surrounded by some gentlemen. Just like a rude fellow, I broke right into the midst of them. Surprised, Don Bosco said: 'See, I am very busy at the moment, would you be able to wait a minute?' Those men thought that I had an urgent commission and withdrew to one side. Then I stood on tippy toes and spoke into our good father's ear: 'Savio has sent me to you; I said a blasphemy.' I was trembling like a leaf. Don Bosco did not yell at me, but I saw a deep suffering wash over his face! I understood the gravity of my sin. Those eyes pierced my heart. 'Don't do that anymore, dear son; never again – it is an offense against God, you know! The Lord would not bless us. Go to church and recite the Our Father many times.' I ran to the altar, prayed the Our Fathers, and ran out, lightened as if someone had taken a huge weight off my chest. I don't remember how many Our Fathers I said, but Don Bosco's gaze? Never will I forget that!

Every one of Don Bosco's boys felt that he was looked upon and loved in the depths of his being. Is this not, perhaps, the root of every vocation - being recognized, seen, loved, wanted, and supported in all the good that one's heart guards secretly?

"Tu non hai più padre". (Stefano Mazzer in Sapientiam Dedit Illi: Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano).

With his measured, calm, and serene gaze he captivated others with an irresistible attraction. With the same power, when he wished, he made himself understood. Often, through an action or a smile, accompanied by a fixed gaze, a question, a response, an invitation, or an entire discussion was had. So many times Don Bosco looked at a young person in such a particular way that his eyes spoke even while his lips said nothing in that moment and still he made them understand what he wanted of the boy. The good young lad would answer him with his lips, amazed that he had perfectly understood the thoughts in Don Bosco's mind. Sometimes it dealt with things that had no connection with what had been said before, or that had been seen, or that had happened just then. It was a question that did not regard personally the one in question: a command, some advice, or a counsel concerning school or recreation or something else was perfectly understood. Often he would follow a boy with his gaze wherever the boy went in the courtyard or portico while he was conversing tranquilly with others. But all of a sudden, the gaze of that boy would meet Don Bosco's and, reading in those limpid eyes the desire to speak with him, he would come and ask what Don Bosco wanted of him. Don Bosco would tell him in his ear. Not rarely, while he had many students in front of him, Don Bosco would fix his gaze on one or two, making with his hand almost a visor over his eyes - just as one does who was looking into the light and wants to see better - and seem to penetrate into the depths of their hearts. They remained confused, and the word on their lips died, and they felt within themselves that he knew some secret of theirs. In fact, he did read on their face some shadow of sin or remorse. Just the slightest movement of his head was then enough: there was no longer any need for an invitation - all that remained was to establish the moment for Confession. (BM VI, 234-235.)

The depth of Don Bosco's gaze derived from his interiority, a fruit of Grace and of nature, and from looking around him, before him, and on high. He knew each of his boys individually and so well that, reading their souls, he knew how to give to each one the advice, the admonishment, or the comfort he needed. This understanding that was communicated by his attentive and fatherly gaze made the young approach him, listen to him, and open their hearts completely to him.

Through the "parolina all'orecchio" [little word in the ear], Don Bosco bent over and spoke to him in secret, with his hand cupping his mouth lest anyone hear. (*Biographical Memoirs*. vol. VI. 234.) Listening became encounter and word, timely and personal, opening the hearts of the young to confidence.

3. Listening as SILENCE

Silence is necessary for listening. True communication demands silence for only he who forgets himself can open himself up to another. A silence, therefore, that is not absence, such as a void, or non-participation, but one that is poverty of self and God's space.

Authentic silence, therefore, calls for a "decentralization." To "de-centralize oneself" means to make room for others, recognizing that they are a gift – without bias, forgetting oneself and one's desire to shine or be in the spotlight, one's egocentricity, and narcissism. There is a death to self that is mandatory if one is to give a worthy welcome; there is an expropriation of oneself to allow the other to be heard and understood, just as they are, and thus able to perceive concretely that they are loved by God. Christ *“emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”* (Philippians 2:7). He emptied himself to take on humanity, Man, in the totality of his beauty and of his sin.

“One listens with effectiveness only when one silences himself within, taking true interest in the other, trying to understand the meaning of his words. This happens when we put our intrapsychic dialogues - those which demand the rights of citizenship within us - in parentheses and when we put aside our tendency to respond to everything, wanting to offer solutions.” (J.C. Bermejo, *L'ascolto che sana*).

*In order to understand another, one must enter into his universe, know how to see through his eyes, feel what he feels, be him by means of interpenetration and closeness. One must momentarily abandon his own biases, personal inclinations, a priori ideas, and familiar territory. All these things, in fact, render our attention selective, filtering what comes to us from the other and refashioning it in keeping with the image that we have of him. [We must] Leave aside every concern for self-affirmation, curiosity, or criticism. (in *Un certosino*, “Il cammino della vera felicità. Le beatitudini fondamento della pace interiore”. Milano, 2005).*

To live silence so as to make myself attentive is the proof that my listening is not being done for my benefit... (for self-gain, to satisfy my curiosity, or to receive affirmation...), but is for the exclusive good of the other. I am the one who decides to love the other, to offer myself to him, forgetting myself so that he may

feel reborn in me and from this, my way of receiving him, he might perceive at least a little bit how dear he is to God's heart, too!

4. Listening as TRUST and WAITING

The need to say "I don't know" while or after having finished listening to some young people and to live this "not knowing" not as a problem but as a resource have happened to me many times – and also to say, "I am burdened and tired" and to live this condition as the consequence of a great investment and not as a morally-mistaken feeling.

This "not knowing" has permitted me to be free and to try to open myself to the Holy Spirit, who gives Himself with strength and abundance to one who is truly seeking. It has also allowed me to live my being burdened as a handing over of my poverty and to come to know that whether I am a useful or a useless instrument depends upon God's will.

I believe that the outcome of authentic listening is trust and waiting – the desire to walk together with the other and both considering each other the place in which God can express His Will. Recounting our stories to each other with liberty and learning to call things by their name, permits life to be read with greater understanding. This requires time and patience, true interest, a profound love, and truly taking on the one who stands before me.

The rush to arrive at the "*dunque*" [the “therefore”], or to arrive at a resolution to problems, or to speak "illuminating" words – all realities which grab us at times and do not allow us to focus on the other person for what he or she is – turns out to be a sterile behavior which inflates our ego but does nothing to render us docile in the Hands of the Father.

“I am interested in you; what you think and what you have to say interests me.” This is Pope Francis’ attitude concerning every young person – no exceptions – and it is the desire of a Church that is Alive! The Synod on the Young puts us in this mode, which is not simply a tool for obtaining results or answers but a way of life. This type of synod process that Pope Francis is asking of us presupposes interest, attention, listening, and humility. Everyone has something important to say and all of us have the duty to listen and to learn, even the Holy Father.

I listen, before anything else. “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. (Oct. 17, 2015). It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.” These words recall to mind the “attitudes of brothers in the Lord” as Francis requested of the Fathers gathered for the opening of the 2014 Synod: “speaking with parrhesia [freedom and boldness] and listening with humility”. (“Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops”. Oct. 6, 2014.)

Opening oneself up to listening is a both a choice of method and of field. Listening, in fact, is the source of true relationships, always new and different. In these relationships, which become an encounter with another, an authentic dialogue develops, which is light, free, and not bogged down by words that speak only of one’s own ego. Listening means being available and ready; it is

an enrichment that is reciprocal and a relating... Moreover, this is true, in a particular way, at the ecclesial level. I listen as a humble person with the desire to go beyond the surface, to dig deep into myself, so as to put the present moment into communication with Eternity, the fragment with the whole, and the provisory with the Definitive.

5. Listening as ACCOMPANIMENT

I have tried to point out every nuance and angle of the act of listening – condition, gaze, silence, trust, and waiting – all of which flow together within this dynamic of accompaniment. When thinking about listening, my mind goes continually to different encounters with the young and, in particular, to those which I have had personally while sitting in my office or walking in the courtyards of Valdocco.

The young explicitly ask us to be reference points and “spaces” of listening and of presence within the dynamic of accompaniment.

"Do I wish to understand how to go about things and how to love truly?"

"What priorities and order do I give to my life?"

"I want to believe but my highs and lows knock me off balance."

"I want to fulfill my responsibilities with conscientiousness and courage without allowing myself to be squashed by the struggles."

"I seriously want to try living as a Christian; that is, according to Christ, every day of my life."

"I want to live a life of service not because it fulfills me but so that I may be useful and do some Good."

"I want to live my friendships and relationships with responsibility and freedom."

"I want to allow myself to love, but I struggle very much."

"Do I want to know what my place is?"

"I want to do what God wants of me."

"I understand that there are parts of me that are “out of order” and I need someone to help me understand them and tell me the truth."

"I want..."

These are the questions and the profound desires which I want to express; these are the questions which mark the turning point of a listening that is paying attention to things to one that is of the heart. These are the questions to which I must continually respond with my life, every day, and not for the purpose of being “credible,” but so as to be happy and to walk ever more according to the Meaning of my existence.

Much time and patience are required to reach this point: the time to tell the story of one’s reality and the patience to live in the knowledge of the other (which is the sum total of his/her entire existence: family, education, school, the times they fell in love, work, faith, encounters, wounds, passions, relationships, struggles, experiences, and desires); and the patience necessary for and the beauty of seeking God in all this and to do His Will.

Listening is the condition necessary to be able to walk with the young, but two more fundamental steps must follow this one: decision and action. A listening that digs deep into truth bears with it the essential question of life: its meaning!

The decision is prompted and sustained by the promise present in the eyes of the one who is listening – the promise that authentic happiness is possible. If the young whom we encounter discover in our eyes the Beauty of a Life that is given for others, then they will live the courage and enthusiasm needed to make their own good decisions. I am certain of it! Three words sum up Mary's attitude: listening, decision, action. They are words that point out a way for us too as we face what the Lord asks of us in life. Listening, decision, action.

1. Listening. What gave rise to Mary's act of going to visit her relative Elizabeth? A word of God's Angel. "Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son..." (Lk 1:36). Mary knew how to listen to God. Be careful: it was not merely "hearing", a superficial word, but it was "listening", that consists of attention, acceptance and availability to God. It was not in the distracted way with which we sometimes face the Lord or others: we hear their words, but we do not really listen. Mary is attentive to God. She listens to God.

However Mary also listens to the events, that is, she interprets the events of her life, she is attentive to reality itself and does not stop on the surface but goes to the depths to grasp its meaning. Her kinswoman Elizabeth, who is already elderly, is expecting a child: this is the event. But Mary is attentive to the meaning. She can understand it: "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:37). This is also true in our life: listening to God who speaks to us, and listening also to daily reality, paying attention to people, to events, because the Lord is at the door of our life and knocks in many ways, he puts signs on our path; he gives us the ability to see them. Mary is the mother of listening, of attentive listening to God and of equally attentive listening to the events of life.

2. The second word: decision. Mary did not live "with haste", with breathlessness, but, as St Luke emphasizes, she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (cf. Lk 2:19, 51). Moreover, at the crucial moment of the Angel's Annunciation, she also asks: "how shall this be?" (Lk 1:34). Yet she does not stop at the moment of reflection either. She goes a step further: she decides. She does not live in haste but "goes with haste" only when necessary. Mary does not let herself be dragged along by events; she does not avoid the effort of taking a decision. And this happens both in the fundamental decision that was to change her life: "I am the handmaid of the Lord..." (cf. Lk 1:38), and in her daily decisions, routine but also full of meaning. The episode of the wedding of Cana springs to my mind (cf. Jn 2:1-11): here too one sees the realism, humanity and practicality of Mary who is attentive to events, to problems.

She sees and understands the difficulty of the young married couple at whose wedding feast the wine runs out; she thinks about it, she knows that Jesus can do something and decides to address her Son so that he may intervene: "they have no more wine" (cf. v. 3). She decides.

It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead, we frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times we know what we ought to do, but we do not have the courage to do it or it seems to us too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the

Visitation and at the wedding of Cana Mary goes against the tide. Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.

3. The third word: action. Mary set out on a journey and “went with haste” (cf. Lk 1:39). Last Sunday I underlined Mary’s way of acting: in spite of the difficulties, the criticism she would have met with because of her decision to go, nothing could stop her. And here she leaves “with haste”. In prayer, before God who speaks, in thinking and meditating on the facts of her life, Mary is not in a hurry, she does not let herself be swept away by the moment, she does not let herself be dragged along by events. However, when she has clearly understood what God is asking of her, what she has to do, she does not loiter, she does not delay, but goes “with haste”. St Ambrose commented: “There is nothing slow about the Holy Spirit” (Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam, II, 19: PL 15, 1560). Mary’s action was a consequence of her obedience to the Angel’s words but was combined with charity: she went to Elizabeth to make herself useful; and in going out of her home, of herself, for love, she takes with her the most precious thing she has: Jesus. She takes her Son.

We likewise sometimes stop at listening, at thinking about what we must do, we may even be clear about the decision we have to make, but we do not move on to action. And above all we do not put ourselves at stake by moving towards others “with haste” so as to bring them our help, our understanding, our love; to bring them, like Mary, the most precious thing we have received, Jesus and his Gospel, with words and above all with the tangible witness of what we do. (Pope Francis. Address. May 31, 2013).

Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of “putting ourselves out there” for accompaniment requires being available and ready to take on the other; i.e., to be willing to “allow ourselves to be touched” by his or her life experience. An “antiseptic” accompaniment, in which we keep our distance, has no reason to be. Only if another’s life is taken on can it be redeemed for thus Christ did for each one of us - He, the Lamb immolated for our salvation. We too are called to this!

Mary, woman of listening, open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.

Mary, woman of decision, illuminate our mind and our heart, so that we may obey, unhesitating, the word of your Son Jesus; give us the courage to decide, not to let ourselves be dragged along, letting others direct our life.

Mary, woman of action, obtain that our hands and feet move “with haste” toward others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus, to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did. Amen. (Pope Francis, Prayer to Mary, the Woman of Listening, May 2013).

Discernment and Decision Making in the Process of Accompaniment

Juan Crespo, SDB

Structure of the talk:

1. Setting the theme in the context of the *Strenna*
2. Teach us to accompany the lives of young people!
3. What accompaniment are we talking about?
4. The pastoral relationship
5. Teach us to discern your presence in the lives of young people!
6. The fundamental and basic rule (observing and centring the "heart")
7. Signs of spiritual discernment. Ability to face life
8. Spiritual dynamics of the vocation call
9. Discernment requires mediation and practical tools
10. In conclusion

I am grateful for the invitation to participate in the reflection of these Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family. We are reflecting on a topic of charismatic importance. Our call to holiness and our fidelity to God commit us to enter into a journey of growth in faith and vocation with young people.

I was asked to make a contribution on the "discernment and decision making in the accompaniment process", with the aim of finding paths of reflection on the *Strenna* of the Rector Major for this year 2018, and in the light of the upcoming Synod of Bishops "Young people , Faith and Vocation Discernment".

This intervention on the proposed theme is the result of personal reflection and the experience of a team, who form youth ministry agents for the accompaniment of young people.

The illustration will follow the order indicated in the "structure of the talk". The perspective is pastoral and formative, even if we cannot ignore a certain reflection with a glance at the foundation of this service for youth ministry. The material presented, with footnotes, is plenty, but the illustration will be shorter.

1. Setting the theme in the context of the *Strenna*

The Gospel story is appropriate for listening and discernment: "Let us cultivate the art of listening and accompanying", with the plea: "Lord, give me this water" (Jn 4: 15).

Jesus shows himself to be a master in the art of listening and of discernment through accompaniment. His eyes and ears reached the depth of the person. Jesus has the ability to see what we do not see, to hear what we do not hear and to clearly discern where we do not reach: "Do you still not perceive and understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear?" (Mk 8: 17-18).

In the Old Testament, prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel attribute this blindness and deafness to insensitivity, to the stubbornness and rebellion of the people to God (Jn 5: 21, Ez 12: 2).

When we speak of spiritual discernment, we recognize that:

- We are not up to this proposal: to listen, to accompany and to discern. Our ears, our eyes and our sensitivity must be transformed;
- But the Lord invites us to take off our shoes before his Mystery and before the mystery that is hidden in every person who opens his/her heart.

This mission of accompanying is a "holy ground" (cf. Ex 3: 5) of closeness which, at the same time, heals, frees and encourages the maturing of the Christian life of the young (cf. EG 169).

To address the issue, we have to start from some statements and questions, which can be further made more precise:

1. The exercise and the relationship of accompaniment are learned in action and prayer (Word), but require science, skill, art and wisdom. This ecclesial ministry involves the one who accompanies and the person who is accompanied, in a "differentiated unity".
2. Spiritual accompaniment is necessary and convenient today in the pastoral care of the "processes" and in the new paradigm of Christian initiation of the young, in vocation discernment and in the formation to the different states of life.
3. Basic aspects of accompaniment ("Spiritual Direction"):
 - a. the one accompanying ("authorized mediation"),
 - b. the person being accompanied (*willing* freedom),
 - c. awareness in both of the presence and the action of the Grace of God,
 - d. an honest "fair play" relationship,
 - e. the aim: to discern the growth of the life of God in the person, the decisions and the ordinary or fundamental options of life.
 - f. Accompaniment converts us to a correct relationship with God, with ourselves and with others.
4. In mid-twentieth century, "spiritual direction" went through a profound crisis, losing prestige and value in the conscience of believers. The causes

that contributed to this were internal and external to the Church. In the past the authority of the “spiritual director” was important; today we choose to respect the person as a relational being and one open to transcendence.

5. The recovery and updating of “spiritual direction”, like the wisdom of the Church, is a consequence of several factors, including the contribution of human sciences in the process of faith, the new unitary vision of the person of Vatican II, the renewal of biblical theology and exegesis and the needs of youth culture.
6. Cultural change requires the integration of faith as a gift and the demands of cultural anthropocentrism. The person with his/her freedom and responsible autonomy, with personal conscience (subjectivity) and with an ethical-moral sense, tends towards God. However, this human dynamism does not have the capacity by itself to reach the gift that God makes of himself to humanity and to every person in Jesus Christ.
7. The charismatic mission consists in educating and introducing young people to the life of God with the style of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Our founders were able to make a proposal of “spiritual direction” with the practice of the Preventive System and with community and educative life, in a relational context that promoted the path to holiness. Personal attention was achieved in this context of “loving kindness” (*amorevolezza*).
8. The Salesian charism incorporates pastoral accompaniment to the creative and pedagogical dynamism of the Preventive System, at the service of the education and growth of the young person's Christian vocation, with concrete resources and attitudes: educating presence, solicitude for the good of the young and attention to him/her as a person, taking care of the “divine” life in them (cf. Wis 11: 24ff), a youthful family environment, relationships of trust, educative processes, creativity in making decisions, a rich pedagogy mediated by grace, etc.
9. Therefore, listening and discernment lead us back to the spirit of the Preventive System and the Oratory: to take care of the hearts of the young, to prepare them for the reception of God and to offer them the means so that grace may live in their lives which are filled with hope, and so that they can make choices and the most appropriate decisions in their lives.

2. Teach us to accompany the lives of the young!

With the Samaritan woman, we ask, “Lord, give us to drink the water that wells up to eternal life! Teach us to accompany, to be compassionate companions (*cum-pan-ire*) – women and men”.

Accompaniment leads us back to biblical and ecclesial images with a strong charismatic resonance: God is the shepherd of Israel and Jesus the new shepherd of the Kingdom. In the Church, there are witnesses, companions and those who introduce in the mystery of God (mystagogues).

This ministry was practiced and transmitted by spiritual teachers (Saint Ignatius, Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Francis de Sales ...). From their personal experience, they have implemented, in their time, what the masters of previous centuries had put into practice. Thus, "spiritual direction" belongs to the best tradition of the Church, preserved through history; and it was, together with prayer, the mediation most used towards Christian perfection and the search for God's will.

In this sense, we can see that in history there is a period "before" and one "after" the Council of Trent and the spiritual currents of the sixteenth century concerning discernment and spiritual direction.

This ecclesial ministry has these two blocks in time, which are now being considered; and perhaps we are forging a third historical block, updating it in the present.

In his dream at nine, Johnny Bosco heard: "Here is your field, here is where you have to work; grow humble, strong, and steadfast; and what you see now happening with these animals, you will have to do with my children".

Our founders grew up in this spiritual *humus* of faith, under the protection of people who respected the work of God in their lives. In this way, they have learned to be docile to God and to ecclesial mediations. Thus, being accompanied [themselves], they learned filial and fraternal affection, while as people who accompanied [others] they exercised spiritual fatherhood and motherhood.

Until the Second Vatican Council, spiritual direction was a pastoral ministry exclusively for priests, as the expressions "caring for souls" and "spiritual father" reveal. Most of the times, it was joint to the sacrament of Reconciliation. In the Salesian tradition, accompaniment was a privileged element; it was present as a genuine characteristic of the pedagogy and spirituality of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello; and it was introduced into youth ministry with different names: 'spontaneous quality encounters', educative colloquy, accompaniment in the youth group, spiritual direction, sacramental encounter...

This vital root is a river of "living water" that reaches us with the fragrance of ecclesial faith. We can affirm that we are in a moment of giving new meaning to accompaniment and spiritual discernment in our culture and history.

This ministry comes to us after a long journey, as a Salesian Family.

Where are we? What has been the path in recent years?

It can be said that, during the twentieth century, spiritual direction was present in the pastoral imagination, but it was not a well-cared-for and renewed practice. The pastoral care of the environment, the educative, cultural and sacramental care have been at the centre of the pastoral task; and, in some places, the itineraries of faith have been present in a brilliant way.

Personal accompaniment, however, has been neglected, coming to consider it foreign to the Salesian charism. Nevertheless, there has always been a good practice, even if reduced to a small scale, within the Salesian Family, of this ecclesial ministry linked to specific people and environments.

In our opinion, the "X Week of Spirituality of the Salesian Family" (23-29 January 1983) was the first serious and explicit setting of this theme after the renewal of the

Second Vatican Council and GC XX of the SDB. The reflections published responded to the *Strenna* of the Rector Major: "We promote the Christian maturing of people and of the community by renewing and intensifying, with Salesian style, the formative experience of Spiritual Direction". The contributions highlighted the pastoral intervention of spiritual direction as an original formative experience of the Salesian spirit and as a necessary help for Christian maturity in the daily life of all young people. The application of spiritual direction to the Preventive System, with a plurality of forms and degrees of intensity, is the original characteristic of the Salesian charism. However, it was stated that Spiritual Direction requires a high degree of spiritual life and pastoral zeal for communities and members of the SF.

Later there was a period of lethargy, more or less conscious and with occasional exceptions within the Salesian Family, up to the last two General Chapters of the SDB (XXVI and XXVII) and of the FMA (XXII and XXIII), and the renewed Apostolic Project of the Salesian Co-operators. The four seminars of the Youth Ministry Department of the SDB, the actions of the *Ambito* for Youth Ministry of the FMA, the new "Frame of Reference of Youth Ministry" and other local initiatives have been and continue to be a promise for the updated recovery of Spiritual Accompaniment of the young in the Salesian charism. For sure, the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS), the Pontifical Faculty of Sciences of Education "Auxilium" and other university and pastoral organs of the Salesian Family gave courses and published precious reflections, which we have not always taken into consideration and been able to utilise.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the canonization of Dominic Savio, in 2004, Fr Pascual Chávez proposed a real challenge in the *Strenna* of 2004: "We propose to all young people the joy and commitment of holiness as a high measure of ordinary Christian life". In the commentary, he stated:

"We have to shift [...] from proposing models to accompaniment as true guides in the spiritual life of young people; from accompaniment to assistance creating personal and environmental conditions, like a microclimate, where great life choices can germinate, mature and bear fruit. The personal conviction of Don Bosco was that without spiritual direction he would not have achieved anything good. For this reason he wanted to be a spiritual guide for his young people, one who was enthusiastic, pointed out values, invited to commitment, guided and corrected them".

The pedagogy of accompaniment, in the context of the Preventive System, gives us greater clarity and evangelizing quality. In our opinion, the reflective efforts, formative initiatives and pastoral experiences of the last ten years provide us with a real frame of reference to give space to "pastoral and formative accompaniment" with creativity and depth in the vast and varied field of the Salesian Family. Salesian Youth Ministry is particularly stimulated by this awakening of the Spirit.

3. About what accompaniment are we talking?

However, what accompaniment are we talking about? Of course, it is not any accompaniment. In our charism we speak of educative, formative and spiritual accompaniment: it is educative in so far as it is spiritual and spiritual in so far as it is educative. It is formative inasmuch as it con-forms the faith structure of

the personality. But what defines the spiritual and educative accompaniment is its **theological** meaning and orientation.

The structuring and essential centre of accompaniment and spiritual discernment is the Mystery of the Trinitarian God, with the consequent understanding of the human person in His saving economy. God gives himself and is incarnated in the human person, his image and in the likeness of the Son, as Grace and experience of faith, in the merciful and healing love that communicates the Holy Spirit.

Educative and spiritual accompaniment is a meaningful mediation of this event of the Mystery of God, fully revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and is realised in his people through the action of the Spirit. The Church is the custodian of this gift, so that accompaniment takes place in her name, and is a visible expression of her evangelising mission at the service of God's plan of salvation.

But we also start from the person as a mystery of love, created in His image and in the likeness of the Son. That is, we start from the mystery of God and from the mystery of the person at the same time. Because human life is a privileged platform for faith, "Without this, life cannot exist, because neither meeting, nor friendship, nor reconciliation, nor love, nor anything that is most important in our existence would be possible".

Therefore, we accompany the young person as a mystery of love, called to communion, with the innate tendency towards realisation and with one's desire projected towards happiness.

When we use the adjective "spiritual", we are pointing to the content and orientation that it pursues: understanding life in the light of faith and responding to God's call. Therefore, educative-spiritual accompaniment helps the young person to understand one's life starting from faith and making decisions in response to God's call and to one's human maturity.

From all this, we can affirm that accompaniment can be considered as a relationship of spiritual help, fundamentally asymmetric and friendly at the same time, whose goal is to promote the process of discernment, in order to personalize the faith and the "becoming human" of the person who is accompanied, as an answer or assent to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and which arouses the Holy Spirit in the concrete structure of the young person; in a climate of respect and trust, and in the search for the greater good for the young man and woman of today.

Therefore, the accompaniment relationship should help the young person:

- towards the true knowledge and acceptance of oneself and one's environment, history, possibilities and limits;
- towards the process of being and becoming an independent, free and responsible person;
- towards the articulation and deepening of one's Christian experience, above all, discovering as a vital experience who God is and what he, the Father of Our Lord, means to him/her;

- towards the formation of the moral conscience and the experience of prayer;
- towards the discernment of the will of God in one's life and the reality that surrounds him/her;
- towards the realization of a project of responsible life and in faith;
- towards the process of a decision about one's vocation based on truth, justice and love.

Evidently, in the Salesian charism the "educative and pastoral accompaniment" is meant for all young people, at different levels of intervention. Therefore, we place ourselves within the personal accompaniment of growth processes.



This drawing helps us to understand that it is people who are involved in accompaniment, and the two aspects we will focus on: **relationship** and **discernment**.

It is true that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of discernment, but the centre of attention is in the person who is accompanied and in his/her process of transformation, when s/he places him/herself with sincerity before him/herself, before reality and before God. Although this is not always clear for and reflected upon by adolescents and young people, the one accompanying is certain about it thanks to one's faith and personal experience. Therefore, this is a special relationship of help because it incorporates discernment in the process of transformation of those accompanied and in the experience of the one accompanying them.

4. Pastoral relationship

Accompaniment with the Salesian charism takes place in daily life, in the educative setting of a relationship of total and spiritual help in which the young person grows and matures in identity, responsibility and freedom to live as a child of God, and to direct his/her life towards the generous commitment of a vocation project.

According to Bruno Giordani, accompaniment is a dialogue between two persons, a helping relationship in which growth towards the full maturity of Christian life

is sought. Thus, a healthy relationship is the starting point for a good accompaniment and the key to discernment.

The quality of relationships brings out the best of the person, and is able to cure pending issues; this issue cannot be neglected in the processes of discernment.

To this end, we who accompany must ask ourselves about the quality and significance of our past and present relationships. Because this quality and meaning will be present in the practice of spiritual accompaniment.

The relational dimension of accompaniment is a broad topic that we cannot afford to treat. However, I will limit myself to offering a scheme that helps us to orient ourselves vis-à-vis discernment, which is the theme of our conference.

It should be noted that the relationship of help in accompaniment has its own technique, which everyone who accompanies must learn and respect. This cannot be improvised.

The specific accompanying relationship differs from the colloquial and ordinary relationship with young people in the environment and in group dynamics (which is usually polluted by certain relational "vices"). The relationship of help includes three important aspects:

- **KNOWING:** Theoretical basis and its relationship with accompaniment.
- **KNOWING HOW TO BE:** Interiorising of vital attitudes for a healthy relationship of listening and discernment (existential stand of the one who accompanies).
- **KNOWING HOW TO DO:** Use of appropriate techniques and specific skills, in order to arouse and give quality to discernment within the relationship.



We shall follow this scheme, which is surely known by a good group among you, or by readers, but we cannot and should not ignore it.

- **Theoretical basis and its relationship with accompaniment (knowing)**

Humanistic psychology provides us with valid and proven tools for spiritual and pastoral accompaniment. These skills and tools have been present in the healthy spiritual tradition, and in the pedagogy of the Preventive System, as well.

The helping relationship has a positive view of the person, who is provided with an innate tendency to survival, growth and self-realization. The person

harbours the necessary resources for one's better functioning and to be able to discern one's life.

From this point of view, a hypothesis is established: if an adequate relationship is created, the person will discover in oneself one's capacity for growth and individual change, in relation to oneself and to others.

The helping relationship is a science for the one accompanying and a benefit for the one who is accompanied, in the service of the discernment of God's will.

- **Vital attitudes of a healthy relationship (knowing how to be).**

A relationship of spiritual help requires internalising and spontaneously acquiring certain vital attitudes on the part of the one who accompanies:

- Authenticity, sincerity and congruence.
- Unconditional acceptance, appreciation or positive consideration.
- Empathic understanding (the result of deep and active listening). This empathic technique is a demanding attitude, and becomes spontaneous with practice and training.

- **Appropriate techniques and specific skills (knowing how to do)**

The one who accompanies has skills provided by human sciences; but he/she also has other skills that are proper to spiritual wisdom in order to discern God's will. Discernment begins with the very relationship and its skills:

The most important ones are summarized in this outline:

- WELCOMING skill (attitude of unconditional acceptance)
- LISTENING skill:
 - Internal and external listening
 - Active and empathetic listening
- RESPONDING skill:
 - Empathetic response
 - Reformulated response (mirroring responses)
- PERSONALISING SKILL:
 - Knowing how to ask (help find solutions and seek discernment)
 - Helping to identify, formulate and internalise
 - Identifying the fruits (connection with spiritual discernment): self-confidence, humility and truth, acceptance of reality, self-control, good works, increase in listening to God, improvement in virtue ...

'Active listening' is an act of love that heals wounds, helps overcome difficulties, motivates self-knowledge and leads to a greater discernment of one's own truth. The one who is listened to feels recognized and can initiate a healthy process of self-awareness.

The acceptance of the person and the listening enlarge the heart, in which desire and nostalgia for God are inscribed. When the person feels heard, s/he gains

autonomy and identity: this way one will be able to solve for oneself one's pending questions, crises, vocation development ... This is prior to discernment, but it also prepares towards it.

In spiritual listening, the saving dynamism of God takes place, because in the depths of the human heart there is much of God that needs to flourish.

These psycho-pedagogical techniques do not act as therapy in the accompaniment, but rather as quality of relationship, mediation for the action of the Spirit, at the service of the spiritual process of the accompanied person and for the improvement of the one who accompanies.

The helping relationship is applied in the pastoral and other professional fields; but in accompaniment, it is carried out in the *interview* or *personal talk*, as the main tool. When the 'discernment of spirits' comes into play, other skills and attitudes are required, related to the 'working' of God, as we shall see.

5. Teach us to discern your presence in the life of young people! Lord, may young people seek to discern your presence and friendship in their lives!

We approach this science of the heart in the depth of the mystery of the person and in openness to the life of the Spirit, with the plea of the Samaritan woman.

Discernment is necessary because existence is crossed by ambiguities and deceptive situations, but also by certainties of sense and moral convictions. Discernment is necessary not only to differentiate between good and evil, but between different goods; not all goods are to be exercised by the person, some are only to be recognised and admired in others. From God, life has its order and 'discipline'. However, discernment is also necessary to place mistakes and errors within God's will.

The one who accompanies teaches and helps to know how to interpret the feelings and the deepest motions of the Spirit of God. Discernment moves in internal turmoil (emotional and spiritual) in various directions, until one of them settles in consciousness (awareness) as one's own and best expresses the will of God.

On the other hand, the desire of God nests in human desires and, at the same time, Grace [does so] in the tendencies of human nature. However, Grace pushes and grows, like wheat with darnel.

Let us make it clear that discernment is a science of the heart, learned in listening to the Word of God, in meeting the Word and in interpersonal encounters.

Accompaniment is, in itself, **history of salvation** in which God seduces (cf. Jr 20: 7) and Jesus becomes the way, the truth and the life (cf. Lk 24: 17).

5.1. Approach to spiritual discernment

The action of discerning, from the Latin 'discernere', refers to analysing, separating, examining, differentiating and knowing how to opt for the object that is pursued. It is a rational and emotional operation in view of a decision.

The Greek term 'diakrino' (διακρίνω) means 'to realise', 'to determine', 'to separate', 'to distinguish' one thing from another in order to know how to act; from that word comes 'crisis'.

Paul often talks about scrutinising (examining) or pouring over the scriptures. He often uses the Greek verb *diakrino* to adhere to the revealed message (cf. 1Thes 5: 20-21; 1Cor 6: 2; 9: 3; 11: 31; 13: 11).

Discernment applies to the person, to the community, to a group and to pastoral action.

Applied to the field of spiritual and vocation accompaniment, discernment can be defined as the art or science by which one seeks and recognises the divine origin (God's will) of what happens in a person or in a group, based on external signs, internal motions, on personal processes of growth or on signs.

The discernment we are talking about comes from the experience of faith and the hidden (but real) presence of the Mystery of God in the person. This presence is not static, but dynamic in the experience of the believer and in one's vocation history. "Spiritual discernment comes powerfully through as a constant in the life of the Christian in order to pass from the infantile age of faith to that of the perfect and mature 'man'".

The discerned existence leads to a Christian life shaped by the Spirit (cf. Rm 3: 6,8) and forges a personality moved by the theological life (cf. 1Thes 1: 2s; 5: 8-10; 1Cor 13: 13; Col 1: 4).

For Paul, discernment is not a matter of analysis, but of inner light. The causal analysis and rational search for the truth is not the most important nor the determining factor. The things of God are known from God and through a vital connection with the Spirit through innate knowledge (cf. 1Cor 2: 6-1). He who has known the love of God is able to discern because he lives in obedience to this love, which transforms him/her inwardly and, therefore, his/her conduct is born from this inner journey (cf. Rm 12: 1-2). The knowledge of God's will requires wisdom and spiritual intelligence, which surpasses all human calculation (cf. Col 1: 9b-11). But it is the Spirit who teaches to live in discernment, who communicates the theological life, that is to live out of faith, hope and love (cf. Hb 5: 11-14).

The one who accompanies spiritually lives in a discernment based on the experience of God in one's life. This is more important than knowing how to discern or what discernment is. Because the important thing is to be a mediator of the presence of grace and of the saving action of God.

The action of God in young people takes place, in many occasions, through this mediating presence.

5.2. Pedagogy of discernment. Issues to keep in mind

A community life and an atmosphere of faith, well cared for, with meaningful relationships and a solid spiritual life, are privileged areas of discernment.

This was, originally, the area of discernment preferred by Don Bosco. The young people came to the Oratory and experienced a crisis and personal transformation through an infectious lifestyle and [full] immersion. The educative system of the Oratory created an environment rich in human dynamism and grace

(sacramental life and prayer), which acted as points of reference for discernment. Personal accompaniment in the Oratory arose within the rhythm of daily coexistence and with spontaneity. Obviously, this basic community experience is indispensable in the Salesian charism, when we speak of accompaniment and spiritual discernment.

a) The community promotes and cares for the ways in which people are accompanied

The ordinary life of the educative-pastoral community presents many ways and opportunities to accompany young people and educators.

We highlight three basic educative elements of youth ministry:

- The pedagogy (approach) of esteem, affection and trust, which are serenely manifested. Personal growth finds the necessary *humus* to grow in this style, which is characteristic of the Salesian charism. The climate of affection, trust and respect is realised in the difference of roles and taking up the basic rules so that personal processes can take place. In these processes, the criterion of discernment is very important.
- The pedagogy (approach) of the 'itineraries of education to the faith' as the most appropriate community setting for personal accompaniment to arise, but above all in order to offer the experience of God in a community of youth. Many young people are accompanied through the experience of a youth group, with the support of friendship and the witness of faith of their peers and of adult points of reference in the faith. The 'itinerary of education to the faith', which follows the individuals' growth, and the 'itinerary of prayer' are of vital importance in Salesian Youth Ministry, together with the initiation into and celebration of the sacraments.
- The pedagogy of accompaniment is an aid to grow and to discern God's will regarding personal vocation and the Christian life in general, through the daily mediations of community life. Everyday life contains much information about behaviours, motivations, attitudes, openness and docility to God's initiative; and it offers opportunities to love and work in freedom, to live life as a mission in the style of Jesus.

Accompaniment in the community environment and in the different groups is as important as personal accompaniment. The community is a place of sanctification. The Salesian educative-pastoral model is aimed at the most vulnerable adolescents and young people. The mere fact of educating is an act of love; it is giving and bestowing life as a gift.

b) The young person must be prepared to recognise the passing of God through one's life

We move within an increasingly secular and critical culture, marked by functional thinking and religious pluralism. To this is added the crisis of institutionalised religions, especially the Church, and the narrowing of the existential horizon. Furthermore, in secularized societies, God is less and less useful.

However, God belongs to faith, to meaning and to the experience of connection and relationship.

In our opinion, spiritual discernment requires preliminary minimal conditions for young people today. These preliminaries will be in proportion to the possibilities of each young person.

Spiritual accompaniment requires that we take seriously the pastoral care of "preliminaries" which prepares towards faith and equips the subject to accept God's offer.

Secularity is positive and makes it possible to live a more purified faith. Faith must not deny anything of what culture offers as human, but find a new place for everything, purifying and transforming it.

These preliminaries start from and respect the situation and mentality of the young people, assuming:

- the demands of ethical humanism in regard to the subject with oneself and in relation, such as: the decision to be a person, the search for one's own truth, authenticity of life, respect for otherness, ethical values ...; and
- the freedom of God and his Grace: the gift that he makes of himself in Jesus Christ.

Those who accompany know how to recognise in the life of young people the manifestation of God's love. But they also offer the foundations of a Christian life and vocation: openness to transcendence, free disposition to the mystery, joyful acceptance of the asceticism that this approach to life entails, deciding to enter into relationship with God and with Jesus Christ ...

Therefore, the art of discernment is the most beautiful aspect of accompaniment and the speciality of this ecclesial ministry. The model and method of discernment can be considered from different approaches, depending on the type of accompaniment.

c) Discernment has its moment

The start of discernment has its moment, time and form in the personal history of the young person, with the bond of love that creates the Spirit, but it needs to be introduced.

Grace becomes present in human freedom, which moves between collaboration with God and the resistance to him being the personal centre and foundation of one's life.

The expression of Pope Francis is well known, "One has to keep watch over one's heart, so that evil may not enter in", which is applied to the importance of the examination of conscience. For the Salesian charism, this vigilance is prevention (it creates the right conditions) and promotion (it provides the pedagogical means for the development of human maturity and for the experience of God). Discernment moves between contrasts and internal tensions; that is why the personal self needs to be strengthened and prepared with an educative presence.

Faith is subject to much fragility, but endowed with inner strength. The more fragility in human aspects and in faith, the more accompaniment [is needed] (cf. *Amoris Laetitia* 291) with the law of gradualness, prudence and compassion about limitations (cf. AL 305).

The Salesian style relates the principle of the traditional “discernment of spirits” with the criterion of *preventive-ness* and with that of promoting the life of God in the young. The one who accompanies with the Salesian charism must be an expert in discerning the spirit of God and know how to promote it in the life of young people, as Don Bosco knew how to do so with Dominic, Michael and Francis, or as Maria Domenica Mazzarello knew how to guide the small group of five Daughters of Mary Immaculate in building their friendship with God.

6. Fundamental and basic rule (to observe and to centre the ‘heart’)

Sooner or later, in the process of accompaniment, the person has to discern the will of God, to decide whether God is the horizon of one’s life, or make ordinary decisions in which one’s own salvation and happiness are at stake.

The one who accompanies teaches young people the dynamics of inner listening (of aspirations, desires, fears, weaknesses...) ; so that they may learn to differentiate and interpret between the natural feeling of the self and the feeling of listening to God; between what leaves behind dryness and sadness, and what leaves behind joy and consolation, etc.

Don Cafasso used this method with Don Bosco, and Don Bosco did with Micky Magone and with many other young people, some of whom were his first children [at the Oratory].

Pope Francis frequently resorts to this wisdom of the spiritual tradition.

We offer here some basic guidelines to enter the path of discernment, applied to the educative and spiritual life of young people, whatever their personal situation may be.

The individual, with one’s intelligence and with the light of the Spirit, can distinguish true from false, error from truth. To do this, we observe stimulus and response, attraction and desire, where they come from and where they lead (the consequences); and how the inner self feels [at the end of it]...

To begin with and to prepare the relationship with God, it is convenient (1st):

a) Learn to differentiate, know what this is about and where it comes from

- Focalise the issue and define what it is about (by exploration or awareness): the issues that come into play in the person’s feelings. Listen to the feelings ...
- Distinguish and differentiate between the psychological (through self-observation) and the spiritual (through the action of God).
- Interpret what comes or stems from the tendency to selfishness or the tendency towards a more real love.
- Know what comes from reason and emotion alone, and what comes from the Holy Spirit in the matter of discernment and in the decision that follows

it. Not everything belongs to the saving action of God, there are forces contrary to the Kingdom of grace, which they destroy; or, although they appear good, they move from the self to the self for its own 'glory' ...

However, how do we know where it comes from?

- What comes from the good, from God and from the Kingdom (reign of God) produces:
 - A state of peace, although it does not always leave total tranquillity because it establishes an internal struggle that makes one grow.
 - Joy that comes from within; although sometimes with the loss of something that also attracts.
 - Inner freedom, personal identity and authenticity; although with some pain for the separation from the opinion and esteem of others.
 - Greater closeness to God and his love, to Jesus and his Gospel message; even if it is not lived up to the level of that perfection.
 - Will and desire to offer oneself to others with generosity and to share the faith; although with some resistance.
- On the contrary, what comes from the psychological part and from rational calculation, from personal selfishness and from forces contrary to the good and to the kingdom, usually produces:
 - Deep sadness; although momentarily [it can produce] satisfaction and superficial happiness.
 - Remorse and some guilt; even though one tries to justify it by reasoning or imitation of what everyone does.
 - Falling under the spell of certain vices or habits that prevent living in freedom and authenticity.
 - Falling away from God, from the message of Jesus and from Christian charity.
 - Closing oneself more and more in one's own selfishness, darkness and closed mind.

To verify, on the side of the one who accompanies, the internal order of the one who is accompanied (2nd)

b) When is the person accompanied calm and 'orderly' in one's affections?

Normally the person

- experiences and expresses serenity and inner order when reason, affectivity and will are oriented to the same object and inclination; and
- experiences and expresses concern when there is a serious divergence in the direction or decision taken, or yet to be taken, between reason, affectivity and will.

The question, then, is to become aware of the following: Where is one directed: *What is one's focus?*

In order to do this, the one accompanying helps to listen properly and raises questions so that the person may find out where one's feelings of peace or concern come from and where do they take him/her; what thoughts are derived from them and where do they lead him/her; what motivations intervene and where they lead.

Usually there are two poles to clarify: God and the *obtuse* self (clumsy and the centre of reality).

What is the fundamental orientation? To that effect, the person will have to see if one's thoughts, inner feelings and will lead to God, bottle up (tighten) the self or broaden one's view.

If there is a process, the Spirit leads eventually to the centrality of God in life, or to be founded on Him. Prayer, especially with the Word, and life will be decisive in this journey.

To continue moving forward in one's relationship with God (3rd):

c) Important issue: towards where and how is my fundamental orientation?

- **What moves me in life?** From *where* do I live? (What are my motivations?)

Differentiate: what I do, how I do it and where my actions come from (from my needs, from within, from the will of God, from the paschal dimension of Jesus, from the Spirit).

- **Two perspectives of orientation in spiritual life:**

➤ **From and towards oneself**

How do opposite tendencies to the will of God work?

- The self acts as closed and justified in its reason and narcissistic affectivity to continue in its own emptiness. The obtuse mind (the greatest enemy) will act on feelings and desires with affective compensations, identifying them with greater happiness. The mind and affection will give reasons to convince [the person] that everything is fine, but justifying oneself while clinging to one's very self.
- The Holy Spirit will act in a very different way if the person opens him/herself to the love of God. The Spirit will point out lies and make the person see that s/he is not OK with oneself or with God. In this way, he will act on the reasoning and cause discomfort; even if the feelings remain scattered.

If the person is authentic, s/he will not endure the onslaught of God that tends to take him/her out of one's comfort zones and shelters with the logic of the life of the Kingdom. If the person changes or modifies him/herself, s/he may experience a different kind of peace.

The Spirit gives light to know how to distinguish between being complacent and living happily, between being satisfied and being serene in the truth, between experiencing gratifying love or real and true love. For the Saviour's passion is consolation.

➤ **From God and towards God**

How does the inclination that brings God closer act and how does the one that takes away from Him act?

- If the orientation is good, the action of the Holy Spirit (1st) maintains reason, feelings and will directed towards God. It will act on the feelings, nourishing them with spiritual consolation; on the reason, seeking understanding in what is being lived; and on the will, moving it towards actions of service and good. The person can continue to live from him/herself, but s/he knows that s/he is not the centre (2nd); God's will is oriented toward the sequel of and with Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God will lead to this humble sequel. However, one will find reasons and feelings that push the person away from this centre and foundation.
- On the other hand, the action of the *opposite spirit* ('enemy') separates mind, heart and inclinations (reason, affectivity and will) to break the right orientation and cause restlessness. It will act on the reason causing false reasoning, creating obstacles or increasing them; on affectivity by causing attraction for prestige and for personal 'idolatry'; and on the will orienting it to actions of appropriation and personal gain. These false 'goods' can be discovered by the fears, anxieties and dryness they sow in the soul or 'centre of interiority'. Its (i.e. of the enemy spirit and of the false goods) strategy will be to attract with initial questions, which cannot be considered before the action; other strategies will be to keep the person at the level of first impulses, or occupying one's mind (which is vague and superficial) with memories, people and known events.

d) The journey is long, it's not "something" of one day

Discernment is not the result of a few moments of prayer and reflection, but of an inner process of comparison with reality, of analysis of the facts, of processes of human maturity, of confrontation with the Gospel, of a living relationship with the Lord and of contemplation of His mysteries. Discernment requires time and inner repose.

The guidelines given by the one accompanying are of decisive importance; above all, to propose to the person accompanied the 'instruments' necessary to acquire the wisdom of discernment in everything; and also to teach the prayer of discernment.

These 'instruments' are basic orientations based on feelings, thoughts and inclinations of the will. The tools that provide the same nature and spirit of God are many. However, the relationship with God, the listening to the Word and the reading of reality as a believer are central to spiritual discernment.

Christian life is lived in discernment; therefore, this never ends. However, let us bear in mind that the discernment par excellence comes from listening to the Word, and it is up to this Word to discern the reality and the life of the believer (cf. Rm 12: 2).

7. Signs of spiritual discernment. The ability to face life

Discernment is spiritual, and its art lies in detecting the action of the Holy Spirit in the experience of faith and in the ordinary life of a person with a [special] vocation.

In reality, the most important aspect of discernment is not the decisions to be made or the actions to be taken, but the effects of transformation that it leaves in the person and the change in [the level of] freedom that has been operated in him/her, so that one may live out in service, in humility and in one's availability to act well, as a fruit of love received. But the greatest fruit, effect and result is growth in the relationship with God and with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The truth of discernment is not in the rapid change, but in the transformation – slow but real – of the person within one's conscience. Decisions and behavioural change usually arrive later and they are the last thing that changes. Because, if the change is the fruit of true love, it comes from within and to the rhythm of the presence of God's love. A consistent human and spiritual process is a place and a sign of discernment.

In effect, every decision made after a discernment must be confirmed in time by the fruits or effects that it produces in the person. This confirmation of the initial "post-discernment" also requires a degree of fidelity and relationship with God.

The classic fruits of spiritual life are set forth by St Paul in the fifth chapter of Galatians; they are also called spiritual gifts: love, joy, peace, patience, forbearance, kindness, goodness, meekness, fidelity, modesty, continence, chastity.

We must bear in mind that spiritual progress is not objectively observable, though it is real. It means that spiritual life and union with God are verified in their effects and fruits. These come from one's way of thinking, feeling and acting. However, they are noticeable in the quality of relationships and in the change of motivations.

When it comes to adolescents and young people, these signs and fruits are also shown by the ability to deal with important issues of their life and person. That is, they affect the contents of accompaniment at the level and depth, in integrity and honesty.

It should be noted that accompaniment and discernment take place starting from the real, from what happens in the reality of life. Often, in the personal talk, we become abstract: we talk about desires, of what we think, of what we would like or not like, about other people...

Some of the topics of conversation in the process of accompanied discernment are:

- About what happened since the last meeting:

- important facts,
 - most common thoughts and feelings (what goes on within),
 - sense of reality and what one does, thinks and lives.
- Reconciliation with past history: pending issues of reconciliation or that must be revised so that they acquire a new sense and meaning, in the light of the present.
 - Affectivity and sexuality – past and present. Affections, attachments, affective processes.
 - Relationships: family, friends, socialisation, recipients of the mission.
 - Other aspects of maturity and personal change: development and moral conscience, solidarity ethics, quality of relationships, work ...
 - Structural or area of consistency of the person: values, attitudes and needs; emotions, motivations and defence mechanisms...
 - Life as a vocation, mission and creativity ... Appropriate intention in everything...
 - Relationship with God: images and history of the relationship with God, the idea of Jesus Christ and relationship with Him, forgiveness in the name of Jesus, sacramental life ...
 - Prayer: Introduction to the relationship with God, methods and pedagogy, examination of prayer and specific actions (recollections, Spiritual Retreats ...).

1st Remark: So that there may be a process of discernment, a contrast between poles must happen: the real and the subjective; the objective and the personal. For this, we have the analysis of reality and the guidelines of the Word. Trust is important.

The one who accompanies creates this contrast, listening to what happens in the subjectivity of the person (helping him/her to discern it) and, at the same time, offering objective content (of Christian doctrine and of analysis of reality). If the person enters the path of faith, the Word is an obligatory point of reference. Only the Word reaches the marrow of the soul (cf. Hb 14: 12).

2nd Remark: The one accompanying must know how to encourage the spirit of search for the truth, the beauty and the best aspect of life in the young person. To achieve this, the guide will address his/her noble heart and what God is awakening in him/her. Above all, the desire for 'holiness', the desire for an 'extra' of love and a certain theological intuition (to live out of faith in trust, out of love in gratuitousness, and out of hope in patience). The "ability to smell God" or theological sensitivity is very important; one can educate with magnanimity, gratuity in everything, total gift of self ...

8. Spiritual dynamics of the call (vocation)

Discernment is applied to Christian life, with regard to the call. When this happens in a specific way, discernment acquires a different dimension, according to the biblical dynamics of the call, from the spiritual structure of faith.

Every Christian vocation must be discerned from its spiritual origin, but also as a free and confident response. Every authentic vocation has its origin in the call and its effect on the response; therefore, it is discerned from this double dynamics.

The *vocation call* is a passionate response to the One who calls, who acts from within the personal nature. For this purpose, we point out its dynamics:

- *The initiative always comes from God: "No one can come to me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him"* (Jn 6: 44).
- *The person called by God allows himself/herself to be probed, ministers to the Caller and to what He calls for; therefore s/he is ready to discover this call both in his/her personal inclinations and in everyday history, as well as to choose with responsibility a certain lifestyle, by consenting to God.*
- *God supports and cares with the warmth of the Spirit, and He makes Himself perceived by the person. The perception of the `mysterious presence of God´ is discerned in good works; in the process of transformation; in internal motions; in serene and trusting availability; in inner freedom; in apostolic and charismatic zeal, and in the "intentionality of being". However, the most obvious form of perception is the infused presence of God, in some particular cases.*
- *The call challenges the person's own freedom and autonomy. This does not happen in a miraculous way: each one assents, accepts, responds and expresses that response with motivations, thoughts, ways of being, and even in different circumstances; but there will be some dense and founding experiences that imprint the 'certainty' of the divine call.*
- *The answer is the fruit of Grace and the Spirit; it is neither the fruit of the will, nor of one's own merits. The response is generated to the extent that Divine Grace attracts in one direction and not in another. The most 'felt' attraction is accompanied by inner freedom and deep peace of heart, but it generates a response that to a large extent appears as 'obedience'. "No one can come to me unless the Father draw him" (Jn 6: 44).*

The call (vocation) tends to awaken the desire for apostolic dedication, the dream of a project, identification with an ideal, imitation of reference persons ... All these are [positive] signs.

- *A particular charism helps to identify the concrete ways of the response to the specific mission in accordance with one's spiritual attraction: "Here I am, send me" (Is 6: 8).*
- *The call and vocation response are made concrete in a way of life according to one's choice, in the acceptance of *a journey proposed by the charism and taking responsibility for personal formation*. A vocation or call is discerned in*

the learning process, with one's eyes fixed on Jesus and on real life. God's will is discovered every day.

Thus, the objective dimension of faith (its content) is inserted into the subjective dimension of the young person, to the rhythm of his/her stages of maturity. The call is effective in everyday life, but life offers crises and stages of concentration in which a greater discernment and vocation evaluation is needed.

Those who accompany are witnesses of this dynamics that involves reflection and praxis. The person who is called is formed from within, in real life and in community interaction; and this entails an active and passive attitude at the same time.

9. Discernment require mediations and practical tools

Christian spirituality is an experience that is verified in the real life. God does not reveal himself directly, but He lives incarnated and He manifests himself through mediations.

This topic of mediations is a central point in the spiritual process, without eliminating the possibility of the immediacy of God's absolute free presence, in our finite freedom.

The infused experience of God must be very well discerned...

God desires and is able to communicate in an immediate way, but He usually does so through mediations. However, He gives himself well beyond them, since He is given as a gift and as grace. What is essential is our faith in Him, our love for His holy will and our willingness to obey.

Pedagogically, the one who accompanies knows how to propose instruments that help in spiritual discernment, in order to grow in one's life with God or in decision-making.

9.1. Mediations of the Spiritual Life

a) History of Salvation and Church Mediations

- Jesus Christ, the Lord: a mediation in which all the others converge. He is the centre. This principle cuts across the whole revelation and the gospels. Relationship with Jesus is a central theme in Christian Spirituality and, therefore, in accompaniment.
- The Eucharist and the sacraments.
- The Word (in the Holy Eucharist) and a preaching which is full of life.
- The Church as People of God assisted by the Holy Spirit (the *Magisterium* ...).
- The signs of the times (human history, the praxis of the Kingdom ...)
- The works of love: works of mercy, exercise of charity and of virtues...
- Aspects of charismatic spirituality.
- The accompaniment ministry is a mediation of the Church, a 'caring for souls' and a path of sanctification; but it has its appropriate moment in every believer.

b) Mediations from ordinary life and significant experiences

The mediations in daily life are many. But there are important mediations that are conducive to the experience of God, and to the deepening of personal life.

- **Ordinary life.** In the ordinary, the extraordinary is given. Ordinary life as a mediation of God is always newness and creativity, because God saves us in our history and in everyday life. The great challenge of accompaniment is to live in faith our daily lives.
- **The “Itineraries of Education to the Faith” and the “Itineraries of Prayer”.** The EPC (Educative and Pastoral Community) and the local Youth Ministry are the privileged environment where young people have the opportunity to participate in faith groups and in the relationship with God. This option must be underlined and is important for personal follow-up.
- **Loneliness and silence.** Serene affectivity, reflection, the ability to be alone, working peacefully with others, intimate communion with the loved ones and with the community group; the presence of God; pastoral zeal; the intimate world...
- **Pastoral and ethical responsibility (work).** Work and love go together, as the capacity to assume and live daily reality without taking refuge in the imaginary, in idealised desires or in fantasy and fears. Our responsibility for action is in the inner self.
- **Meaningful relationships.** Our relationship with God is based on affectionate and emotional connections, and it is developed and tested through healthy and meaningful relationships (‘face to face’).
- **Prayer** is a privileged mediation. It unfolds in itself both personal life and life with God (without feeding rationalisations, imagination or projected desires). True prayer is lived in emotional depths, in reconciliation with the reality, in gratuitous love and in the relationship with God. It is necessary to relate prayer and listening to the Word; prayer and self-knowledge; prayer and real life. There is [always] an important moment to introduce *Lectio divina* as a privileged method of prayer.
- **Challenging (“confrontation”)** is wisdom of discernment, when it is well done. It requires trust and acceptance. It is hard and it sometimes hurts; but it gives peace and it opens up horizons.
- **Borderline experiences** that overflow and break, both in terms of fullness as well as deprivation such as: having a child; a deep experience of prayer; death; suffering; a failure ...

The one who accompanies knows how to take advantage of those experiences where the person is surprised and strongly affected. There are multiple mediations in ordinary life.

9.2. Tools to accompany discernment

a) The interview: a basic tool for personal accompaniment

The personal interview is the privileged area where the dynamics of the relationship and conversation are carried out, as well as the clarification and analysis of the discernment process.

The interview has its technique and requires training, trust and confidentiality.

The interview or personal accompaniment colloquy is a privileged encounter: what is the relationship established by the one who accompanies with the one who is accompanied and vice versa?

➤ **Hints for the one accompanying, before the interview:**

- 1) Put aside time with long intervals, with a serene attitude and in an appropriate place.
- 2) My personal preparation, which includes prayer.
- 3) Read the previous notes about this person and remember his/her history [background]
- 4) The room where we are meeting and privacy conditions.

➤ **Regular interviews:**

- 1) Welcome, listen and understand the young person in his/her affections, feelings and motions of the spirit.
- 2) Help the person accompanied to go deeper by means of concreteness, immediacy and exploration.
- 3) You can offer some material about the topic, phase or circumstance lived by the person.
- 4) Confrontation (a challenge) or interpretation will be offered, according to prudence.
- 5) Make some proposals, in order to help the person to see options or take actions.

➤ **Interviews to finalize the accompaniment:**

- 1) The one who is accompanied makes his/her own review of the journey
- 2) The one who accompanies adds his/her own assessment.
- 3) Try to open up to future experiences.
- 4) Prepare the farewell and both (the one who accompanies and the one accompanied), place their affections in God alone.

b) Some working tools for the accompaniment

- **Notebook of the one who accompanies.** This confidential instrument is important for the one accompanying who takes seriously the life of those entrusted to him/her by the Lord. Meaningful aspects of the process of the ones s/he accompanies are written down on the notebook as well as the subjective aspects of impact and of personal work. It is also good to observe the possible instances of transference.
- **Personal diary of the one who is accompanied.** Some people call it a 'spiritual notebook' where those accompanied write the resonances, the discernment process, the concrete proposals, the decisions to be made and, above all, the relationship with God in prayer and in listening to the Word.
- **Personal Plan.** The personal plan belongs to the pedagogy of the person in process, aware of his/her possibilities and limits, discerning the work of God in his/her process of transformation.

- **Autobiography.** The autobiography is very useful for personal knowledge and for self-exploration; to interpret life in the light of faith and for discernment. The one who accompanies has this privileged tool to help the accompanied person to pause, reflect on his/her own life and take it responsibly.

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this conference was to provide some clues to reflect on “discernment and decision making in the process of accompaniment”, in the context of the 2018 *Strenna*.

We started by praying with the Samaritan Woman. This story reminds us of another one, that of the Good Samaritan. I think the Lord wants to imprint a ‘Samaritan spirit’ on the members of the Salesian Family, to heal the wounded youth with the oil of compassion; to be hosts and healers at *Kingdom’s Inn*, the Kingdom of mercy; or to set up tents in the cities, in remote and even hostile territories in search of lost young people. We are members of the great *hospital* that is the Church, shelter and refuge of the most fragile. He will repay us in His own time, when He will return.

We, the Salesian Family, are now concerned with accompanying the young people, making God known and discerning with them the most appropriate way, so that the promise of Salvation may happen in their lives and they may know Jesus Christ.

However, being witnesses of the faith, as well as educators and spiritual guides, requires a process of conversion and training. I wish to convey my concern for formation to this ministry. The Church asks us for it, and so do the young people. We are called to be guides and spiritual teachers, with our own inner life and being well trained.

The journey consists in recovering the spiritual experience of our founders and the genuine educative style of the Preventive System, with the apostolic zeal and the pastoral charity of the Good Shepherd. Let us become capable of enriching the educative mission when it is necessary at the service of God’s experience in the young people; let us become capable to be competent guides in listening and in spiritual discernment, men and women of God, witnesses and teachers in the matters of the Spirit. This becomes an invitation from the Lord and the duty to give an answer to the young people of today, as well as to the concern of the Church.

We are all invited. Who is called to do it? Who lets him/herself be encouraged by the Spirit of God? Anyone?

With this talk, I hope to have enlightened, encouraged and helped you to discern the way ahead about God’s will on this topic, at the personal and institutional level, in each one of the branches of the Salesian Family.

Thank you very much.

Juan Crespo, sdb

The art of Salesian encounter, accompaniment and discernment

Michal Vojtáš, SDB

The best concrete form of the Salesian approach to education is the educative history of Don Bosco. Some basic principles are described in the short "notes" on the *Preventive System in the education of the young* written in 1877, must be understood within a rich framework of other narrative, educational, motivational and regulatory texts. The texts often explain the educative reality, the good practices in use or describe the exemplary students who are "told" to be an inspiration for a concrete reader. John Bosco narrates the beginnings of his Educative commitment in Turin, in December 1841, as a real encounter with a concrete boy - Bartolomeo Garelli. It was a beginning, consists of dialogue, understanding of the person and a simple proposal for catechism and games during the holidays. But placing the beginning of his educative work in that encounter is more, it is a paradigm of his educative style. The encounter, the dialogue, the support and the accompaniment are the cornerstones around which Salesian education revolves. Pope John Paul II rightly called Don Bosco as educator with "genius of the heart". Geniality and inner passion are condensed in the pastoral charity that stimulates pedagogical intelligence to translate into concrete educative gestures.¹

1. Narrative pedagogy of accompaniment in the discernment of young people

Starting from the narrative analysis of the biographies of the young people by Aldo Girauda,² I want to develop a brief summary of the Salesian accompaniment in seven steps. In the narration we can grasp not only the ideals of the man to be educated, but also some steps that describe the Salesian way of constructing the educative relationship and to develop in the young the constructive process in dialogue with the educative proposals of the educator and environment of the Salesian house.

¹ Cfr. E. VIGANÒ, *La nuova educazione*, in «Atti del Consiglio Generale» 72 (1991) 337, pp. 27-30.

² Cfr. A. GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in G. BOSCO, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besuccho*. Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Girauda, LAS, Roma 2012, pp. 28-30.

1.1. Welcoming

Don Bosco, as a paradigmatic educator, begins to build the educative relationship. Complete and cordial welcoming of the young person takes place through creating communication channel that is informal, contextual and friendly. Welcoming young people is not just a communication of openness and empathetic listening, which can be a technique that is learned with a special training. According to Pope Francis, it is also a "capacity of the heart that makes the closeness possible".³ With great clarity, Pietro Stella describes the concept of "heart" in Don Bosco as "the capacity of intellectual intuition and intense and spontaneous love, as capacity for understanding and love that springs from the most intimate psychological unity of man".⁴ Openness and closeness to the young person one encounters, presupposes an accepted vulnerability of the educator. This readiness to question oneself requires a psychological maturity and a profound personal balance. Without accepting the challenge of profound openness, dialogue remains welcoming only in a formal way and the non-authenticity is grasped intuitively by the young person.

In full confidence a "language of the heart" is created, a typical expression of Don Bosco, which we can see in action at the beginning of dialogues with various young people. With Dominic Savio a sync is created immediately: «Then I called him aside, and started to work [...], we soon entered into full confidence, he with me, I with him». ⁵ Michael Magone, who finds himself in the situation of the game led by him as "general of recreation", must be conquered little by little with a patient dialogue that demonstrates in a non-verbal way the statement of Don Bosco said at the beginning: "I am a your friend". ⁶ Bartolomeo Garelli, in the paradigmatic tale of 1841, is defended by Don Bosco with the same declaration of friendship that defends him in a situation of vulnerability and opens the dialogue of mutual knowledge:

"What does it matter to you?"

"It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him." [...] He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received. - "Have you attended Mass yet?" I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.^{[L]_{SEP}}

"No," he answered.^{[L]_{SEP}}

Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you." He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving, I took my candidate

³ FRANCESCO, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 171. Il paragrafo seguente è il contesto dell'espressione citata: «Abbiamo bisogno di esercitarci nell'arte di ascoltare, che è più che sentire. La prima cosa, nella comunicazione con l'altro, è la capacità del cuore che rende possibile la prossimità, senza la quale non esiste un vero incontro spirituale».

⁴ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001, p. 60.

⁵ G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera*. Raccolta antologica, LAS, Roma 2014, p. 1039.

⁶ G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1092.

*into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him eerfully:
"My good friend, what's your name?"⁷*

However it should be noted that Don Bosco brings into play a dialogue that is balanced. The empathetic openness overcomes the role of impassive, distant, managerial educator who in the period of Don Bosco was closely related to a demanding and austere religion that makes the salvation difficult, and to a philosophically cold, just judge, reachable only from high speculation and moral perfection. Actually, on the other hand, there is rather the risk of a trivializing acceptance according to the postmodern motto of *anything goes* or of a simplistic *I'm ok, you're ok*. An extreme centrality of the young person would lead to an empathy and acceptance to the point of avoidance of the educator. In this case, one could give reason to Nietzsche who through Zarathustra, declared the suffocated and weakened God for his compassion for men.⁸

1.2. Challenge

Don Bosco brings together the available and empathetic attitude offering the possibility of developing one's gifts and talents. In the encounter Don Bosco provokes intentionally expectation, desire, curiosity that brings the young out of his narrow horizons. Dominic Savio is tested about his desire and ability to study with the challenge of memorizing a page of Catholic readings. Domenic welcomes the challenge, anticipates the times and responds very well to the glove launched. Don Bosco remains convinced and promises him acceptance in the Oratory.⁹ In the encounter with Magone, Don Bosco sees not only his potential but also perceives his being in a risky situation. Here is the challenging question:

"My dear Magone, do you have the will to abandon this life as a brat and start learning some art or trade, or continue your studies?"

- yes, that I have will, answered with emotion, I do not like this damned life; some of my companions are already in prison; I fear the same for me; but what should I do? My father is dead, my mother is poor, who will help me?

- This evening makes a fervent prayer to our father who is in heaven; pray heartily, hope in him, he will provide for me, for you and for everyone ".¹⁰

The challenge in continuous dialogue is that Don Bosco does not reveal his name to Magone. He sends him back to others and thus provokes his curiosity. The challenging moment is very important for several reasons. The first is the gift of hope - the questions open the horizon of the young person

⁷ G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1235-1236.

⁸ Cfr. l'introduzione al quarto libro di F. NIETZSCHE, *Così parlò Zarathustra: Un libro per tutti e per nessuno*, Adelphi, Milano 1986.

⁹ Cfr. *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1039-1040.

¹⁰ BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1093.

beyond the concrete situation that has exhausted its potential or does not have many outlets for the future. The second element is the knowledge of the young person to understand if the young person is suitable for the educational environment and if so, how to insert him. The third element is an wider vision with the eyes of faith - Don Bosco advises him to pray cordially and to hope by entrusting himself. Finally, the last reason is the context of the free choice that Don Bosco leaves to the young. Dominic, need not learn the page of text, Bartholomew might not come after the Mass and Magone could forget about the identity of the unusual priest who appeared in the middle of the game.

1.3. Confidence - Trust

In the educative relationship, after the approach and the challenge that intrigues and opens horizons, we can arrive at the positive response of the young person. The correspondence to the challenge launched, the good will and commitment of the young come to the formulation of a "promise". The young person relies on the educator and enters into an educative relationship starting from the affective relationship and the sense of gratitude. At this moment it is recognized if the educator has found the accessible point to the good: "In every young person ... you have a accessible point to the good and first duty of the educator is to look for this point, the sensitive string of the heart".¹¹

Received the acceptance letter, our candidate was impatient to come to Turin. He thought of enjoying the delights of the earthly paradise, and becoming master of the money of all this capital. A few days later I see him appear ahead. "Here I am, he said, running towards me, here I am, I am that Michael Magone you met at the railway station in Carmagnola".

- I know everything, my dear; Did you come with good will?

- Yes, yes, I do not lack good will.

- If you have good will, I recommend that you do not put me in confusion all over the house.

"Oh, do not worry, I will not give you any displeasure. In the past I have behaved badly; for the future I do not want it anymore."¹²

In Don Bosco's stories, the accepted challenge on the part of the young man makes him to discover the feel of tension between the concrete situation and the promise of an ideal. The welcoming of the person by the educator, as the first step in the educative relationship, is a consonant promise with a possible and positive future. The second step of the challenge is prolonged in a distant ideal that resounds in the most intimate and profound parts of the young (the string of the heart). The uncertainty of the future is counter-balanced by the desire to work on oneself. The perception of one's limits is compensated by the trust that the educator places in the young. Braido places here the educational obedience that is gained with the complete welcoming and helps the growth of the young.

¹¹ G.B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 5, p. 367.

¹² BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1094.

Domenic Savio "came to the house of the Oratory and went to my room to give himself, as he said, entirely in the hands of his superiors."¹³ Here the anthropology of the educative system is in play. Inspired by Philip Rinaldi, the third successor of Don Bosco, we can state that the Preventive System is based on love and obedience to an order of universal and reasonable values. A repressive system of education, on the other hand, assumes a liberal and individualistic anthropology, thinking of a man who decides with free will to face arbitrary legislation and assumes all the consequences of his choices.

At this stage, an important sign is the gratitude of the young person who makes us understand if the educative offer is a gift made to him, or a gift that he deigns to do to the educator. In the story about Francis Besucco, this aspect of gratitude is very strong, even to the point of making him cry. On that occasion Don Bosco affirms: "This young man through healthy culture will make excellent success in his moral education. It is because it is proved by experience that gratitude in children is mostly a foretaste of a happy future; on the contrary, those who easily forget the favors received remain insensitive to announcements, advice, religion, and therefore find education difficult and lead to uncertainty of success ".¹⁴

1.4. Environment

At this point the accompaniment enters a new phase. The educative relationship between two people is part of a formative environment of the Salesian house. The interpersonal accompaniment becomes that of a community. From the coherent dialogue we move on to the systemic logic of many interventions and relationships. From the centrality of personalization to a certain standardization of educational itineraries. In the Salesian house the young person experiences proposals, high values, human relationships, activities and educational stimuli. In the rhythms of life and in the regulation, the duties and times of fun are balanced. The proposals of study go hand in hand with the proposals of spirituality.

In the stories that Don Bosco offers us, we glimpse the different types of young people. Some, like Besucco, who in a complex environment find themselves lost in inadequacy, disorientation and inferiority. These need encouragement, support and emotional closeness. A second group is represented by the experience of Magone who «in the early days he had no liking for anything from recreation outside. Singing, shouting, running, jumping, joking were the objects that satisfied his fiery and lively nature ». ¹⁵ The third group could, instead, be described in the figure of Dominic Savio:

His standard of living for a while was all ordinary; he admired an exact observance of the rules of the house. He applied himself to the study. He waited ardently for all his duties. He listened to the sermons with delight. He had rooted in his heart that the word of God is the guide of

¹³ BOSCO, *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1040.

¹⁴ G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1134.

¹⁵ BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1095.

*man to the way of heaven; so every utmost hearing in a sermon was an invariable memory for him that he no longer forgot.*¹⁶

Clearly, in the new situation, the educator does not leave the young person lacking in accompaniment, but it is interesting that Don Bosco brings the experience of assigning to the new ones a companion rather than an educator. Personalized accompaniment is necessary, but at this stage it is crucial to accompany the whole environment, plan times, balance experiences, train educators, give quality and meaning to the activities carried out, in a few words, balance the pedagogy of duties with the pedagogy of joy. In the experience of Magone the balance between duties, defined times and the joy of spontaneous recreation is the context of the story. The accompaniment through the care of the educational environment was so important for Don Bosco, that led him in the 50s and 60s to pass from the oratory to the college as a predominant work. In fact, in the college, the preventive-protective principle that structures the whole environment becomes more concrete.

In addition to following the "visible curriculum" made of times, spaces and activities, it is necessary to take care of the "hidden curriculum" which consists of the values transmitted by relational, behavioral, group dynamics or implicit standards that are not expressed. In this sense, the joy and trust between educators and the young are indicators of the quality of the process of accompaniment through the environment. This is demonstrated by the "educative testament" of Don Bosco - the letter from Rome, in which he wishes "to go back to the happy days of the ancient Oratory. The days of love and Christian confidence between the young people and the superiors".¹⁷

1.5. Crises

After some time spent in an educative environment, the accompanying stories describe a moment of severe crises. Indeed, it can be said that the crisis is the heart of the three biographies. Crises are different realities, linked to character, temperament, past experiences and the degree of maturation of each protagonist. Even if they are different, crises have a common symptom in the stories: decrease in happiness, melancholy or sadness.

In Dominic, the critical moment arrives six months after he entered Valdocco. After the sermon on holiness, a new horizon is opened for him which was before unattainable. The state of mind in which he finds himself is that of the desire and of the need to become a saint designed in absolute terms. The crisis arise when the strong desire for perfection clashes with the imagery of the instruments described in the popular spirituality of the time: extraordinary gestures, artificial penitences and heroic actions. In this crisis, called a "mystical" crisis by Giraudo, the task of the educator is the accompaniment in the excellence of the performance of ordinary commitments and activities aimed at the good of his peers. We can add that the task of a contemporary

¹⁶ BOSCO, *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1040.

¹⁷ G. BOSCO, *Lettera da Roma alla comunità salesiana dell'Oratorio di Torino-Valdocco*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 451.

educator, in addition to the accompaniment in the crisis, is also to arouse the desires of excellence and of holiness. Today's ethical horizontalism without ideals create depressive crises worse than those encountered in the path of perfection and holiness.

After a month's stay in the Oratory, Michael Magone is seriously confronted with the quality of the environment and he becomes aware of his own mediocrity. His commitment leads him rather to a "ethical" crisis, characterized by remorse of conscience and moral dilemmas. Michael manages to get out of it after several reassuring dialogues with the educator who suggests the hypothetical solution, but does not make decisions for him. It is a process of conversion, which allows him to access a state of spiritual serenity which he never experienced before and to emerge from it transforming into a new level of interiorized value, chosen with freedom, totality and enthusiasm.¹⁸ In this case the role of the educator is to accompany without replacing the young man's freedom (even for a false compassion) in a difficult moment. The carer supports but does not anesthetize, does not cure the symptoms but patiently guides the search for the root causes of the crisis of the young.

Francis Besucco, for his part, goes into crisis a few days after his arrival in Turin. He feels lost in an environment so different from the original one, he passes from the experience of the shepherd of the mountains to a life in a relatively closed environment of the city. His is an "affective" crisis, defined both by nostalgia for the native environment and by the sense of inferiority towards the companions. Don Bosco accompanies him and supports him affectionately proposing him a simple life project:

Practice only three things and everything will be fine [...]: Cheefulness, Study, Piety. This is the great program, practicing these, you can live happily [...] He took the suggestion too literally; and in the persuasion of being grateful to God everywhere, he showed himself impatient of free time to take advantage of it. What? Not being capable of certain recreational exercises, still he took part, which often bumped or fell here or there [...] Poor boy!...be little more moderate [...] From these words he understood, how the recreation should be moderate, and directed to lift the spirit, otherwise it would be detrimental to the same bodily health.¹⁹

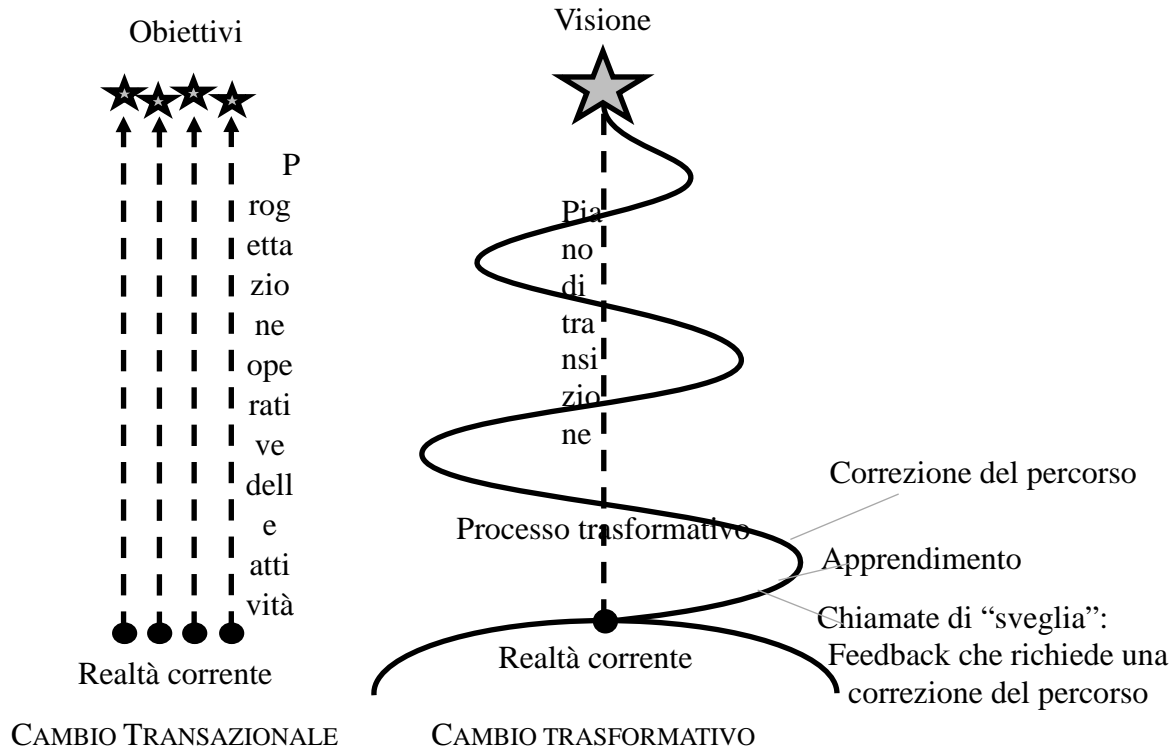
In the case of Besucco the challenge for the educator is the balanced accompaniment that is in the right measure, in the good sense and in the patience that manages to reassure the turbulent and unstable life.

¹⁸ Cfr. GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in BOSCO, *Vite di giovani*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ BOSCO, *Francesco Besucco*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1135-1136.

1.6. Decision

The environment and the educator accompany the young man's crisis towards a decision. We can speak of affective, ethical, relational, mystical, etc. but it is interesting to note that the decision that describes Don Bosco has common features.



As an element to note, is the fact that the decision does not solve the superficial symptom of a problem, but goes deep and makes an inner transformation. It is precisely a conversion in biblical terms - a *metanoia*, that is change of the way of thinking, of seeing ourselves and reality as a whole. In this phase of accompaniment it takes at least four qualities of the educator: patience to get to the core of the question; capacity for closeness that gives support to the young man's journey in important moments; a lot of inner freedom and finally, inner balance so as not to replace the young but to mature his freedom.

In today's language we could say that the Salesian educator accompanies the young person in a transformational change and not in a transactional change. In the transactional change a simple problem solving is performed that perceives the difficulty of the young person in one of the dimensions of his personality and subsequently plans, or puts in place, interventions to reach the goal - the solution of the problem and the cancellation of the inconvenience connected to it.

In transformational change, however, the vision of an exciting ideal is used constantly to correct the course of action. A transition plan may very well exist, but this does not eliminate a discernment that is sensitive to the various feedbacks, which come from the reality and "call" to a learning that

recognizes the point where he is, puts him in relation with the vision and corrects the course of actions. Therefore, discernment is a constant disposition both in the design phase and in the accompaniment phase. In transformative education, we do not think of solving the problem once and for all. The accompaniment of the young person and the permanent formation of the educators are always useful and necessary.

1.7. Commitment

The solution to the crisis follows, as a last narrative step, the descriptions of the educative itineraries undertaken by the young protagonists under the guidance of the educator. Beyond the different accentuations, one can easily see the unity in structure of the formative program outlined by Don Bosco in these biographies that refers to Christian anthropology put into practice.

There is an emphasis on the *pedagogy of duty*, on the scrupulous use of time and on the diligence in fulfilling the commitments of study and work. Duty is combined with a *pedagogy of joy* that finds its typical expression in moments of leisure and spontaneity. Joy finds its deep root in peace with God and with one's conscience. Here we find the *religious pedagogy* and the regular practice of the sacraments of the Eucharist and of confession in the confidence-accompaniment of the director-confessor. The last component is the *pedagogy of the commitment* that makes the young the protagonist, not only of his own growth, but of many forms of service to others, of beautiful friendships and of the ardor for the material and spiritual good of all. Once helped by his companions he himself begins to accompany his own companions. A dynamic that has found its place in the Salesian youth ministry that sees the young animators of young people in a logic of peer education.

An important element is missing to conclude the complete image on the Salesian accompaniment. First we saw the personal accompaniment from the part of the educator; the accompaniment by the exemplary companions and the accompaniment through the care of the environment, the proposals, the programs, the times, the classes and its relational and organizational culture. The last modality is the accompaniment through the "group of commitment" or the so-called sodalities that contribute to the creation of the family environment with their unique character of solidarity, emulation and free participation. Pietro Braido observes as the most meditated description of their identity is the story about the Cheerful society of Chieri.

The Memoirs of the Oratory, written by Don Bosco in the first half of the '70s, show rules of behavior that exactly reflect the lines of Don Bosco's more mature pedagogy:

That these gatherings might have a name, we called ourselves the Society for a Good Time. There was a reason for the name, because everyone was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things

contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain, or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once. So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted: (i) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian. (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties.²⁰

2. Don Bosco, is a disciple, therefore accompanies the young

It would be onesided to describe Don Bosco's way of accompanying young people without dwelling on his experience of being accompanied. It seems logical and convincing to affirm that if one believes in accompaniment, one will allow himself to be accompanied or desire to do in the different phases of his life. But before being accompanied "in fact", the basis is to be a disciple with the attitude of the search for the signs of the Spirit in concrete situations and of practice the virtues connected with being a disciple.

In 1886, that is, in the period of the full maturity of his personal experience, to the repeated requests of the Rector of the Seminary of Montpellier who asked him to explain his educational method, Don Bosco exclaimed in the presence of the members of the Superior Council of the Salesian Society: "method you want me to expose: but I do not even know it! I always went ahead how the Lord inspired me and the circumstances demanded ". Words that do not want to mean that Don Bosco would go without knowing where, but that he had not wanted to imprison himself in a rigid and stereotyped system that cut off the freedom and speed of the movements in the face of new initiatives or new needs. The way of Don Bosco's progress seems clear enough and has the characteristics of spiritual discernment, that is, searching God's will in inspirations (more subjective) and in circumstances (more objective). In the following paragraphs I would like to describe some transformative passages of Don Bosco's life particularly that strongly speaks of his discipleship and accompaniment.

2.1. Meeting Don Colosso

The description of Don Bosco's accompaniment by Don John Calosso, which we find in the Memoirs of the Oratory, responds to the accompanying outline described earlier in the biographies of young models.

— The first meeting takes place in the street. Don Calosso among others walking down the street notices him as a "child of small stature, with his head uncovered, hair bristling and ringed," who walked in great silence. He greets him by welcoming him and making a joke of his mother's appreciation.

²⁰ BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1193.

- Then he challenged him on the sermon by saying: "What have you been able to understand!" After the exhaustive answer, Calosso opens the possibility to study and promises the help for overcoming family problems.
- Don Bosco entrusts himself to the guidance of Don Calosso, who makes him "taste what spiritual life is", in the midst of the study, the duties and the joy "of the usual festive gatherings in the meadow".
- In the following pages the theme of the living environment is taken up - the family. The quiet period of winter in which the peasants' jobs did not require a great commitment have passed and his brother Antony was beginning to get excited about the fact that John was still young.
- The following crisis occurs as a conflict between the two brothers. John's dream of studying clashes with the attitudes and demands of rural life.
- The decision that resolves the crisis is typical for the combination of loving-obedience that is fundamental to the Preventive System. John relies entirely on his guide who accompanies and begins to share life with the chaplain, going home only to sleep. He states that «Don Calosso He had become an idol for me. He loved more than his father, prayed for him, served him in all things. "
- His commitment makes quality leaps, works and studies with enthusiasm and total responsibility. "I made so much progress in one day with the chaplain, that I would not have done at home in a week." It is symbolic that after Don Calosso's death, Don Bosco continued the discourse of accompaniment. He describes immediately in the next paragraph his meeting with "a new benefactor" and his future guide, Don Joseph Cafasso ".²¹

2.2. The vocational choice

Don Bosco lived within an attitude, which intensifies the importance of vocational choice until it was decisively determined for salvation or eternal damnation that led to inevitable anxiety. The first strategies to "handle" the vocational dilemma were two: the path of obedience and the path of rationality. In obedience to his confessor Joseph Maria Maloria, who was considered the most learned ecclesiastical of Chieri, John would have expected more concrete indications regarding the choice of vocation. The young Bosco was very happy with his guide and will continue to confess to him also in the seminary, but his advice on this matter was not enough: "In this situation, he answered me saying, everyone must follow his own inclination and not the advice of others".²² Various hypotheses can be made about the choice of Maloria not to express himself directly, but the fact remains that John could not choose simply obeying another's directive. The second alternative was to make a rational choice. The elements that came into play were: the right time for choice (the last year of high school), the decision not to rely on dreams, the consideration of the high dignity of the priestly ideal, the awareness of one's own weaknesses and of the dangers of

²¹ Cfr. *Idem*, pp. 1182-1186.

²² Cfr. *Idem*, p. 1210.

the world and finally the question of economy. The rational result of the decision-making process was to become a Franciscan.²³

The rational choice could not be carried out due to a strong perception of an inner restlessness among the Franciscans where the young Bosco would not have found so much inner peace that he looked for. From here on, the typically 'Boschian' way of discerning and being accompanied is developed. John Bosco retrospectively tells it in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* in a context of discernment in prayer that can be described phenomenologically as the creation of a vision of the future permeated by trust in God's Providence. John makes a novena according to this intention and receives the sacraments with great fervor. John Bosco entrusted to the advice of the uncle priest of Luigi Comollo, In fact, the advice of the uncle of Comollo goes in this direction, suggesting John to enter the seminary where he will be able to know better what God wants from him. In these situations the discipleship of John Bosco made a transformative leap, perceiving himself as a disciple in the permanent search for the voice of the Spirit in concrete situations. The center of his discipleship is the attitude of the search and not the "materiality" of the accompaniment that would seem to become more occasional and less profound.

2.3. The choice of proactive prevention

Finding himself in Turin, the young priest John Bosco does not immediately decide his field of work, but relies on the formation and accompaniment in the Ecclesiastical College by St. Joseph Cafasso. Working in the re-education works of the Marchioness Barolo and attending the prisons of Turin, Don Bosco came to know the pressing problems of the young people of the time. It is in this context that Don Bosco makes a discernment that leads him to another leap in quality - the choice of the proactive preventive strategy that is at the heart of the Preventive System. Don Bosco writes about his visits to the prison: "It was on those occasions that I noticed how many were brought back to that site because they were abandoned to themselves. Who knows, he said to me, if these young men had a friend outside, who took care of them, helped them and instructed them in religion on holidays, who knows they can not keep away from ruin or at least reduce the number of those, who return to prison?"²⁴

Don Bosco's preventive attention is thus the result of an accompanying discernment that goes deep and addresses the causes of the problems that afflict young people. The depth of discernment is not opposed, but helped by the immersing into the concrete world of young people. It is not only a response to the immediate pressing problems that would risk being welfare, but it is a preventive formation that anticipates the falling of those who are "at risk". Don Bosco responds concretely to the challenges of the youth with the preventive proposal of the festive oratory: the friendship in an anonymous city in demographic growth and in the phase of early

²³ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 1234.

industrialization, religious education for children without parishes, healthy fun for those who spend most of their time working, night schools for the illiterate, etc.

2.4. Further evolutions of the discipleship of Don Bosco

In the steps described, we saw Don Bosco moving from a style of "totalizing" accompaniment of Don Calosso to a mature style of discipleship. Summing up we see that as a teenager, in his 14-15 years, he lets himself be guided with the same style that he proposes to his boys in edifying biographies. But in the concrete choice of his vocation he finds himself in the necessity of entering into a more mature logic, of a constant discernment. Both blind obedience and pure rational choice are discarded. The choice falls on the path recommended in the seminary that allows him to concretize further his mission. Finally, at a third level, we see the continuation of discernment under the guidance of Cafasso, which broadens the horizons not only to discern in personal life but also in the concrete processes of educative-pastoral work.

In the 60s we can see the decline of the festive oratory at Valdocco, the failed experience with the college of Giaveno, the problematic construction of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the long process of approval of the Constitutions, attempts to expand in Piedmont with the different colleges entrusted to very young directors. In the '70s the missions began in Latin America, the controversies with the Archbishop Gastaldi for which it was neither simple nor immediate to rationally predict the future of the Congregation and the work that began in very modest conditions. The working creativity of Don Bosco is a fruit of continuous discernment that makes him detach from a single mode of work (for example that of the festive oratory) and gives him an inner freedom that he can rely more and more on Providence. His working genius and heroic discipleship are found to be strengthened and to be synergised.

Another aspect of Don Bosco's discipleship can be observed in the stories of his dreams, in which he is always accompanied by a character: Don Cafasso, Don Alasonatti, Count Cays, Silvio Pellico, Marquise Barolo, etc. Even Domenic Savio, for several times, led Don Bosco in the opening of new horizons. In this way the path is accomplished - the excellent disciple has become master of his master. It is interesting how the historian Pietro Stella combines in his assessment realism and dreams as complementary in the action of our Saint:

We realize that it is not easy to establish Don Bosco's attitude of dreams, which he feels or presents as prophetic, and reality. One has the impression that he acts in the conviction of having a mandate from above, a goal to be achieved, something to be achieved even if he does not perceive - through dreams - the whole entity. Don Bosco warns that the unfolding of events makes the Congregation configure not how he would have liked it, or how he believed it should become [...] His ideas are modified, the specified conditioning of the events always followed carefully, not to accept them

passively, but to adapt to them, with continuous creative activity, the new construction [...]. It is not pragmatism, because it dominates the fixed purpose and a series of religious and moral principles: it is skill and the search for opportunity: it is radical optimism in the persuasion that the evolution of things always offers an acceptable basis on which to implant their germs, in the confidence that they, even if conditioned by "very sad times", will always find ways to overcome the storms and to fructify ».²⁵

3. Conclusion: Educate and plan today with a style of accompaniment

The phenomenological-narrative analysis of the experiences of the founder of the Salesian Family allowed us to access his style of accompaniment in seven steps. This style finds correspondence with the theory and practice of transformative change and works on three levels of interpersonal, group and environmental accompaniment. The intervention of the educator is rooted in the experience of having been accompanied and the credibility of his gestures is founded in the profound identity of the accompanying educator because he is a disciple. I think that the seven steps and the Salesian style are valid even now but some variables of a context have to be considered. I briefly outline some current tools that can enlighten the practice of the educative accompaniment of young people towards the choices of life.

3.1. The plan of life as a practical tool of accompaniment

Given the postmodern context without a strong and shared references, it is not enough to appeal to "values", "virtues" or "duties of life" as before, in a society in which the majority of the population was educated by values and a shared Christian ideal. The educator must work explaining together with the young the vision, the values and accompanying the implementation of personalized strategies. A useful tool is the "plan of life" written and co-created with the educator who is above all in the role of facilitator. The plan is not just a linear statement of values, objectives, activities and indicators, but is found in the dynamics of transformative discernment that implies, as in Don Bosco's narratives, challenges, crises, decisions and quality leaps. The Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry says: "In this logic, as Christians, we read the plan of life under the sign of the vocation, call of God that arouses, supports and strengthens the freedom of the young person, making it capable of responding with freedom and joy to one's own identity and mission [...] It is in this space that the proposal of faith and the response of the plan of life are also placed ".²⁶

²⁵ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1: *Vita*, LAS, Roma 1979, pp. 161-162.

²⁶ DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE SALESIANA, *La pastorale giovanile salesiana. Quadro di riferimento fondamentale*, SDB, Roma ³2014, p. 53.

The plan of life can be built by analyzing with the young their goals, asking why is that goal, in order to discover rationally and emotionally whether the goal is an end or just a means to reach another goal. The purpose of the chain of questions is to arrive at the ultimate intrinsic desire that can build the basis of vision-vocation and is an end in itself. Another path that can be made together with young people, is visualizing the future, imagining the different anniversaries of life, retirement or funeral, in a sort of purposeful "exercise of good death". Then the contents of the imagination are verbalized describing the story, the people of reference, the desired wishes for the various roles of current life. From here you can start a work on goals and strategies in the life of the young.²⁷

3.2. The isomorphic organizational style of accompaniment

If the accompaniment is a work task for the educator, it can lead to good results. I think that the process will hardly come to the effects present in the biographies of the young models, because the strength of the testimony and the knowledge of the educator that must be "ahead" in self-knowledge, of their motivations to work constructively with the dynamics of transference and counter-transference. It is necessary that accompaniment becomes a "form" that structures the processes and educative environments at different levels. This is why one can speak of an isomorphic organizational style.

In this direction, with a specific focus, the study of a Salesian Reinhard Gesing from Germany, expert in the field of Salesian formation, is moving. In one of his writings he compares the function of the interview with the director in Salesian tradition and the dialogue of supervising the employee with his superior in a concrete multinational company.²⁸ Through the comparison of the two ways of dialogue, the author reaches the possibility of learning for the two organizations: the Salesians could enhance the interview more (and return to practice), thanks to recent management studies applied in the company sphere; the role of the director could be broadened by including some functions of the coach in giving and receiving feedback; the important methodology of the interview could be highlighted; and, lastly, the practice of dialogue could also be extended to lay collaborators in Salesian works as a tool for ongoing coordination and formation. Salesian style clearly goes far beyond corporate supervision but as a matter of fact sometimes there is not even that. For a false respect for the autonomy of educators and for the historical legacies of generations that have already passed by, we do not practice the Salesian colloquy that has a potential for educational and organizational coordination.

²⁷ Cfr. M. VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory: Salesian Youth Ministry, Leadership and Innovative Project Management*, STS Publications, Jerusalem 2017, 324 pp. 228-232. Versione italiana: ID., *Progettare e discernere. Progettazione educativo-pastorale salesiana tra storia, teorie e proposte innovative*, LAS, Roma 2015, pp. 263-266.

²⁸ Cfr. R. GESING, *Das Mitbrudergespräch in einer Ordensgemeinschaft und das Mitarbeitergespräch im Unternehmen. Ein vergleichende Darstellung unter besonderer Bezugnahme auf das Mitbrudergespräch bei den SDB und das Mitarbeitergespräch bei RWE*, Manoscritto della serie "Benediktbeurer Schriftenreihe zur Lebensgestaltung im Geiste Don Boscos", Benediktbeuern 2004.

3.3. The transformative plan of educational structures

If Salesian accompaniment is the truly isomorphic principle within an educational structure, it should affect not only communication and interpersonal processes of supervision, empowerment, facilitation, etc. but also at the level of "organizational culture" and the identity of the institution. Said with more concrete concepts, the accompaniment must also enter as a basic logic for strategic planning. From previous studies it can be concluded that the model of the man who is at the base of Salesian educative-pastoral planning is the rational-voluntaristic man linked to planning by objectives. Within this transactional logic, the first step is to analyze reality, plan objectives, follow activities and finally, verify. By itself, if the one who plans has enough consensus to get the plan approved, there is no need for the collaboration of others and if so only as information carriers and / or executors.

In a transformative logic, on the other hand, planning can be conceived above all as a formative tool of the educative-pastoral community and only secondary as a managerial tool. During the planning process we should accompany the processes of confrontation on more profound aspects of educational action: the inner identity of the educator, the virtues and attitudes, the paradigms, the expectations, the fears, the hopes and the deeper vocational aspects.

To ensure the right importance for transformation, the planning moments could consist of five steps. It starts from the predominantly rational description of the situation and from the verification of previous planning cycles that present a variety of stimuli and symptoms. In the second moment the community descends into the most emotional part; it elaborates a meta-analysis of the paradigms connected with the habitual ways of thinking and feeling, connected with experiences and with personal or group history, to share and question paralyzing paradigms and / or opposing ideologies. In the third moment the community discerns the presence of the Spirit who speaks in concrete reality to accept a call that is given and which has the potential to change the basic educative-pastoral perspective. The call is narratively explained in a vision in the fourth moment of the plan: it is also opportune to have the vision tested in small prototypes to have already the first feedback from the practice. In this way the typical way of "planning" of Don Bosco is recovered, who by narrating proposes to the young people and educators the educative stories of the model boys or of paradigmatic situations. Only then do we arrive at the fifth moment of the operational planning, which completes the vision in reality, establishes objectives and strategies in the effort to align all the systems in the direction of vision with the instrument of regulation, typical of Don Bosco.²⁹

²⁹ Cfr. VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory*, pp. 258-283 oppure ID., *Progettare e discernere*, pp. 283-314.

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Experiences

Accompanied to Accompany Experiences of Paschal Dynamics

Hello everyone! We are Titta and Sebastiano from the Lay Spiritual Movement of the Salesian Family, the Witnesses of the Risen Lord. We are really honoured to be here.

We bring forth to you the experiences that we have had during these years as both accompanists and being accompanied. We really like the idea of creating a dialogue and a discussion on the theme of listening and welcoming that certainly has many nuances.

Before going into the matter, we would like to present ourselves. We have been married since 8th December 2012 and since September 2016 we have had the joy of being little Matteo's parents. For about 11 years we have formed part of the Movement of Witnesses of the Risen Lord: I, Titta, am the National Coordinator of the Youth Sector TR and I, Sebastiano, am an animator. Together we form part of the cenacle TR Castellammare2.

The greatest fortune has been that of having lived and shared the most important stages of our life together, of having matured together, having received a vocation to keep developing, always together - as boyfriend and girlfriend, as husband and wife and as parents.

The meeting with the Lord has changed our perspective. We were lucky to feel welcomed and listened to. We have been fortunate enough to always make the fundamental choices of our life together with the Lord. Perhaps on the day we chose to be accompanied by our spiritual guide we had not really fully understood and appreciated the importance of what we were choosing and to what extent this would broaden our horizons.

I, Sebastiano, am an actor and theatre director and I deal with theatrical pedagogy through theatre courses. My vocational, familiar, theatrical and pedagogical discernment is intertwined with that of Titta. Since Matteo is in our life, the Lord is asking us to reopen another chapter of great change. This involves modifying our schedules, our spaces, and being able to give voice to the vocation of work in another capacity. I, Titta, a civil engineer by profession, after working for three years in a studio (and after being a full-time mother for a year), I now see before me the prospects of new jobs to be experienced.

But how did we feel accompanied in all these steps of life?

In our experience, being accompanied has never meant to receive advice, solutions, directives or to be replaced in the choices we had to take, but our spiritual guide taught us to take care of us, to observe the presence of the Lord in our days, to take note of what He asks us, to try to learn what His perspective is, to keep in mind our personal and couple project and to make frequent life verifications. He made us understand that the Lord is always calling us to share, discern and walk together. The richness of what we have lived and continue to live urges us to be accompanists of other young people. We are sure that without first experiencing being listened to and accompanied, we could not accompany others.

So ... where do we start from? First of all, it is about feeling at home!

With our spiritual guide we always felt free to be ourselves, even when we disagreed or when we were wrong. We have always felt that before every thought, word or deed there is always the love for who we are. We always seek to do the same with the youths. They amaze us with how involved they can really become when they "feel at home". At home we know we can speak sincerely, we are able to show our vulnerability, to be able to expose our feelings, our ambitions, our desires, even the most hidden ones. We know that at home there are those who love us as we are, there are those who go beyond the spoken words and those who first of all want and seek together with us our pursuit of happiness.

We freely talk about the emotional, spiritual, sexual and professional dimensions... The relationship of trust that is established is based on complete sincerity on both sides. We are learning to not focus on ourselves (having to prove ourselves to be good accompanists) but to concentrate on the person we have before us. For a young person, feeling at home means feeling heard in the totality of their being as a person.

Educating for vocational culture

We have seen many young people grow up, taking important decisions, making mistakes and getting up again. We met those who approached the movement and then gave up, others who once arrived never left, and those who, having left, later wanted to return.

We are especially close with young people who are facing the world of university and work. This leads us to come in contact with those who find themselves faced with fundamental choices in their lives. The word vocation should not be scary. We note that there is a certain "vocational anxiety" ("What if the road I am taking is not the right one?").

The vocation for us is a continuous path, a letting ourselves be called and transformed by the Lord. It is to take root and at the same time be ready for change - we never arrive. One of the fundamental points of our accompaniment is this: To educate towards a vocational culture.

Understanding the direction, how to live one's life and where to invest one's energies. It is always nice to see our youths walking along their paths (doubts, crises, discoveries, changes...). One of the tools we tend to find very useful for both the youths and ourselves is to write their own personal project: every year, in prayer, we take note of concrete objectives concerning every dimension of our life, from spiritual to emotional, from the working one to the community one, etc...

It is our present moment seen through the eyes of the Lord which shows us the path to be taken. It is an excellent tool to take hold of one's own life, to have a positive and proactive look. It is about engaging with the Lord and with oneself in order to not let the days and what happens to us slip away. It is to commit to wanting to be really happy!

Growth, discussion, sharing: journey in community

How do we overcome our fears? How do we free ourselves from what does not help us to walk? How do we imagine ourselves in this world of work? How do we make sure we are having sincere and long lasting affective relationships? These are some of the questions posed to us. These are always open questions that can be answered only in the intimate dialogue with the Lord and later discussed and evaluated with the brothers and sisters on the journey.

The accompaniment path is based, in fact, on fraternal and sincere discussion with the other youths of the group-community, on a systematic path of faith and friendship. We believe that discussion (in freedom and respect) creates positive dynamics that can confirm or confront the certainties that we are led to build in our mind.

Starting a personal journey does not mean looking only at oneself, at one's self-realization, but it means growing in the awareness that our human and spiritual maturation is also a gift for the others who are close to us. Obviously, in this case too, we must first live the community experience ourselves as accompanists in our cenacles / communities. Otherwise, what are we proposing?

Being mature in discerning

We have met guides who have attracted many young people and created beautiful projects. However, once they left the project, they left behind disoriented youths, young people who had probably learned to love the guide but not the community, the commitment and the Lord.

We are always careful not to create dependencies, because it is very easy to do so!

We were delighted to read in a community project of one of the groups we follow, "seeking autonomy from Titta and Sebastiano". This is the greatest victory, because we see concretely that the boys remain linked to the

community, to the commitment, to the Lord. They have a lot of affection and esteem for us, but they learn to walk on their own two feet very well!

What keeps the desire and the joy of accompanying always burning in us is to see the boys grow and mature in dialogue, in prayer and in discernment with the Lord. The fruits, which we have the grace to see, are so many and they regularly surprise us and even go beyond our imagination. In fact, they teach us a lot and instil in us a desire to grow and always improve even more.

Paschal dynamics

In our opinion, the beauty of the Gospel is to always challenge and confront our perspective, to open ourselves to new dynamics and to confront our distorted human thinking. Jesus never answers questions in a clear way. Instead, He gives us the opportunity to read the answer in our heart, He sets us in motion. What is more beautiful than this? Sometimes we want to "extort" recipes and solutions from our guide, but we are learning to understand that he is not called to do this.

We try in our small way to oppose the belief that the central point is the answer, the result, the success. We ask ourselves and help the youths to learn how to recognize how precious every single step is. Jesus teaches us to put the person before everything. The person and their path, not the goal, achieved or not, but it is "how" they are proceeding to achieve it. It is He who gives us the example of the "how". We live the life of Easter men and women - persons who roll up their sleeves every day, in everyday life, among the brothers, at work, in the family, to overcome every form of "death" and feed every form of "life". This is the perspective we are trying to bring forward with our youths. This is a dynamism which involves us and our whole being every day. We are called to live Easter every single day!

It is fortunate to be able to dedicate ourselves to the accompaniment and growth of the youths. All that we have received and that we have understood in these years helps us to deeply understand the feelings, contrasts, doubts and uncertainties that arise when faced by fundamental life decisions. Many-a-time we happen to see ourselves in other people's life experiences and writings. We have been fortunate because we were made to understand that the Lord, first of all, wants us to be happy. This is not something that we take for granted, it is the starting point of everything.

Let us pray to the Lord that He helps us realise that we never arrive but are always on the way. It is important to remember that the most important thing we can give to our youths is our growth with Him.

Titta and Sebastiano
Movement of the Witnesses of the Risen Lord

Esperienza nella formazione e accompagnamento di adolescenti e giovani

Pilar Lance e di Alberto Sanz

1. Presentazione

Alberto ed io ringraziamo per l'invito a partecipare a queste Giornate di riflessione e testimonianze di vita, in occasione della Strenna del Rettore Maggiore, D. Ángel Fernández Artime: "COLTIVIAMO L'ARTE DELL'ASCOLTO E DELL'ACCOM-PAGNAMENTO": "Signore, dammi di quest'acqua" (Gv 4,15). Il racconto della Samaritana illumina il messaggio del Rettore Maggiore.

Le relazioni ci aiutano a prendere coscienza dell'importanza dell'ascolto, del discernimento e dell'accompagnamento nella pastorale con i giovani.

Alberto ed io vogliamo presentare la nostra esperienza, il percorso e la presenza attuale nell'accompagnamento con lo stile salesiano. Prima ci presentiamo.

Il mio nome è *Pilar Lance*, attualmente lavoro come direttrice della piattaforma sociale Salesiana di Lleida, nella zona nord dell'ispettoria Maria Ausiliatrice (Ibérica).

La mia storia personale e il mio percorso professionale sono stati sempre segnati dalla vocazione all'educazione, dal servizio agli altri e per gli altri, e dall'instancabile ricerca del volto di Dio in me e nelle persone.

Ho sviluppato la mia vocazione di educatrice attraverso il lavoro con varie congregazioni religiose, con le quali ho conosciuto carismi e sfumature educative che mi hanno aiutato ad avvicinarmi meglio ai giovani con cui lavoro oggi.

La spiritualità salesiana mi ha aiutato a comprendere che in ogni giovane fragile o ferito c'è una possibilità di futuro da scoprire e che per farlo bisogna guardare oltre a ciò che i miei occhi possono vedere, le mie orecchie possono udire e la mia testa può ragionare. È necessario guardare e avvicinarsi ai giovani con il cuore.

La spiritualità ignaziana con la quale sono stata educata, ha segnato e segna il mio modo di vivere la vita e di relazionarmi con Dio. Per questo il fatto di essere accompagnata o di fare i processi di discernimento non sono estranei per me, piuttosto il contrario. Se guardo la mia vita con una certa

prospettiva, posso affermare che oggi sono la donna che sono grazie alle persone che mi hanno aiutata a crescere come persona e come credente.

Il mio nome è *Alberto Sanz*, sposato con Ana, con due figli Pablo di 4 anni e Lara di 1 anno. Ho 40 anni e da quando ho l'uso della ragione la mia vita è stata unita alla famiglia Salesiana.

Sono entrato come studente a 12 anni nella Scuola San Giovanni Battista (Salesiani- Estrecho-Madrid) e ora sono il Direttore Pedagogico della Scuola Secondaria (Istruzione Media obbligatoria, Superiore e Formazione Professionale). Responsabilità che ho accettato poco più di un anno fa, lasciando l'incarico di Coordinatore della Pastorale delle Scuole Superiori.

Fin da bambino sono sempre stato vicino a qualcuno che mi ha accompagnato nella mia vita, soprattutto nella scuola e nel Centro giovanile. Dopo aver finito la scuola, ho continuato ad essere legato al Centro giovanile e alla Parrocchia. Per quasi vent'anni, fino a due anni fa, ho accompagnato i gruppi di formazione nella fede. Quando era più giovane per la preparazione alla Cresima e poi in gruppi di catecumenato di giovani cresimati nel loro cammino di maturità nella fede fino all'incorporazione adulta alla parrocchia. Di solito in altri gruppi come cooperatori o comunità di giovani adulti.

Io stesso ho partecipato a tutto il processo di formazione e appartengo ad una comunità (già poco giovanile) della parrocchia dei "Salesiani di Estrecho". Nel gruppo, quasi tutti siamo coppie tra 35 e 50 anni, con figli, e con molto coinvolgimento con la famiglia Salesiana. Il direttore della scuola (oggi laico) appartiene alla mia comunità.

In questo gruppo vivo la mia fede in "compagnia", mi confronto, condivido i dubbi, le gioie, le paure, i dolori... Ma soprattutto è lì che ci facciamo l'uno per l'altro eco della luce di Dio.

Abbiamo sempre avuto come riferimento un salesiano accompagnatore del gruppo, che ci ha guidato e orientato, ci ha aiutato a crescere nella fede e nella fraternità, e ci ha anche esortato ad intraprendere dei passi nella missione. Siamo una comunità con un certo carattere missionario, abbiamo progetti con diversi centri attraverso l'ONG Salesiana "Giovani e Sviluppo" e abbiamo passato periodi della nostra vita in altre realtà. Mia moglie ed io abbiamo avuto la fortuna di godere di un'esperienza di missione in Guinea Equatoriale, con i Salesiani, per un anno.

2. Come nasce il bisogno dell'accompagnamento

Il fatto di essere stata accompagnata e di lasciarmi accom-pagnare, è stato il motore per formarmi, accompagnare e formare gli altri.

Per me è stato molto importante conoscermi per sapere chi sono, in chi credo, come credo, cosa voglio, cosa temo, che cosa non mi aiuta a crescere come persona e quindi cosa devo migliorare per avvicinarmi di più a Dio e servirlo meglio tra i più piccoli.... Accompagnarmi per me è sinonimo di contrastare

la vita che scelgo liberamente con quello che credo che Dio mi chiede e, per quanto è possibile, cercare di "correggermi".

Non riesco a capire la mia vocazione di educatrice come una semplice persona che trasmette delle conoscenze, abilità, valori o atteggiamenti. Credo che le persone e soprattutto i giovani che sono soli, con pochi punti di riferimento, feriti dalle loro storie... devono poter ricostruirsi a partire di un progetto di vita. Nessuno che io conosca può sognare e realizzare un progetto di vita senza aver prima guardato la sua storia con affetto, perdonando e perdonandosi, accettando e accettandosi. ... e questo non è così facile, né è così evidente che i nostri giovani possono farlo da soli.

Viviamo in una società segnata dal narcisismo, dall'immediatezza e dal consumo eccessivo, in cui l'immagine della felicità permanente è ciò che si ha, tutta apparenza nessuna imperfezione, quindi: chi vuole guardare dentro di sé per vedere la bruttezza temuta? Non guardiamo quello che ci spaventa, senza capire che dentro di noi oltre "quello brutto che ci spaventa" c'è anche il più bello di noi stessi che non siamo in grado di vedere... (la nostra sorgente).

Pertanto: cosa facciamo? la cosa più facile è cambiare il vestito, i capelli, l'auto, il cellulare, gli accessori... Tutto ciò che ci fa essere quella persona che vogliamo essere, ma senza dover sforzarci di cambiare troppo. Ciò che è difficile invece è guardare dentro noi stessi, sapere cosa c'è veramente e sforzarci di amare ciò che siamo, anche se non è perfetto.

È anche vero che i giovani ci chiedono di stare con loro, di accompagnarli, laici e religiosi, (come dicono le conclusioni del sondaggio tra i giovani che è stato fatto in Spagna per il Sinodo dei giovani del 2018). La maggior parte hanno bisogno di essere accompagnati, ma quanto è difficile questo se non si trova la persona che sappia come farlo correttamente. Ed è che agli educatori, ai religiosi e alle religiose, ai sacerdoti... ci insegnano ad ascoltare per dare risposte corrette... E questo è il problema, si deve imparare ad ascoltare per **COMPREDERE** la persona, non per dare risposte, che forse non vuole nemmeno... Dobbiamo imparare ad essere **FARI** che avvertono di possibili pericoli, ma lasciandoli che siano loro quelli che decidono quale strada deve prendere la loro vita. E questo è **DIFFICILE**.

Mi ricordo che quando entrai nella scuola, venivo da una famiglia normale (cattolica, tradizionale, poco praticante...), da una scuola normale (pubblica e non confessionale) e sono rimasto scioccato di incontrare i Salesiani, soprattutto i più giovani, che si preoccupavano di noi in maniera speciale. Qualche invito a un incontro, a partecipare all'Oratorio, a partecipare ai gruppi di musica (sapevo suonare la chitarra) ..., al di là dei voti buoni o di studiare molto (che io facevo bene).

Ma non c'è stato niente fino a quando ho iniziato a frequentare i gruppi di cresima, fino a che non ho iniziato a sentirmi "accompagnato". Al di là dell'ambiente: bello, di vicinanza, di gioia... che c'era al Centro Giovanile, ho trovato persone, catechisti, per i quali io ero importante. Si interessavano di

me e di tutti i ragazzi. Con loro si poteva parlare di quello che ci succedeva e delle altre cose "misteriose" che, come adolescenti, cominciavano ad apparire. E sempre circondato da amici nel mio gruppo di cresima, è stato facile scoprire il desiderio di conoscere di più su Gesù di Nazareth e di capire Dio.

Molti anni più tardi, vivendo la normalità insieme ad altri come compagni di cammino nella fede, e sempre avendo come riferimento un animatore-catechista nel gruppo (sono stato sempre in gruppo) mi hanno chiesto se volevo essere un catechista. E ho avuto l'opportunità di condividere questo servizio con molti altri animatori tra i quali c'era qualche salesiano in formazione.

Questa è stata una delle esperienze più arricchenti della mia vita, dal momento che ho avuto l'opportunità di essere vicino a persone che, un po' più grandi di me, facevano passi di grande intensità vocazionale nella loro vita e lo condividevano con me. Dopo del tempo ho capito che, per quei momenti della vita, l'accompagnamento sarebbe stato anche per me un grande strumento.

Fu allora che realizzai un processo di discernimento vocazionale, accompagnato da un salesiano. In quel tempo, ho potuto capire che dovevo formarmi di più, se volevo essere un accompagnatore per gli altri.

È stato un momento molto speciale nella mia vita, per dare sicurezza alla mia fede, per vedere con più cuore, con più speranza, per pulire lo sguardo e cercare di guardare come Dio guarda, per decidere di mettere la mia vita nelle mani di Dio e il suo Regno. Non fu un processo psicologico, non ho dovuto vivere un lungo processo di riconciliazione con me stesso (ho già detto che sono una persona normale), ma è stato un processo di "lasciarmi amare di più da Dio". Essere consapevole di tutto il suo amore. Un lasciarmi amare per essere un testimone fedele di quest'amore tra gli altri. E soprattutto per poter fare un passo fermo nella mia vocazione di educatore salesiano.

In diversi momenti della mia vita ho avuto un accompagnatore spirituale "personale", soprattutto durante il mio cammino di fede sono stato accompagnato. Sia dai catechisti del gruppo, sia dai sacerdoti salesiani nella mia comunità cristiana di riferimento.

3. Formazione ricevuta

Per me tutta la formazione ricevuta finora mi ha aiutato a fare un processo personale molto importante e profondo che mi ha portato ad un lavoro personale, ad un modo differente di affrontare la mia vita e ad una formazione permanente che ritengo necessaria. Sette anni fa ho iniziato il mio percorso formativo in questo campo e non credo di sapere già tutto... perché quando si tratta di persone e di Dio... non si arriva mai a sapere TUTTO, entrambi si muovono in quella specie di MISTERO che non segue modelli, norme o regole....

Quindi ritengo che l'apprendimento più importante è stato che ogni persona accompagnata è terra sacra, per cui quanto più formata e più accompagnata sono io, più sarò in grado di capire la persona e che cosa accompagnarla può significare per me.

Il più importante, il proprio accompagnamento. Ma fondamentalmente i corsi ricevuti. In primo luogo, la formazione di animatore e la formazione della Scuola di Teologia per laici della antica Ispettorìa Salesiana di Madrid.

Mi ha anche aiutato molto la formazione ricevuta presso la *Scuola di Pastorale con giovani* della Pontificia Università di Salamanca.

E fondamentalmente il corso-master di accompagnamento della Delegazione della Pastorale Giovanile della Spagna. Sono stato invitato a farlo ed è stato uno dei momenti più profondi della mia vita di fede. Tempo intenso per guardarmi e tuffarmi liberamente nel mio passato e nel mio presente, per approfondire il mio rapporto con Dio, per conoscerlo, o meglio, per avere più chiara l'immagine che avevo di lui e man mano "pulirla" lasciandolo essere più "Lui" nella mia vita.

Due anni in cui la formazione non era solo tecniche e teoria (che ce n'era molta), ma scoprire che per essere in grado di avvicinarsi alla realtà "dell'altro" nell'accompagnamento personale, non solo si deve essere a piedi nudi (come dice Pilar, è terra sacra"), ma si deve andare preparati e avere l'esperienza di essere accompagnati.

4. Incidenza nella realtà pastorale

Considerando la realtà delle nostre ispettorie in cui ci sono sempre meno salesiani e in cui la maggior parte di loro non si sono formati all'accompagnamento, posso solo dire che questa formazione per i religiosi e laici impegnati nelle opere è assolutamente necessaria.

Forse sottolineiamo che siamo bravi nell'animazione dei nostri ambienti, dei gruppi, degli incontri giovanili, ma ci manca, in età superiore, di poter offrire altri itinerari di crescita nella fede o di gruppi di riferimento dove i giovani possono maturare la fede e non rimanere disincantati con essa.

A volte trovo difficile capire come sia possibile per giovani che hanno trascorso tutta la loro vita in un ambiente salesiano improvvisamente rifiutano le loro credenze. Ma questo mi interroga e mi sfida ad impegnarmi di più. Non possiamo vivere dalla fede della catechesi eternamente, dobbiamo offrire spazi individuali, dove i giovani possono sentire che vanno oltre.

La pastorale deve essere aggiornata per aiutare i giovani a maturare nella fede. Ma è importante non solo la loro partecipazione, ma soprattutto il loro protagonismo creativo: contare su di loro per fare altre cose e superare le tappe pastorali del passato.

L'Assemblea/comunità/parrocchia/centro giovanile ha bisogno di giovani in un altro modo, con altri impegni più adulti e con una capacità di apertura e di servizio che va oltre il centro salesiano di riferimento. "Li mandò in gruppi di due nelle città e luoghi dove lui doveva passare."

Le comunità/progetti/parrocchie/centri giovanili..., da parte nostra dobbiamo essere generosi, dobbiamo lasciare che "i giovani" vadano per vedere il mondo, altre realtà, altri modi di fare e anche possano dare il loro contributo salesiano ovunque si trovino, e chissà se in questo modo continueranno a far crescere anche la Famiglia Salesiana.

5. Accompagnare nella Pastorale Giovanile e nella formazione per l'accompagnamento: storia e presente del piano di accompagnamento pastorale dei giovani

Oggi si sta portando avanti un aggiornamento del processo di formazione nell'accompagnamento nelle ispettorie FMA e SDB della Spagna.

È stata una lunga strada fino a quando è stato istituito tre anni fa "Il piano di formazione nell'accompagnamento dei giovani" su quattro livelli.

In questo cammino distinguiamo alcune tappe:

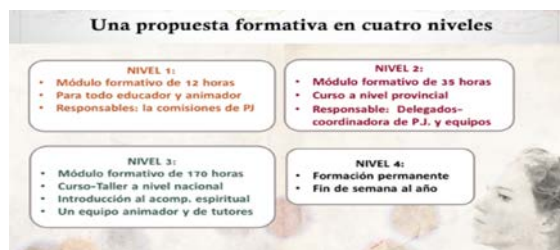
1) 2001-2006: La Delegazione/Coordinatrice della Pastorale Giovanile organizzava ogni anno il "Convegno Nazionale sull'Accompagnamento" durante un fine settimana, tenuto da un sacerdote gesuita (Manuel Plaza). Gli incontri avevano una grande adesione e innestavano entusiasmo. Ma si chiedeva una formazione più consistente. Alcuni partecipanti accompagnavano giovani provenienti dalle scuole, dei gruppi del catecumenato, delle comunità giovanili e dell'itinerario dell'educazione alla fede. L'ultimo incontro del 2006, dedicato alla preghiera, si affidò ad un altro relatore. Senza dubbio, i corsi dati hanno creato una base di sensibilizzazione e una formazione di base in molti partecipanti; alcuni di loro accompagnano gruppi e persone, o hanno iniziato un accompagnamento personale.

2) 2006-2007: il Coordinatore dell'Evangelizzazione del Centro Nazionale salesiano per la Pastorale Giovanile, ha incontrato due Salesiani e due Salesiane che avevano completato un Master di Accompagnamento presso la Scuola di Formatori di Salamanca (SJ). Il gruppo ha valutato la proposta di preparare un corso-laboratorio biennale per questa formazione. Il lavoro è stato avviato con consulenti esterni. Il quadro formativo è stato presentato alla Delegazione/Coordinatrice di Pastorale Giovanile e ai Consigli Ispettoriali di SDB e FMA che hanno preso insieme l'impegno di portare avanti questo progetto e d'inviare le persone per questo.

3) La formazione è iniziata nel febbraio 2008. Ad ottobre 2017, è stata avviata la quinta promozione con 25 partecipanti. In questi anni sono stati preparati circa 100 agenti pastorali, alcuni dei quali di altri carismi.

4) 2014-2015: anno di riflessione e ripensamento. Quest'anno è stata valutata la possibilità di fare un piano più ampio e di preparare un corso previo d'iniziazione per educatori e insegnanti dei centri educativi.

In questo momento la Pastorale giovanile Salesiana progetta la formazione nell'accompagnamento pastorale di adolescenti e giovani in quattro livelli:



Livello 1: Modulo formativo da 8 a 12 ore per insegnanti, animatori ed educatori, nei corsi di formazione organizzati dalle commissioni e dalle équipes provinciali o nazionali di aree pastorali.

Livello 2: Modulo formativo di 35 ore in tre week-end, di introduzione nell'accompagnamento spirituale dei giovani, per professori, animatori ed educatori, organizzati dalle équipes ispettoriali di PG.

Livello 3: Modulo formativo di 170 ore in due anni, per agenti pastorali ed educatori con la vocazione per accom-pagnare persone e gruppi, organizzati dalla Delegazione-Coordinatrice di PG da un team preparato.

Livello 4: Modulo di formazione permanente di un fine settimana all'anno, per coloro che sono stati formati in corsi o seminari specifici o esercitano l'accom-pagnamento personale, organizzato dalla Delegazione – Coordinatrice di PG e coordinato dal team di Livello 3.

Ora siamo consapevoli che un accompagnamento diversificato in spazi e ambiti richiede una formazione nell'accompagnamento diversificato e creativo.

Pertanto, parliamo di una Pastorale Giovanile in chiave di accompagnamento, che è l'origine del Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana. Ma la chiave è una buona formazione ed esperienza di essere accompagnato.

In questo momento c'è sempre più formazione, perché c'è più interesse, e più bisogno da parte non solo dei Salesiani e Salesiane, ma di tutti i laici impegnati nell'azione pastorale. A poco a poco nei centri educativi di accompagnamento si parla di aprire nuove esperienze pastorali in cui i giovani hanno la possibilità di riferimenti adulti che li accompagnino nella fede.

Formazione locale nei centri giovanili, che estendono la formazione ricevuta. Per parlare di un esempio locale, nel Centro Giovanile della mia casa, tutti gli animatori-catechisti appartengono a gruppi con un animatore formato nell'accompagnamento e tutti con un accompagnatore personale, che abbia non solo un percorso di fede, ma una formazione, rendendo possibile prendere decisioni adulte che rispondono veramente alla loro vocazione di figlio di Dio.

La realtà è che negli ultimi anni stanno emergendo più gruppi che, partendo dalle decisioni personali, nutrono la scommessa per la vita comunitaria.

6. Le nuove necessità che emergono

- Avere una buona équipe di accompagnatori e formatori che offrano questo servizio agli educatori, ai catechisti, ai giovani, ai salesiani e salesiane, ai laici.... e che questo sia richiesto.
- Lavorare con i diversi ambienti l'importanza della formazione degli educatori/evangelizzatori.
- Approfondire alcuni temi che vanno emergendo allo stesso tempo che si realizzano gli accompagnamenti, con il livello 4 di formazione.
- Specializzarsi in alcuni temi che non conosciamo, come per esempio il passaggio dalla giovinezza all'età adulta. Come far fronte alle diverse crisi di identità nelle diverse fasi della vita. Come accompagnare le diverse opzioni vocazionali o le crisi vocazionali (non solo quelle religiose). Come accompagnare spiritualmente i giovani non credenti....
- Rendere questo programma di contenuti più salesiano, senza perdere la base psicologica e pedagogica che lo sostiene. Abbiamo bisogno di una riflessione comune da parte delle persone formate e che stanno accompagnando, per adattare i contenuti alle nostre realtà.

7. I frutti

Nella nostra Ispettorìa (Maria Ausiliatrice) i frutti più significativi sono la formazione dei laici e religiosi e con questa formazione il processo personale che ognuno di loro sta facendo....

Per me questo processo è il più importante, che ogni persona formata si renda conto che ha bisogno di lavorarsi, di essere accompagnato/a, di avvicinarsi in un altro modo a Dio e confrontarsi.

Da tre anni stiamo facendo l'accompagnamento di livello 2 nelle tre zone della nostra ispettorìa e la stragrande maggioranza delle persone che sono coinvolte sempre fanno lo stesso commento: sono venuto perché mi dicessero come accompagnare i giovani e vado a scoprire che devo essere io la persona accompagnata.

Quest'anno nel corso di formazione dei direttori del tempo libero (centri giovanili) si prevede di introdurre il livello 1 di formazione.

L'équipe di formazione insieme alle persone formate stanno già facendosi domande su come includere questa offerta nei diversi progetti pastorali.

Ci sono giovani che hanno iniziato questo processo di accompagnamento con i salesiani che possiedono una formazione adeguata per farlo.

In brevissimo tempo, il livello 2 è stato organizzato e realizzato nelle tre aree geografiche in cui è divisa l'ispettorìa Santiago El Mayor. L'accoglienza è stata molto positiva e il risultato è che molti animatori,

professori e persino lavoratori di piattaforme sociali, hanno iniziato questo processo di accompagnamento.

Nei centri giovanili si stanno sistematizzando processi d'accompagnamento. E in minor misura nelle scuole, dove la realtà è molto diversa, si è passati da una sensibilità a "personalizzare i processi pastorali" a parlare della realtà dell'accompagnamento dell'adolescente e del giovane nella sua vita di fede, a partire da proposte più personali, che includono esplicitamente la vocazione.

La cultura "dell'accompagnamento" va prendendo corpo nei chiostrini e tra i laici nei diversi ambienti delle nostre opere. Ci sentiamo corresponsabili di questa missione.

Vorrei dare un esempio molto locale. Nella mia parrocchia dell'opera "Salesiani Estrecho" i gruppi di operatori e le comunità di laici, da qualche anno ci sentiamo responsabili dell'accompagnamento dei gruppi di catecumenato (ho già detto che erano i gruppi di fede che abbiamo dopo la cresima di età compresa tra 19 e 24 anni), essendo loro responsabili.

Questi gruppi di catecumenato si sostenevano, come la maggior parte, nella preghiera, nella formazione e nella revisione di vita. Ma da qualche anno, si offre l'accompagnamento a tutti i giovani di catecumenato in modo specifico, così come semplici strumenti per fare "revisione di vita" e "progetto di vita" o come qualcosa di più profondo per "leggere la propria vita alla luce del Vangelo", "fare sintesi tra fede-cultura", "cercare ciò che Dio vuole della mia vita". (ho messo tutto tra virgolette, perché sono frasi che io stesso ho sentito in quei gruppi).

Ma sempre offerto da qualcuno formato, salesiano o laico, con più esperienza di vita. Loro sono stati i primi destinatari dei processi di accompagnamento. Sono anche il motore del Centro giovanile, poiché la maggior parte di loro sono animatori-catechisti, o hanno altri apostolati.

Questa esperienza li aiuta ad essere in grado di accompagnare i loro gruppi di ragazzi, adolescenti o giovani (anche la cresima), e scoprono il bisogno di formarsi per poter essere guide, animatori o catechisti, nella fede di altri giovani.

8. Possibili difficoltà

- Formarsi, ma non avere del tempo per impegnarsi. È come se non ti fossi formato in niente.
- Accontentarsi di una formazione iniziale e non approfondire, credendo che sia più che sufficiente.
- Relegare ai propri Salesiani questa funzione, dimenticando che i laici possono anche esercitare questo servizio pastorale.
- Non laborarse, non accompagnare...

- Credere che sia solo dell'accompagnamento Salesiano il prendersi cura del gruppo e dell'ambiente.
- Trasformare l'accompagnamento in una moda e credere che chiunque sia qualificato per un accompagnamento pastorale. In questo senso, bisognerebbe differenziare i livelli di accompagnamento, anche all'interno dello "spirituale".
- Una notevole difficoltà in alcuni luoghi e opere è la reale assenza di una *comunità educativo-pastorale* con lo stile pedagogico del Sistema Preventivo, ostacolando così l'accompagnamento con lo stile e il carisma salesiano.

Accompagnare

È una «forma di dialogo permanente tra compagni per accogliere la Vita, accompagnando la vita»; un dialogo che ha come scopo ultimo quello di favorire il rapporto tra la persona e il Signore, aiutandola a superare eventuali ostacoli.



Acompañar

Es un «modo de diálogo permanente entre compañeros para acoger la Vida, acompañando la vida»; un diálogo que tiene como último objetivo favorecer la relación entre la persona y el Señor, ayudándola a superar eventuales obstáculos.



Scoprire
Docilità
Cammino
Libertà
Atteggiamiento

Accompaniment

«As a form of permanent dialogue among companions to welcome Life, accompanying life»; a dialogue whose ultimate aim is to foster the relationship between the person and the Lord, helping them to overcome any obstacles.

36^e Giornate di Spiritualità
della
Famiglia Salesiana