



SALESIAN SPIRIT

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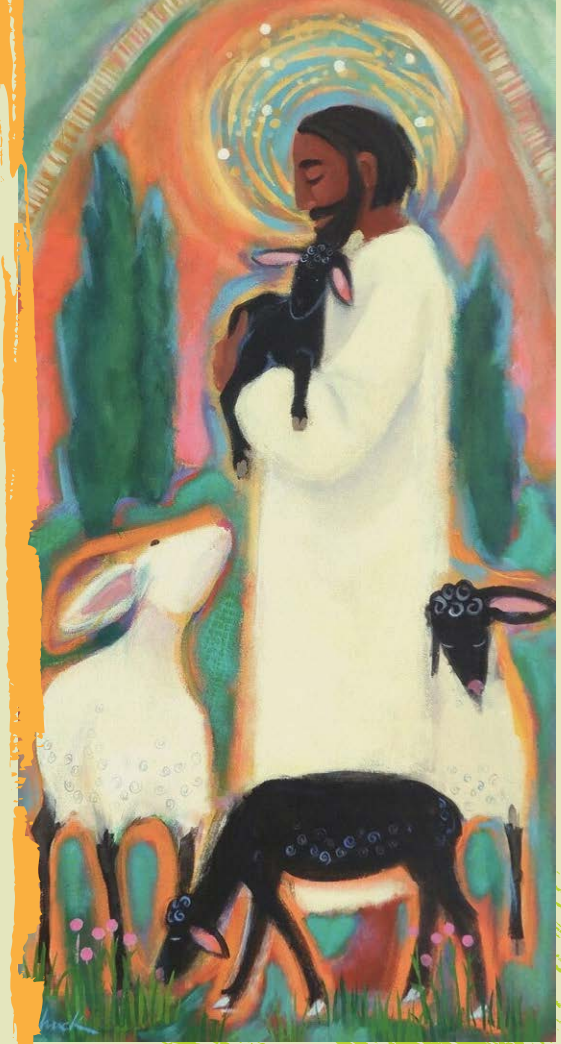
Another characteristic of the Salesian spirit is the practice of the preventive system, a treasure bequeathed to us by Don Bosco. The Salesian spirit becomes incarnate in the preventive system. We realise that the preventive system is not merely a system of education but a way of living and acting individually and as a community. It is a practical way of living and proclaiming the Gospel. It is the Salesian way of carrying out the mission of educating the young. It is the Salesian path to holiness.

Preventive system is Don Bosco's own making! He 'invented' it as he began and carried out his work with his poor boys, under the inspiration of God. It is evident from his own words. The rector of the seminary at Montpellier wrote to Don Bosco in 1886 asking him to tell him more about his method so that he could better help the seminarians. While reading this letter to his council members, Don Bosco commented, "They ask me to expound on my system, and I myself don't know what it is! I have always gone along without a system, just as the Lord inspired me and circumstances required." Without pretending to have discovered the secret of pedagogy, Don Bosco "drew inspiration from the Gospel and the Church's teachings, blending harmoniously the supernatural means of divine grace with the norms of natural philosophy."

And so, the supreme model of the preventive system is Don Bosco living among the boys of the first Oratory in simplicity, joy, family style and a concrete form of education.

INSPIRED BY GOD'S WAY OF LOVING

Pastoral charity, which is the centre of the Salesian spirit, catalyses the preventive system. Love is at the heart of the preventive system, which is not only a system of kindness but kindness (loving kindness) erected into a system! When people asked Don Bosco to explain his system in training youngsters so successfully in Christian principles, he would say simply, "The Preventive System. Charity!" And when asked to elaborate on the ways and means to apply it, he would add, "Instil the holy fear of God".



THE SALESIAN PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

Preventive system is a love freely given. And it is inspired by the way God loves us. He freely loves every creature. The creatures do not have to merit the love of God by their efforts, He loves them all the same: He sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous! (Mt 5: 45). He provides for all his creatures well in advance. He constantly accompanies all his creatures by his close, constant and non-threatening presence. And Salesians are signs and witnesses of this kind of love. So, the preventive system is nothing other than the practice of true charity.

A WAY OF LIVING AND WORKING WITH THE YOUNG

We have a perfect example in the very person of Don Bosco. He was at home with the young. And he acknowledged that that was where he belonged. And he repeatedly called his Salesians to be present physically with the young people, "I wish that you try always to be among the boys during recreation periods, conversing with them, playing with them, giving them good advice. Keep an eye on them. When you cannot join their games, at least supervise them, make the rounds of the house in its remotest corners and try to prevent evil." The Letter from Rome (1884) is another clear example of the great

PERMEATES EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIFE

Preventive system permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships and our manner of living in the community, that is, every aspect of our life. It impresses upon us the orientation of all our activity to the Supreme End. It is what Don Bosco wanted: the only purpose of the Oratory is the salvation of souls!

Don Bosco explained how the preventive system has to be practised in all aspects of life in his letter to Fr. Costamagna: "I would like to have with me all my sons and our Sisters of America ... I would like to give them all a conference on the Salesian spirit which must animate all we say and do. The preventive system must



importance he placed on physical presence among the young people: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always with the boys, especially during recreation?"

Why should the Salesian be with the young? What is the ultimate purpose of this presence? It is to hand on to them the Gospel of Christ and bring them his salvation! It is to prevent evil. It is for boys' spiritual well-being. Don Bosco told Don Rua on his appointment as the Rector of Mirabello (which later he gave to all Rectors), "Put up with anything if it is a question of avoiding sin. Direct every effort to your boys' spiritual well-being." The Salesians live the Gospel especially by loving the poor young people and they, in their turn, copy the Salesians. The Salesians say with St. Paul, "Copy me as I copy Christ". (1Cor 11:1)

be our characteristic ... in the classrooms let there be only kind words, charity and patience ... Let every Salesian make himself the friend of all; let him never try to get his back on anyone; let him be always ready to forgive, and never hark back to incidents that have been forgiven ... Gentleness in what we say and do, and in the advice we give, will win over everyone and enable us to attain all our objectives."

CONCLUSION

The Salesian spirit is living the preventive system. Preventive system is not merely a system of education. It is the way of being Salesian. It is recognizing that our youngsters are God-sent and that we have an obligation of saving their soul. It is loving them and manifesting it practically in our physical presence with them, in our gentleness and patience in dealing with them. True practice of the preventive system will lead us to holiness. ■