



**SALESIAN SPIRIT**

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The preventive system of education is based on reason, religion and loving kindness. Without religion it would cease to be Don Bosco's method of education. Here, we shall elaborate on the role of religion in the education system of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco was firmly convinced that education could not be divested from religion because religion gave the principles as well as the ultimate 'why' of good living. He gave the boys religious instruction which furthered their good behaviour and excellence in studies. The following incident proves the point poignantly. In 1878, the Prefect of the Province of Turin wanted Don Bosco to take charge of the state-run juvenile reformatory of *La Generala*. The prefect wrote to the Minister of the Interior who in his turn granted the required permission. But when the negotiations began, the minister backtracked because he feared that 'Don Bosco would turn all the boys into priests!' His fear was founded on the importance Don Bosco gave to religion in his educative system. In fact, in the negotiations, Don Bosco had demanded utter freedom in imparting religious education if he took up the reformatory. Here we see two systems at loggerheads, one which believed in religion as the fountainhead of good behaviour, and the other which thought of religion as antiquated.



## PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: RELIGION

Religion figures prominently in the very goal of education: 'honest citizens and good Christians'. So, Don Bosco spoke of the Christian education of the youth. When in 1877, the Ministry for Public Education adopted Don Bosco's Preventive System in the Education of Youth as a textbook in teachers' colleges, Senator Peter Fedele observed, "Don Bosco's achievements cannot be explained if we exclude the supernatural". If we detach religion from

Don Bosco's system, it will not stand.

### WHAT DID DON BOSCO MEAN BY RELIGION?

Don Bosco was a Catholic priest and he lived and promoted Catholicism. The salient religious practices in his oratory, the model of preventive system in action, were: Frequent confession & communion; devout attendance at daily Mass; frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament; retreats, monthly recollections & Good Nights; religious

instruction & catechism; placards 'God sees you', pictures of Our Lady and the Crucifix placed in rooms and playground; Rosary, three 'Hail, Marys' & invocation 'Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, help me to save my soul'. The religious instruction included presenting the main tenets of our faith, fear of God, love of virtue, horror of sin, moral principles and eternal truths.

The education of the heart which is done through religious practices came prior to the classroom studies. Dr. Julius Benelli, having made a study of the Salesian boarding schools in 1879, reported the following as the cause of the excellent results, "... The first priority, even before classroom instruction, is the education of the heart. Some of the teacher-clerics are far from being geniuses, but they are all young men of attractive manners and sound moral training. Their constant presence among the boys exerts a great influence for good. Youngsters always model themselves on others, and in Don Bosco's schools the boys have excellent models to follow. This explains the excellent results."



Frequent confession and communion were the mainstay of Don Bosco's system. He stressed on it very much. He never tired of exhorting his boys to frequent and well-made confession.

Don Bosco instilled in the boys a reverential fear of God, love of virtue and horror of sin through catechetical and moral instructions. He strove to form in them a right conscience, enlightened and sustained by moral principles which will lead them to good and avoid evil.

### RELIGION FURTHERS EDUCATION

Religion makes one live a good life, in peace with God and neighbour. When one enjoys peace within and without, that person will be able to concentrate on things at hand and be successful in living well. For Don Bosco, religion, like the bit in the horse's mouth, controlled the youngster

and reason, like the bridle, steered the youngster's course. Sincere and genuine religion controlled and directed one's actions. It applied moral principles to one's activities.

Preventive system forbids corporal punishments and has rare recourse to other punitive measures. Why? There was no actual need for it. Religion already threatened frightful punishments for those who break God's commandments. The educators just needed to recall them. That brought about wholesome results both exterior and interior, since they reached even the most secret thoughts. So, promoting the sincere practise of religion we do away with the need for punishments.

Don Bosco learned from his own experience that practices of piety boosts excellence in studies. He said, "For many years I have been observing that if a boy is faithful to his religious duties, he is also liked by his companions and superiors, he excels in his studies, and he is the joy of his parents." And we should say that the contrary was also true.

Discipline and piety go hand in hand. Religion touches the heart and in religion we appeal to the boys' heart. Coadjutor Enria told the astonished visitors, "You see, it is not fear of punishment that makes these boys behave well and study hard, but fear of God and the fact that they frequently go to the sacraments. That works wonders with young people." Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda said, "Sin is the soul's death. The world no longer cares for religious practices and sacraments; by accustoming the young to the sacraments, the Salesians have started them off in life in the Spirit and have breathed into them the breath of new life."

### CONCLUSION

Living in a multi-religious context, how can we apply the preventive system in a context where there are adherents to other religious faiths? To what extent can it be applied?