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## APOSTOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF DON BOSCO: A HERMENEUTICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HIS SPIRITUALITY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'spirituality' is gaining popularity with a wide range of meanings that refer to both religious and secular aspects of life<sup>1</sup>. If Christian spirituality was once seen as intrinsically bound to monastic life, the growth and proliferation of religious congregations and secular institutes engaged in active apostolate today, have highlighted the need of integrating apostolic action and spiritual life. From the perspective of monastic spirituality, apostolic action was at times regarded as a danger to spiritual life leading to activism and dispersion. Even when apostolic action was held in positive regard, it was considered as something parallel to spiritual life or a means to perfection<sup>2</sup>.

The dualism of contemplation and action points to other underlying dualisms such as sacred and profane, consecration and mission, interior experience of the divine (love for God) and exterior action in favour of the human (love for man). A closer look at the life of Christ, the apostles, and the saints of active apostolic life, suggests that there is an inseparable bond between the spiritual and the apostolic dimensions of Christian living. With expressions such as "ecstasy of life and action" (St. Francis de Sales), "acting passively" (St. Vincent de Paul), "give me souls, take away the rest" (St. John Bosco), some saints tried to express the mystical transformation experienced by them in their apostolic life and action<sup>3</sup>.

In the contemporary context, the emergence and the progressive configuration of 'spiritual theology' as a distinct branch has brought into focus 'God-experience', 'religious experience' or 'spiritual experience' as the core of spirituality<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See the debate in the recent volume: *Present-Day Spiritualities. Contrasts and Overlaps*, eds. E. Hense, F. Jaspers, & P. Nissen, Brill 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Midali, *Spiritualità apostolica. Personali e vitali riferimenti fondanti*, LAS 1994, p. 28-33.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 33-38, 439-474; C.A. Bernard, *Il Dio dei mistici. III. Mistica e azione*, San Paolo 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F.V. Anthony, *Teologia: pratica, speculative e spirituale. Verso un'epistemologia più raffinata*, Salesianum (2003)65, p. 741-755. Per una visione aggiornata della teologia spirituale, vedi: M. Rupnik, *Teologia spirituale*, in: *Teologia*, a cura di G. Barbaglio, G. Bof & S. Dianich San Paolo 2002, p. 1754-

The current focus on the role of ‘consciousness’ in human experience, with the distinction made between ‘knowledge about’, ‘knowledge-by-acquaintance’, and ‘knowledge-by-identity’<sup>5</sup>, is particularly significant to the understanding of spiritual or mystical experience<sup>6</sup>.

If consciousness is central to spiritual experience, then it is so also with reference to apostolic spirituality or spirituality of apostolic action<sup>7</sup>. The aim of this article is to explore the consciousness underlying the apostolic or pastoral-educative action of Don Bosco. In other words, we seek to grasp his apostolic consciousness, namely, his subjective grasp of young persons and of himself in relation to them and to God.

Exploring the apostolic consciousness of Don Bosco necessitates a specific research method. Evidently, understanding the life experience of Don Bosco (1815-1888) in Turin, Italy, requires the use of historical-critical method. While comprehending the historical context of Don Bosco’s life and action is indispensable, a historical-critical method alone is insufficient to explore the conscious experience of Don Bosco. Likewise, we realize that a pedagogical interpretation of his educative action misses the theological dimension, namely, that he could be considered a *practical theologian*<sup>8</sup>.

In our opinion, to explore the apostolic consciousness of Don Bosco we need to employ what is now termed the hermeneutical-phenomenological or empirical-phenomenological research method<sup>9</sup>. Based on the writings of Edmund Husserl, this method seeks to grasp the conscious experience of a person through first-hand account or interpretation of reality. In our case, it would mean that we aim at delving deep into the apostolic consciousness that underlies Don Bosco’s encounter with youth.

For this purpose, we first select a relevant sample of Don Bosco’s writing and discourses addressed to youth (section two). We then analyse them to evince the

1768. Cf. also *Teologia e spiritualità oggi. Un approccio intradisciplinare*, a cura di J. M. Garcia, LAS 2012; idem, *Teologia spirituale. Epistemologia e interdisciplinarietà*, LAS 2013.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent analysis of consciousness in the process of knowing, see: W.S. Haney II, *Culture and Consciousness. Literature Regained*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers (Indian edition) 2006; J.B. Chethimattam, *Experience and Philosophy*, Dharmaram Publications 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F.V. Anthony, *Consciousness: The Vedantic Approach to Life and Reality*, in: *The Roar of Awakening. A Whiteheadian Dialogue between Western Psychotherapies and Eastern Worldviews*, eds. G. Derfer, Z. Wang & M. Weber, Ontos Verlag 2009, p. 25-37; idem, *Spirituality of Daily Life and Action*, Third Millennium (2008)11/3, p. 119-133. For the importance and relevance of consciousness in theology and spirituality, see: B.J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, University of Toronto 1990<sup>2</sup>, p. 6-13; R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Consciousness*, Orbis Books 1993.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Midali, *Spiritualità apostolica. Personali e vitali riferimenti fondanti*, LAS 1994.

<sup>8</sup> See *Don Bosco, teologo pratico? Lettura teologico-pratica della sua esperienza educativa*, a cura di F.V. Anthony & B. Bordignon, LAS 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J.V. Spickar, *Phenomenology*, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds. M. Stausberg & S. Engle, Routledge 2014 (paperback), p. 333-345; J. Swinton & H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, SCM press 2006, p. 101-132; M.M. Wilcke, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Research Method in Social Work*, Currents 1/1(2006), p. 1-10, <[http://www.ucalgary.ca/currents/files/currents/v1n1\\_wilcke.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/currents/files/currents/v1n1_wilcke.pdf)>, (accessed on 19.09.2014).

structure of Don Bosco's apostolic consciousness (section three). In the final section, we briefly highlight the significance of the emerging structure of his apostolic consciousness for Salesian spirituality.

## 2. SAMPLE OF DON BOSCO'S WRITINGS AND DISCOURSES ADDRESSED TO YOUTH

The enormity of the archival material and the critical edition of 37 volumes makes an analysis of Don Bosco's writings and discourses a forbidding task. A selection or sample of these with a spiritual quality and addressed to youth would serve our purpose. In the recently published *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera. Raccolta antologica*<sup>10</sup>, Part Three edited by Aldo Giraud, comprises the *Scritti e testimonianze di Don Bosco sulla vita spirituale*. The first section (of Part Three) *Orientamenti di vita spirituale per i giovani* presents a set of Don Bosco's writings and discourses addressed to youth<sup>11</sup>, and as we shall explain below it meets the requirements of our search.

There are, of course, biographies of Luigi Comollo, Domenico Savio, Michele Magone, Francesco Besucco, which present these youth as models for others<sup>12</sup>. These could clarify Don Bosco's view on youth spirituality. There is then the *Memorie dell'Oratorio*<sup>13</sup>, namely, Don Bosco's narration of the origin and development of his vocation at the service of youth. It could offer us an understanding of the spiritual attitudes and virtues indispensable for those who wish to spend their life in service of youth. These texts, together with the part of the anthology forming our sample, could represent the spiritual teaching of Don Bosco, namely, the methods, the orientations and the themes of spiritual life<sup>14</sup>. However, our aim here is not to analyse Don Bosco's spiritual teachings, but grasp the apostolic consciousness that pervades them.

Insofar as the hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis requires first-hand writings, discourses and narratives of Don Bosco, we limit ourselves to the texts given in *Orientamenti di vita spirituale per i giovani* (Section 1 of Part 3 in *Fonti Salesiane 1*, pp. 605-741). These include, firstly, the formal writings addressed to youth as a collective reality: a simple handbook for youth *Giovane provveduto*<sup>15</sup>; and the regulations for the

<sup>10</sup> Istituto Storico Salesiano, *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera. Raccolta antologica*, LAS 2014 (Here after as FS 1).

<sup>11</sup> This has also been published as Part One *Don Bosco Guida spiritual dei giovani*, in G. Bosco, *Insegnamenti di vita spirituale. Un'antologia*, Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraud, LAS 2013. Published in preparation for the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth.

<sup>12</sup> G. Bosco, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*, Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraud, LAS 2012. Published in view of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth. Also in FS 1: 1026-1169.

<sup>13</sup> G. Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraud, LAS 2011. This was also published in view of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's Birth. Also in FS 1: 1170-1308.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Giraud, *Introduzione*, in: G. Bosco, *Insegnamenti di vita spirituale*, p. 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> [G. Bosco], *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de'suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà*

pious associations of St. Luigi Gonzaga<sup>16</sup>, Immaculate Conception<sup>17</sup>, and Holy Sacrament of Eucharist<sup>18</sup>. Secondly, there are 21 personal letters addressed to youth offering them practical orientations<sup>19</sup>. Thirdly, there are 11 short homilies and the so-called 'goodnight talks'<sup>20</sup>, which include the narration of 4 dreams to youth<sup>21</sup>.

Among these selected texts, the letters of Don Bosco to the young have a special place in our analysis as it offers a first-hand account of Don Bosco's consciousness. It is true that in these letters little space is dedicated to spiritual matters. "But there is no lack of letters, brief though they may be, with spiritual input and valuable counsel, and from these emerges the wisdom and experience of someone who is forming souls"<sup>22</sup>. The short homilies, the goodnight talks, and the narration of dreams, although not written by Don Bosco himself, are first-hand records of his listeners. Instead, the writings of Don Bosco addressed to youth as a collective reality represent the reflexive consciousness of Don Bosco.

We cannot but acknowledge the archival research of historians who make these texts available for further analysis, and the expertise of Julian Fox who has

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*per la recita dell'ufficio della beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre ecc.*, Torino, Tipografia Paravia e Comp. 1847 (G. Bosco, *Opere edite*, vol. II, LAS 1976, p. 185-323). As Giraud notes the handbook has had over hundred editions during the time of Don Bosco, reprinted and translated up to the middle of XX century. Reference to the *Opere edite* and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 613-674.

<sup>16</sup> Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome) A2300201: *Compagnia di S. Luigi. Regolamento*, autographic manuscript with autographic correction of Don Bosco. Reference to the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (Rome) and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 699-700.

<sup>17</sup> Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome) E452: *Compagnia dell'Immacolata*, manuscript of Giuseppe Bongioanni with autographic annotations of Don Bosco. Reference to the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (Rome) and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 700-704.

<sup>18</sup> Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome) A2300202: *Compagnia del SS. Sacramento*, autographic manuscript of Giovanni Bosco. Reference to the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (Rome) and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 704f.

<sup>19</sup> G. Bosco, *Epistolario*, introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di Francesco Motto, vol. I-V [1835-1877], Roma, LAS 1991-2012, vol. I, p. 144, 423, 459f, 500f, 607, 629f, 694; vol. II, p. 57-60, 97f, 252, 279-281, 407f, 445, 458; vol. III, p. 208, 385f, 390, 435f, 476f. Reference to the *Epistolario* and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 675-697.

<sup>20</sup> Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome): A0040601, *Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861*, manuscript of Giovanni Bonetti, p. 1-7; A0000309, *Piccole locuzioni del molto R.do don Giovanni Bosco*, Quad. IX, 1876, manuscript of Francesco Ghigliotto, p. 3-7; A0000408, *Conferenze e prediche di Don Bosco 1875/1876*, Quad. XIX, manuscript of Giulio Barberis, p. 63-78; A0000310, *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. X, 1876/1877, manuscript of Giacomo Gresino, p. 4-6; A0000302, *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. II, 1876, manuscript of Emanuele Dompè, p. 7-9, 18-21; A000303, *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, manuscript of Giacomo Gresino, p. 10-13, 24-40. Reference to the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (Rome) and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 706-711, 714-723, 726-729, 733-739.

<sup>21</sup> Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Rome): A0080302, *Cronaca dell'Oratorio 1862*, manuscript of Francesco Provera, p. 1-6; A0000301, *Conferenze e sogni*, Quad. I, 1876, manuscript of Giacomo Gresino, p. 1-9; A000303, *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, manuscript of Giacomo Gresino, p. 41-48; autographic manuscript edited by C. Romero, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, Edizione critica, Elle Di Ci 1978, p. 40-44. Reference to the *Archivio Salesiano Centrale* (Rome), other references and the selected text as in: FS 1, p. 711-714, 723-726, 729-732, 739-741.

<sup>22</sup> FS 1: *Consigli spirituali nelle lettere di Don Bosco a ragazzi e giovani*, p. 675.

translated them into English<sup>23</sup>. Building on the work of others, we take up our hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis of these texts.

### 3. STRUCTURE OF DON BOSCO'S APOSTOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness refers to a person's awareness or mindfulness when placed in front of a reality. In our analysis, we wish to explore "what it is like to be" in front of the concrete reality of youth for Don Bosco: What was his conscious experience of youth? Of what apostolic urgency was Don Bosco conscious in front of the reality of youth? What structure of his apostolic consciousness emerges from his own writings, discourses and narratives?

The sample of texts selected for analysis cover a span of over thirty years (1847 to 1879) which represent the phase in which Don Bosco (aged 32 to 64) was actively involved in youth apostolate. Whereas the ten years before 1847 (entering the seminary on 30 October 1835 and being ordained on 5 June 1941) can be considered a period of formation, discernment and initial attempts<sup>24</sup>, the last ten years, namely, from 1879 to his death in 1888, can be considered the phase of handing over the charism and the apostolate to his followers. Although we analyse the texts that refer to about thirty years of Don Bosco's life among youth, the aim of our analysis is not to describe the historic evolution of Don Bosco's apostolic consciousness, but to grasp the structure of his apostolic consciousness during the years when he was intensely engaged in youth ministry. Insofar as apostolate or mission implies the conviction of being sent, "apostolic consciousness of Don Bosco" can be understood – as we shall explore below – to comprise the consciousness he manifests about the reality of youth, about himself, and about God.

#### 3.1. Don Bosco's consciousness of Youth

In the first place, Don Bosco is aware that young people can easily be misled into thinking that religion is opposed to their happiness and that life is long enough to live as one pleases. Secondly, he is aware of the positive potential and vocational possibilities they have.

##### 3.1.1. Conscious of youth being easily misled about happiness and life

Don Bosco perceives two basic snares closely linked to youthful age. Youth can be under the impression that serving God or religious practice, implies a melancholic life, obstructing their desire for enjoyment and happiness. Instead, he is convinced

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<sup>23</sup> The citations used in the text – at times refined by taking into account the Italian original – are from the English translation by Julian Fox available at: <<http://www.sdb.org/ENG/teibp/content/fonti-complete.xml>>, (accessed on 20.09.2014).

<sup>24</sup> The first encounter that marks the beginning of the youth apostolate of Don Bosco – according to the Salesian tradition – was with the young boy Bartholomeo Garelli on 8 December 1941.

that an authentic Christian life can be a source of profound and eternal happiness<sup>25</sup>. His own desire and wish is that they live happily and be happy in the Lord<sup>26</sup>. “I wish to teach you a way to Christian life that is at the same time happy and contented, indicating the true enjoyments and true pleasures, so that you can say with the holy prophet David: let us serve the Lord in holy gladness: *servite Domino in laetitia*. This, then, is the purpose of the present booklet: to serve God and to be always happy<sup>27</sup> ... We also see that those who live in God’s grace are always happy, and even when there are problems their heart is content. ... So courage my dear boys, try to serve the Lord and then you will see how content your heart will be<sup>28</sup>.”

Don Bosco is conscious that youth can be misled into thinking that life is long, and that they can set right their life later in the old age or at the moment of death: “Be careful, my children, because many have been deceived in this manner. Who assures us of ever reaching old age? It would be necessary to come to pact with death to wait for us till that time, but life and death are in God’s hands, and he can dispose of them as he wishes<sup>29</sup>.”

Likewise, youth can be deceived about the difficulty of living a virtuous life for long, namely, for forty, fifty or sixty years<sup>30</sup>. As no one can be sure of a long life, Don Bosco underscores the value of time and the necessity of utilizing it well<sup>31</sup>. He is conscious of the precarious nature of life of youth, and also of his own: “... one can die going for a walk, or eating, sleeping or at any moment... So tomorrow when we wake up, it could be that one of us dies. Who died? Don Bosco. Oh, how come? He is no more. And what could happen to Don Bosco could happen to any one of us. If anyone is not prepared, let him think about remedying, think about adjusting his matters<sup>32</sup>. In this vein, he underlines the importance of doing well the retreat and being always ready<sup>33</sup>. With the view to preventing youth from the misfortune of ending up in the sad state of “eternal unhappiness<sup>34</sup>, he presents “a method of living, brief and easy, but sufficient ...”<sup>35</sup>.

### 3.1.2. Conscious of the peer-group influence

For Don Bosco, peer group is the context in which young people can manifest their freedom and initiative. In his perception, the influence of bad companions,

<sup>25</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 613, 616.

<sup>26</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614; *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 677.

<sup>27</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 613.

<sup>28</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 624.

<sup>29</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 613; cf. *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 615f.

<sup>30</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 623.

<sup>31</sup> FS 1: *All'inizio dell'anno scolastico*, p. 728.

<sup>32</sup> FS 1: *La coscienza tranquilla*, p. 733f; cf. *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 679; *La tempesta nel cuore del peccatore*, p. 715; *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 623.

<sup>33</sup> FS 1: *Come fare gli esercizi spirituali*, p. 737.

<sup>34</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 613.

<sup>35</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614.

namely, of bad conversations and bad books, leads to the loss of one's soul. On the contrary, good company, particularly of those more given to piety, makes the youth good<sup>36</sup>. Inviting the boys to avoid scandals and scandalous persons, he encourages them to give good example<sup>37</sup>: "Oh how many souls will imitate you and walk the way to paradise! You will be sure to go there too, because anyone who saves a soul can assuredly hope to save his own: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*"<sup>38</sup>.

Don Bosco is conscious that youth can be protagonists of their faith, namely, witness or share their faith with others: "When you pass in front of a church or image of Mary or of other saints, do not pass by without taking off your cap as a mark of reverence. Thus you will show that you are true Christians and the Lord will fill you with blessings for the good example you have shown to the neighbour"<sup>39</sup>. Similarly, he invites his boys to read spiritual books, such as *Imitation of Christ*, *Filotea* of St. Francis of Sales, *Apparecchio alla morte* of St. Alphonse Maria de' Liguori, *Gesù al cuore del giovane* of Giuseppe Zama Mellini; and advises them, "You will have double merit before God if you would narrate what you have read to others or read it in their presence, especially in the presence of those who do not know to read"<sup>40</sup>.

When faced with the context of bad conversation, Don Bosco invites his youth to be rigorous in correcting the offenders, if these are junior to them; in the case of those who cannot be reprimanded, it would be advisable to get away from them. When this is not possible, one should be firm about not taking part. For, "If you remain firm on the Lord's behalf, it will come to pass that these same scoffers will be forced to appreciate your virtue in such a way that they will no longer dare to trouble you with their perverse reasoning"<sup>41</sup>. Yet, in his letter to Giovanni Garino, calling for some prudence, Don Bosco advises, "I would need to make you hunter of souls, but afraid that you might instead be caught by others I suggest that you just make yourself a model for your companions in doing good. Anyway, it will always be to your great fortune when you can promote some good or prevent some wrong amongst your companions"<sup>42</sup>.

Don Bosco then is aware that young people can play a more active role in their environment: "If you hear of something in that holy place that is going wrong, run quickly and inform the superior quietly so he can prevent any evil that might derive"<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 620-622; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 687; *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 679; *Lettera a Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli*, p. 686; *Lettera a Luigi Vaccaneo*, p. 690; *Lettera a Stefano Rossetti*, p. 675; *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676.

<sup>37</sup> FS 1: *Compagnia di san Luigi Gonzaga*, p. 699; *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 624; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzerio e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691f; *Compagnia di san Luigi Gonzaga*, p. 699f; *Lettera a don Giovanni Branda e agli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 695.

<sup>38</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 622-623.

<sup>39</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 618.

<sup>40</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 618f; cf. *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 687.

<sup>41</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 622.

<sup>42</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Giovanni Garino*, p. 676.

<sup>43</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 625.

It is in this spirit that the members of the Company of Immaculate Conception bind themselves: “(1) to observe rigorously the rules of the house; (2) to edify the companions by admonishing them charitably and encouraging them to do good through words but especially through good example; (3) to make strict use of time”<sup>44</sup>.

That for Don Bosco young people could be free and valid collaborators in his own apostolic endeavour is clear from the suggestions<sup>45</sup> he makes without imposing obligations on them. For example, to boys going on vacation, he writes, “If you meet any virtuous companion in your village try to bring him to the college with you; but to those who don’t seem to be good do not speak to them about coming to this college”<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.1.3. Conscious of the vocational possibilities of youth

On observing the boys, Don Bosco becomes conscious of their possible vocation: “When I saw you I seemed to have an inkling of Divine Providence’s plans for you. I shall not tell you this yet, but if you come another time and see me, I shall speak more clearly and you will know the reasons for certain things said then”<sup>47</sup>. Don Bosco manifests a clear perception of all possible vocations open to his boys: “You know then that in this world men must walk on the path to Heaven in one of two states: ecclesiastical or secular. For the secular state each one must choose the studies, employment, profession that allows him to fulfil his duties as a good Christian and which will also please his parents. For the ecclesiastical state, one must follow the rules established by our Divine Saviour: renouncing comfort, worldly glory, earthly enjoyment to give oneself to God’s service, and so assure oneself of the never-ending joys of Heaven”<sup>48</sup>.

For Don Bosco all have a vocation, and what is important is that each one must discern his vocation<sup>49</sup> and the opportunity he has to do good in a context where the harvest is great and the labourers are few: “How much work there is to be done to see that everyone is saved; but *operarii autem pauci*, the labourers are few. By the labourers working in the vineyard of the Lord is meant all those who in some way work for the salvation of souls. And note well that labourers here does not only mean priests, preachers and confessors, as some could believe, who certainly are put there to work and are directly involved in gathering the harvest, but they are not alone, they are not enough<sup>50</sup>. ... As it is in the field, so it is with the Church; all kinds of labourers are needed, yes of all kinds; No one can say:

<sup>44</sup> FS 1: *Compagnia dell’Immacolata Concezione*, p. 700; cf. *Compagnia di san Luigi Gonzaga*, p. 700.

<sup>45</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614; cf. *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 677; *Compagnia dell’Immacolata Concezione*, p. 704; *Lettera a Giovanni Turco*, p. 690.

<sup>46</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688.

<sup>47</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676.

<sup>48</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli alunni della 4° e 5° ginnasiale di Borgo San Martino*, p. 696; cf. *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 693; *Lettera al giovane seminarista Antonio Massara*, p. 694.

<sup>49</sup> FS 1: *Discernere la propria vocazione e decidere*, p. 738; *Come fare gli esercizi spirituali*, p. 737.

<sup>50</sup> FS 1: *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 716.



«Although my behaviour is irreproachable, I would be no good working for the greater glory of God». No, nobody should say so; everyone can in some way do something<sup>51</sup>. ... What I want and what I insist on is this, that wherever you may be you be, as we read in the Gospel, «*lucerna lucens et ardens*»<sup>52</sup>.

Don Bosco is conscious that all can contribute in varied ways to the salvation of others<sup>53</sup>. However, he has a special word of encouragement for those called to priestly and religious life<sup>54</sup>, conscious of the immense need for missionaries<sup>55</sup>: “I hear a voice from afar crying out: O young boys, O pupils at Lanzo, come to save us!” These are the voices of so many souls looking for a kindly hand, one that pulls them back from the brink of perdition and sets them on the way to salvation. I am telling you this because many of you are called to a sacred career of winning over souls. Take courage; there are many of them waiting for you. Remember St. Augustine’s words: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*<sup>56</sup>.

### 3.2. Don Bosco’s consciousness of himself

In front of the reality of youth, Don Bosco’s writings and discourses reveal that he was conscious of his profound love for them and of the responsibility and concern, he felt in their regard.

#### 3.2.1. Conscious of his profound love for youth

Don Bosco’s love for youth can be noted in the way he addresses the young in his letters with expressions such as: “most beloved son”<sup>57</sup>, “my sons” or “my dear sons”<sup>58</sup>, “my dears ones”<sup>59</sup>, “my little friend”<sup>60</sup>, and “dear youth”<sup>61</sup>. Frequently, he concludes his letters with expressions such as “most affectionately”<sup>62</sup>, “with all

<sup>51</sup> FS 1: *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 717.

<sup>52</sup> FS 1: *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 720.

<sup>53</sup> FS 1: *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 719.

<sup>54</sup> FS 1: *Lettera alla giovane Annetta Pelazza*, p. 683; cf *Lettera agli alunni della 4° e 5° ginnasiale di Borgo San Martino*, p. 696; *Ripulire i vestiti al ritorno da un viaggio*, p. 734.

<sup>55</sup> FS 1: *La tempesta nel cuore del peccatore*, p. 714.

<sup>56</sup> FS 1: *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 693; cf. *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 719, 720; *Crescere in fretta per essere apostoli*, p. 728.

<sup>57</sup> For example: FS 1: *Lettera a Stefano Rossetti*, p. 675; *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676.

<sup>58</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 613, 614, 616; 618; *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688; *Lettera agli alunni della 4° e 5° ginnasiale di Borgo San Martino*, p. 696; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzeri e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691; *Lettera ai giovani dell’Oratorio*, p. 678; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 679-681, 686; *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684.

<sup>59</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 619, 621, 622, 624; *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 682; *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 685; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzeri e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 692.

<sup>60</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 685.

<sup>61</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 623.

<sup>62</sup> For example: FS 1: *Lettera a Stefano Rossetti*, p. 675; *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676.

my affection, I am, your affectionate friend”<sup>63</sup>; “affectionately in the Lord”<sup>64</sup>, “your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ”<sup>65</sup>; “with fatherly affection, completely yours in the Lord, most affectionate friend”<sup>66</sup>. The rapport he establishes with youth can be grasped from the expressions such as “listen to a few words from a friend of your soul”<sup>67</sup>; “some fatherly advice that I feel is necessary for your souls”<sup>68</sup>; “I am coming amongst you as a father, friend and brother”<sup>69</sup>.

Don Bosco expresses sincere pleasure in receiving and writing letters<sup>70</sup>: “The letter you wrote me truly gave me pleasure. With it, you have shown that you have understood how I feel about you. Yes, my dear, I love you with all my heart, and my love for you urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your study and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven”<sup>71</sup>. “Be certain, my dear boys, you have expressed to me so many beautiful thoughts, but these thoughts found echo in my heart and I hope that your heart and mine will be one in loving and serving the Lord”<sup>72</sup>.

His love for youth can be grasped from the fact that they are always in his mind and heart<sup>73</sup>. He is immensely happy to be among his boys and expresses it in his yearning to be among them<sup>74</sup>: “So let me say that I want to thank you for all the signs of kindness shown me and the confidence you showed me on that beautiful day I spent at Mirabello. Those voices, the liveliness, the kissing and shaking the hand, those warm smiles, the conversation about matters of the soul, the mutual encouragement to do good are all things that embalm my heart and I can hardly think of it without feeling moved to tears. ... Let me also tell you that you are the

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<sup>63</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 682; cf. *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 677, 679; *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684; *Lettera a Giovanni Turco*, p. 690; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzerio e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 692; *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 693; *Lettera al giovane seminarista Antonio Massara*, p. 694; *Lettera a don Giovanni Branda e agli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 695; *Lettera agli alunni della 4° e 5° ginnasiale di Borgo San Martino*, p. 696.

<sup>64</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli*, p. 686; *Lettera a Luigi Vaccaneo*, p. 690.

<sup>65</sup> FS 1: *Lettera ai giovani dell'Oratorio*, p. 678; *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 683.

<sup>66</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 688.

<sup>67</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 679; *Lettera a Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli*, p. 686; *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688.

<sup>68</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 686.

<sup>69</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 683; cf. *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 689.

<sup>70</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684s; *Lettera a Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli*, p. 686; *Lettera a Luigi Vaccaneo*, p. 690; *Lettera a Giovanni Turco*, p. 689; *Lettera a Giovanni Garino*, p. 676; *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 681; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 679.

<sup>71</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Stefano Rossetti*, p. 675; cf. *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676; *Lettera a Giovanni Garino*, p. 677.

<sup>72</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688.

<sup>73</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 682.

<sup>74</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 681; cf. *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688; *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 692; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 686; *Lettera a don Giovanni Branda e agli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 695.

apple of my eye and that every day I remember you at Holy Mass; I ask God to keep you healthy, in his grace, make progress in knowledge, and that you may be the consolation of your parents and Don Bosco's delight, who loves you so much"<sup>75</sup>.

Don Bosco is ever conscious of the deeper foundation for the mutual affection that exists between him and his youngsters: "There is no need to tell you how much affection I have for you. I have given you clear proofs of that. Nor do I need you to tell me of your love for me, because you have shown that constantly. But this our mutual affection on what is it founded? On money? Not on mine, because I spend it on you; not on yours because – don't be offended – you don't have them. So my affection is based on the desire I have to save your souls, which were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. Therefore the good of our souls is the foundation of our affection"<sup>76</sup>.

Don Bosco's love for youth emerges in a special way in the attention he shows to each individual: "I would have liked to reply before now to some of the letters written by your dear teacher and a number of you. Not being able to do so for each one in particular, I am writing a letter to you all, reserving the opportunity to speak to each one privately on the coming feast of St Aloysius"<sup>77</sup>. "Oh! With what pleasure I read your message of good wishes; with what pleasure I read the name, surname of each pupil, each class, from the first to the last at the college. It seemed to me to be in your midst and in my heart I often said: *Long live my boys at Lanzo!*"<sup>78</sup>.

Don Bosco is not only conscious of his profound love for youth, he is even certain that his love for them surpasses that of others: "Let me tell you again that when you go elsewhere you will find people who are more learned and far more virtuous than me, but it will be difficult to find someone who seeks your good more than I do"<sup>79</sup>. In the same vein, in the preface to the handbook for youth, Don Bosco writes: "My dear [friends], I love you with all my heart, and it is enough that you are young for me to love you very much. I can assure you that you will find books proposed to you by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself, but, it would be hard for you to find one who loves you more in Jesus Christ and desires your true happiness than I do"<sup>80</sup>.

### 3.2.1. Conscious of his responsibility for youth

Being a keen observer of youth, he is concerned about their physical safety, for example, during the cholera plague<sup>81</sup>, and more so about their spiritual welfare.

<sup>75</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684f; cf. *Come fare gli esercizi spirituali*, p. 736f; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzerio e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691.

<sup>76</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzerio e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691.

<sup>77</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli alunni della 4° e 5° ginnasiale di Borgo San Martino*, p. 696.

<sup>78</sup> FS 1: *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 692.

<sup>79</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 687.

<sup>80</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614.

<sup>81</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 689.

“I need to speak to you in public to tell you some things that would be to your liking, then to speak privately of less pleasurable matters, but which is necessary for you to know. Then I would like to offer a word in the ear to some of you to break the horns of the devil who wants to become your master and owner. ... I have serious need of speaking to their soul, heart, conscience, but this need of mine is only so I can do good to their souls”<sup>82</sup>.

In the narration of some of his dreams, Don Bosco reveals the concern and the responsibility he feels for the salvation of youth. In his dream about the *Serpent and the Ave Maria* he narrates: “I was helpless, shouting at one, then another; I even slapped one, punched another, trying to stop them eating, but in vain. As soon as one fell to the ground, another would start eating. So I called the clerics to help me and told them to use every means so that none would taste that meat, but to no avail. ... I was beside myself, seeing such a huge number of boys lying on the ground”<sup>83</sup>. In another dream, he narrates: “I took no notice of their fear and said to them «I want to go and see what has happened, even if I should die with them». I went out and saw a terrible sight: all those animals were pursuing our boys, injuring them, tearing them apart”<sup>84</sup>. Similarly, in the dream about the lambs and the storm, Don Bosco narrates: “...«What will happen to these lambs if they are caught in the storm?» I was saying; «let’s bring them to safety». And I started calling them. Me on one side, my companions in other places, we tried to push them towards the entrance to the garden, but they did not want to know about it. ... I got wet as well and I saw those poor little lambs collapsed on the ground struggling to limp into the garden but they couldn’t walk. I opened the gate but all their efforts were useless”<sup>85</sup>.

In another of his dreams, Don Bosco narrates about Dominic Savio warning him of his lack of faith, his being too timid: “Look how many souls the Oratories have brought to Heaven and we can see multitudes of them. There would have been a hundred thousand more had you had the faith that the minister of the King of kings should have. ... the children of God whom he entrusted to you and for which in time you will have to render account”<sup>86</sup>. Don Bosco expresses the awareness of his limited experience as he narrates about one of the boys known to him, telling him in the dream, “Ah my dear, you are still a novice in these things, you who think of having had lots of experience”<sup>87</sup>.

At the same time, Don Bosco manifests a clear consciousness of the reciprocal responsibility he shares with the boys themselves. Referring to the novena for All Saints, he writes “I am not saying that you make them badly now, no, there are good boys; but there is no longer that commitment. I do not know why things are

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<sup>82</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 682f; 679f; cf *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684. *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 684; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzero e alla comunità degli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691.

<sup>83</sup> FS 1: *Il serpente e l’Ave Maria*, p. 713.

<sup>84</sup> FS 1: *La fede, la temperanza e l’ozio*, p. 724.

<sup>85</sup> FS 1: *Gli agnellini e la tempesta*, p 740; cf. P. 741.

<sup>86</sup> FS 1: *Sogno di Lanzo o del giardino salesiano*, p. 731f.

<sup>87</sup> FS 1: *La fede, la temperanza e l’ozio*, p. 725.

like this now. Perhaps on my side, that I do not speak anymore to my boys, that I do not make myself understood; or on their side that they do not want to understand me anymore; or it could also be both<sup>88</sup>.

Don Bosco is conscious, on the one hand, that the responsibility of looking after the young is shared by other adults, namely, parents, parish priests, superiors, teachers, and assistants<sup>89</sup>; on the other, he is aware that the youth will turn to evil if they do not allow themselves to be guided by those who have the task of directing them, particularly the parents<sup>90</sup>.

### 3.3. Don Bosco's consciousness of God

Don Bosco is aware that all the wonders of heaven and earth have their origin in God, the 'creator'<sup>91</sup>, including man in every physical aspect. God gave existence to man "who of all visible creatures is the most perfect. Therefore, our eyes, feet, mouth, tongue, ears, hands, are all gifts of the Lord"<sup>92</sup>. Nevertheless, man is distinct from other animals because he is endowed with the soul that can "think, reason and know what is good and what is bad"<sup>93</sup>. In this vein, Don Bosco is aware of God's preferential love for the young and their being called to friendship with him: "... happy am I who will have the great and much-desired consolation of seeing you in friendship with the creator God"<sup>94</sup>.

#### 3.3.1. Conscious of God's preferential love for youth

A central aspect of Don Bosco's consciousness concerns God's preferential love for the young: "Though He loves all men as the work of his hands, yet he has a particular affection for the young, finding his delight in them: *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*. So then, you are the delight and the love of that God who created you. God loves you, because you are still in time to do many good works; he loves you, because you are at a simple, humble, innocent age and in general not yet have fallen unfortunate victim of infernal enemy"<sup>95</sup>.

In this vein, Don Bosco underscores that Jesus himself welcomed children, embraced them and gave them his blessing, considering anything done to them as done to himself, condemning outright any scandal against them. The young should then correspond to this love of the Lord<sup>96</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> FS 1: *Il fervore spirituale*, p. 726.

<sup>89</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 617, 619; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 683, 687; *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 688f; *Lettera a don Michele Rua e agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 685; *Lettera a Emanuele Fassati*, p. 677.

<sup>90</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 616.

<sup>91</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614, 616.

<sup>92</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614.

<sup>93</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614.

<sup>94</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 683.

<sup>95</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 615.

<sup>96</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 615.

The liturgical expression “the Lord be with you”<sup>97</sup> with which Don Bosco frequently concludes his letters expresses not only a wish, but also an awareness that the Lord accompanies the youth in their lives. He is conscious of the constant necessity of God’s blessings and grace for the boys and for himself: “May the Lord’s blessing accompany you at every step. ... May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always ...”<sup>98</sup>.

This implies that the young have an awareness of God’s presence: “While you are playing, or in conversation or other pastime raise your mind to God sometimes, offering these very amusements for his greater honour and glory”<sup>99</sup>. “God is great, God is merciful. We sometimes do not think about him, but he thinks about us and when he sees us running away, he pats us on the shoulders, stops us, and makes us come back to him. Is that not true?”<sup>100</sup>.

The awareness of God’s presence should also prevent the young from falling into sin: “And this thought of God’s presence should go with us all the time, everywhere and in every action. Who would have the courage to do something wrong, that would offend the Lord, if he knows that the one he wants to offend can, right that moment before he wants to utter that word, dry up his tongue, or paralyse the hand with which one intends to commit sin?”<sup>101</sup>. The proper response to such awareness of the presence of God is the holy fear of God: “grow each day in the holy fear of God”<sup>102</sup>.

### 3.3.2. Conscious of the goal of life

It is clear to Don Bosco that all “were created for Heaven”, the young people as well as himself: “If you found great consolation in the brief time we were together for a chat, what joy will it not be for us when, with God’s help, we will be forever blessed in heaven where we will praise our Creator for eternity with one voice?”<sup>103</sup>. “Pray to God for me, dear boys, and let us all pray for one another that we can avoid offending the Lord in the course of this life and then to find ourselves together one day to praise, bless and glory the divine mercies in heaven”<sup>104</sup>.

Such a goal is expressed in terms of salvation of souls<sup>105</sup>. Don Bosco is aware that in his effort to help them save their souls, and thereby increase God’s glory<sup>106</sup>,

<sup>97</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614.

<sup>98</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 688; cf. *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 679, 683; *Lettera a don Michele Rua, ai salesiani e ai giovani di Mirabello*, p. 682; *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 692.

<sup>99</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 620.

<sup>100</sup> FS 1: *Lettera al giovane seminarista Antonio Massara*, p. 694.

<sup>101</sup> FS 1: *La coscienza tranquilla*, p. 733.

<sup>102</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676; cf. *Lettera a Stefano Rossetti*, p. 675; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 683.

<sup>103</sup> FS 1: *Lettera a Severino Rostagno*, p. 676; cf. *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 615.

<sup>104</sup> FS 1: *Lettera agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 689; cf. *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614f.

<sup>105</sup> FS 1: *Lettera alla giovane Annetta Pelazza*, p. 684; *Compagnia dell’Immacolata Concezione*, p. 703.

<sup>106</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614; *Lettera a don Giuseppe Lazzerio e alla comunità degli*

he should not forget the salvation of his own soul: “I recommend myself to your good prayers also, so that I may not have the misfortune of preaching to save others and then lose my own poor soul. *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar* (1Cor 9, 27)”<sup>107</sup>.

In accordance with life’s goal, in his apostolic action, Don Bosco consciously aims at helping the young: to be a consolation to the parents, the honour of the country, good citizens on earth, to be later one day blessed inhabitants of Heaven<sup>108</sup>. He sums up this understanding of the goal of Christian life in terms of being a saint, and encourages them to walk towards it: “The Novena for All Saints is in progress and I am hoping that someone will become a saint, or at least do miracles: maybe someone is already like this but I have not yet become aware of it. ... Let each one think of Heaven, where some have brothers, sisters, friends and companions, others their superiors or inferiors who are enjoying the rewards of their virtue. They were flesh and blood like us; and we are out of danger, can easily practise our religion, adjust matters on our conscience: so if they became saints, why not us? — But, you say, we need God’s grace! I assure you the Lord gives us his grace. — So what is missing? A little bit of good will is missing”<sup>109</sup>.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: DON BOSCO’S APOSTOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

Within the constrain of the space available for this paper, we have tried to lay bare the structure of “Don Bosco’s apostolic consciousness” as emerging from his first-hand writings and discourses. It comprises the consciousness he has of youth, of himself, and of God, in realizing the ultimate scope life.

As far as Don Bosco’s consciousness about the reality of youth is concerned, firstly he is aware that the young can easily be misled in their understanding of happiness and of the duration of life, which necessitates a certain preventive action on his part. Secondly, he is conscious that young people can be free and responsible protagonists in their peer-group life-world, which can have both positive and negative influence. Thirdly, Don Bosco is aware that every young person has a specific vocation, and his own role is to help the youth discover it and gradually realize it<sup>110</sup>.

Regarding his consciousness about himself, we find that he is aware of his profound love for youth and of the motive for it, namely, the good of their soul. Such a love finds expression in the concern and responsibility he manifests in their

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*artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 691; *Lettera agli allievi di Mirabello*, p. 681.

<sup>107</sup> FS 1: *Lettera ai Salesiani e agli allievi di Lanzo Torinese*, p. 693; cf. *Tutti sono chiamati a lavorare nella vigna del Signore*, p. 720-722; *Discernere la propria vocazione e decidere*, p. 738f.

<sup>108</sup> FS 1: *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 614; cf. *Lettera a don Giovanni Branda e agli artigiani di Valdocco*, p. 695.

<sup>109</sup> FS 1: *Il fervore spirituale*, p. 727; *Il Giovane provveduto*, p. 624.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. B. Bordignon, *La relazione educativa in don Bosco*, Rassegna CNOS (2014)30/1, p. 28-32.

regard, and the collaboration he solicits from the youth themselves and from other adults responsible for them.

Don Bosco is conscious of God's preferential love for the young, which also calls for a response on the part of the young. Helping the young to become aware of the love of God and sharing this love eternally together with them is for Don Bosco the goal of life. Consequently, making the young fully conscious of the responsibilities that the earthly and heavenly citizenship implies is then the core of his apostolic endeavour<sup>111</sup>.

Such an apostolic consciousness can be regarded as the core of Salesian spirituality. In other words, Salesian spirituality is a matter of consciousness that we have of youth, of ourselves, and of God. On the basis of our analysis, we can describe 'apostolic consciousness' as the awareness we have of our common origin and common eternal destiny, while assisting the young in their vocation to integral life and happiness; as the awareness we have of God's preferential love for the young and of our own love and responsibility for them in their vulnerable and fecund age; and as the awareness we have of our apostolic striving as the basis of our own fulfilment and salvation.

As youth ministers, we come to realize that we ourselves are a fruit of such an apostolic consciousness of others. This, in fact, was the experience of the boys in the oratory who in time grew up to be Don Bosco's disciples and close collaborators. Salesian apostolic consciousness does not then refer to some knowledge to be transmitted, but to a profound personal and collective awareness or mindfulness – inherited from Don Bosco – regarding the identity and future of young people, shared inter-generationally in a sort of spiritual osmosis.

#### APOSTOLIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF DON BOSCO: A HERMENEUTICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HIS SPIRITUALITY

##### Summary

In this brief article, the author seeks to evince the structure of Don Bosco's apostolic consciousness through a hermeneutical phenomenological analysis of a sample of first-hand writings, discourses and narratives of Don Bosco. These texts cover a span of over thirty years (1847 to 1879) which represent the phase in which Don Bosco (aged 32 to 64) was actively involved in youth apostolate. Insofar as apostolate or mission implies the conviction of being sent, "apostolic consciousness of Don Bosco" can be understood to comprise the consciousness he manifests about the reality of youth, about himself, and about God, in realizing the ultimate scope life. Such an apostolic consciousness can be regarded as the core of Salesian spirituality.

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<sup>111</sup> For an elaborate analysis and discussion on the scope of Don Bosco's apostolic action, see: F.V. Anthony, «Buoni cristiani e onesti cittadini» competenti nell'agire generativo e responsabile, in: *Don Bosco Teologo Pratico? Lettura teologico-pratica della sua esperienza educativa*, a cura di F.V. Anthony & B. Bordignon, LAS 2013, p. 61-89.



and Director of the Interfaculty Commission for Research. Noteworthy among his publications are: *Ecclesial praxis of inculturation. Toward an empirical-theological theory of inculturizing praxis* (LAS, Roma 1997); *Faith and culture in Catholic schools. An educational-pastoral research on inculturation in the Tamil/Indian cultural context* (Deepagam, Chennai 1999). The latest volume *Religion and Conflict attribution. An Empirical Study of the Religious Meaning System of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India*, (Brill, Leiden 2015), is in collaboration with professors Chris A.M. Hermans and Carl Sterkens of Radboud University Nijmegen. Besides editing together with other scholars six volumes in the area of practical theology and youth ministry, he has published over sixty articles in specialized journals and edited books.

**Keywords:** consciousness, apostolate, apostolic spirituality, Salesian spirituality, youth, Don Bosco

## APOSTOLSKA ŚWIADOMOŚĆ KSIĘDZA BOSKO. PODEJŚCIE HERMENEUTYCZNO-FENOMENOLOGICZNE DO JEGO DUCHOWOŚCI

### Abstrakt

W niniejszym, krótkim artykule autor stara się ukazać strukturę apostolskiej świadomości księdza Bosko poprzez analizę hermeneutyczno-fenomenologiczną próbkę jego pism, przemówień i opowiadań o nim. Teksty te obejmują okres trzydziestu lat (1847-1879), który odpowiada fazie aktywnego zaangażowania księdza Bosko (wiek od 32 do 64 lat) w apostolstwo młodzieży. Skoro „apostolat”, czy też „misja”, zawiera w sobie przekonanie o byciu posłanym, zatem „apostolska świadomość księdza Bosko” obejmuje jego przekonania o rzeczywistości młodzieży, o sobie samym i o Bogu w procesie dążenia do ostatecznego celu życia. Taka świadomość apostolska może być postrzegana jako sedno duchowości salezjańskiej.

**Nota o Autorze:** ks. dr Francis-Vincent Anthony SDB – ur. W Bombaju w 1954 r., wyświęcony na kapłana w 1985 r. przez Jana Pawła II, jest profesorem nadzwyczajnym Praktycznej Teologii Fundamentalnej na Papieskim Uniwersytecie Salezjańskim. Obecnie jest także Dyrektorem Instytutu Teologii Pastoralnej i Przewodniczącym Międzywydziałowej Komisji Badawczej. Wśród jego publikacji warto wymienić: *Ecclesial praxis of inculturation. Toward an empirical-theological theory of inculturizing praxis* (LAS, Roma 1997); *Faith and culture in Catholic schools. An educational-pastoral research on inculturation in the Tamil/Indian cultural context* (Deepagam, Chennai 1999). Najnowsza książka *Religion and Conflict attribution. An Empirical Study of the Religious Meaning System of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India*, (Brill, Leiden 2015) powstała we współpracy z profesorami Chris A.M. Hermans i Carl Sterkens z Radboud University Nijmegen. Oprócz współpracy redakcyjnej z innymi badaczami nad sześcioma publikacjami z dziedziny praktycznej teologii i duszpasterstwa młodzieży, jest autorem ponad sześćdziesięciu artykułów w czasopismach naukowych i pracach zbiorowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** świadomość, apostolat, duchowość apostolska, duchowość salezjańska, młodzież, ksiądz Bosko