



SALESIAN SPIRIT

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PREVENTIVE SYSTEM PREVENTS SIN

The aim of education is the civil, moral and intellectual formation of the pupils. How does the preventive system of education achieve this aim? What does it 'prevent', from which it takes its very name? It makes every effort to prevent the youngsters from sin (from moral evil) by promoting ways and means of being at peace with God. In this healthy environment the youngster grows in wisdom.

The preventive system of education concentrates its energies to 'prevent' offences taking place. Repressive system punishes offenders in the hope that punishments will deter occurrences of future

offences. But youngsters are youngsters! They forget the rules in their youthful enthusiasm. So, youngsters require another methodology: placing them in the moral impossibility of committing a fault through loving supervision and timely reminders. This is the methodology of the Preventive system. It aims to prevent their pupils from sin by promoting their closeness to God, which will make them flower forth into good Christians and honest citizens.

Preventive system of education enables the youngsters to excel in manners, happiness and good lives while being students as well as later on. In 1882 at Lyons, Don Bosco was asked whether the

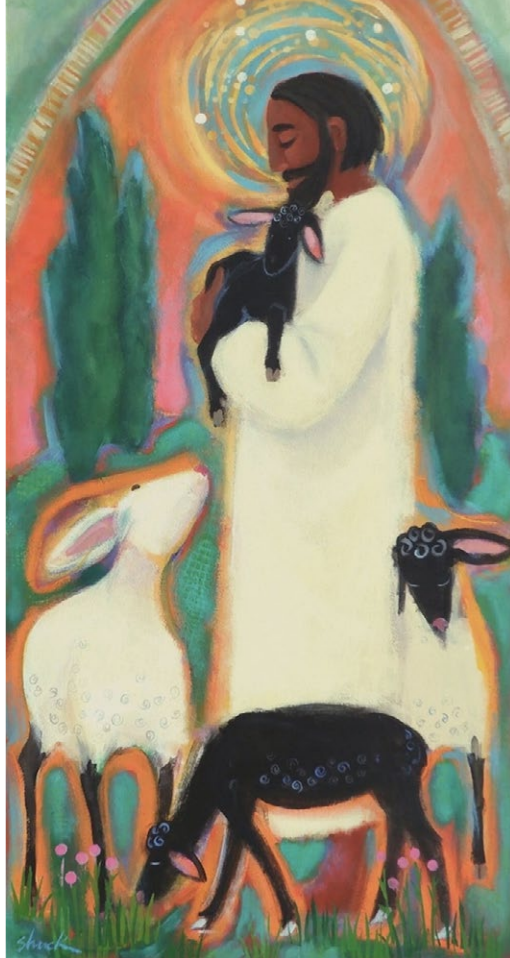
good results achieved by the preventive system endured even after they left the school. Don Bosco affirmed that “the good seeds sown by our educational method during boy’s early years produce lasting fruits after they have left school. Many pursued honourable civil and military careers and are living good Christian lives.”

AWAY WITH SIN

Biographers affirm that Don Bosco’s primary concern was to instruct his pupils in the most essential articles of faith and to foster a reverential fear of God so that the youngsters would avoid sin. He kept their minds occupied with a variety of things that would crowd out all unwholesome thoughts. All his exhortations were centred around the theme of preventing sin and its evil effects from boys’ souls. Yes, it was his policy to “place his pupils in the impossibility to do wrong.”

Prevention from sin was the top priority for Don Bosco. It can be found on his own lips in his address to his pupils. We shall enumerate a few as samples. He instructed his youngsters to insistently pray for three graces, first of which was ‘never to commit a mortal sin’. In his booklet on the preventive system, he says that it places the pupils in the moral ‘impossibility of committing faults’. He told his pupils “At the oratory we tolerate pranks, childish capers and annoyances but never an offence against God.” He told the Salesians that they must be alert “to prevent all moral evil, any disorder among the boys and ourselves.”

Why did Don Bosco insist so much on preventing sin and how is it related to excellence in studies? Sin and true wisdom are opposed to each other. Avoiding sin, one grows in true wisdom. He explained: “I want to teach you how to succeed in your studies and other duties. My advice is not really mine; it is the Lord’s. He says through Holy Scripture: ‘Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin’ (Wis 1:4). We speak here of true wisdom, that wisdom which acknowledges God... Banish sin from your heart because it prevents true wisdom and God’s holy fear from entering it. ... The more careful you are in keeping sin from you, the more you will succeed in your studies and endeavours.” Again in another Good Night at the beginning of an academic year he told his pupils: “You must constantly bear in mind that you are here to learn; therefore study! ... So, commencing from tomorrow, do



your utmost to avoid idleness and sin if you really want to learn. ... You must also be convinced that true wisdom comes only from God. Keeping busy and making good use of time would be of no avail if you are burdened with sin. Since ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,’ we must put our conscience in order.”

Don Bosco compiled a prayer book, *The Companion of Youth*, in 1847, adapted to the needs of young people. In the Introduction to the book, he explained that living a virtuous life, one will be a blessing to one’s parents as well as the country: “if we lead a virtuous life when we are young, we shall do likewise in our later years. ... I have drawn up a way of life, brief and easy enough, but sufficient to help you to be a joy to your parents and a glory to your country, good citizens upon earth and, one day, blessed inhabitants of heaven.” Living a virtuous life is best for learning and education, or rather, is itself the education.

FR. JOHN GIACOMELLI

Fr. John Giacomelli came to the Oratory as a priest in 1849. He stayed there and helped Don Bosco for two years. Later he was the chaplain at St. Philomena's which was very close to the Oratory, till the end of his life. So, he knew Don Bosco from very close quarters. In his testimony he tells us what Don Bosco considered most important in his method of education: "Don Bosco's guiding principle was that the only way to win the confidence of youngsters and to protect them from evil was to be honest and open-hearted with them. ... By preventing them from doing wrong he removed the need for punishment. He



used to tell them, 'Raise all the rumpus you want, run and jump, just avoid sin.' Don Bosco had a very delicate conscience; he not only avoided any semblance of evil, but by his constant, loving supervision, by his exhortations to frequent the sacraments, and in so many other different ways he did everything possible to keep any dangerous occasion far from his boys and to forestall anything undesirable. So great was his horror of sin that he would have sacrificed his life a hundred times a day to prevent a single sin."

THE BOY WITH THREE CONDITIONS

Don Bosco promoted sodalities, first among them was St. Aloysius Sodality, as a means to help in education. On becoming a member, the candidate had to take a pledge. The pledge captures

for us Don Bosco's desire to prevent moral evil: "I pledge to do all I can to imitate St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Therefore, I resolve to flee from bad companions, to avoid bad talk, and to encourage others to virtue, by word and example, both in Church and elsewhere. ..."

In 1855, Don Bosco admitted a boy who had been expelled from other boarding schools. But strangely the lad laid three conditions on Don Bosco: "I don't want to hear a word about confession, I want to be excused from going to Church, and - if I don't like it - I must be free to leave." Don Bosco agreed to all three conditions! He enjoyed his freedom. He roamed about the porticoes when others were in the Church. He ridiculed those who went for confession. Members of the St. Aloysius Sodality made friends with him, coaxed him to play with them to keep him away from boys on whom he could have bad influence. Slowly he began going to the Church and eventually made his confession! He transformed himself and became an exemplary boy at the Oratory.

HORROR OF SIN

Don Bosco created a climate in which the boys had a horror of sin. He himself had a delicate conscience and a horror of sin. He passed this onto his boys. Joseph Morello was an apprentice who came to the Oratory on Sundays and holy days. When other boys played, he would sneak into the church to pray. On one occasion, Don Bosco saw the boy reciting his rosary while carrying a heavy wooden shaft. He made the spiritual retreat in 1852 at Giaveno along with other boys. At the retreat talks, he was always at the door as if he was waiting to exit. This surprised everyone. Don Bosco asked him the reason for this strange behaviour. He hesitatingly replied: "Well, if the preacher talks about mortal sin, I just can't stand it. It hurts me so much that I leave the church or I'll start crying." He had such a delicate conscience that even the mention of mortal sin affected him. In fact, Don Bosco saw him visibly hurt whenever he spoke strongly about sin. Don Bosco had created a climate of holiness and abhorrence of sin in his house.

CONCLUSION

Don Bosco laid the foundation of education on the holiness of life. Both the educator and the pupil should avoid sin and live a life worthy of the Christian calling. This is not only the means of education but also the goal of education. ■