



Dear Friends,
Arthur Lenti has given us this month, a reflection on the holiness proposed to youth. This comes after the month in which we have celebrated the feast of Dominic Savio. This reflection is enlightened by the thoughts given to us by Pascal Chavez, our Rector Major, in his 2004 *strenna*, Laura Vicuña also occupies a place in this reflection. Next month Fr. Art will give us a scriptural on the holiness theme.

As always, the words of the Rector Major, in this case a reflection on next year's *strenna*, are featured.

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HOLINESS PROPOSED TO YOUNG PEOPLE AS THE GOAL AND STANDARD OF ORDINARY CHRISTIAN LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

The "Strenna" (that is, "New Year's Offering") given to all Salesians for 2004 reads in Italian: "Riproponiamo a Tutti i Giovani con Convinzione la Gioia e l'Impegno della Santità come "Misura Alta di Vita Cristiana Ordinaria"—which might be rendered as follows: "Let us Challenge All Young People with a New Serious Proposal of Holiness to Be Embraced Wholeheartedly and with Joy "as the Goal and High Standard of Ordinary Christian Living."⁽¹⁾

On New Year's Day 2004, the Salesian Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez, delivered his commentary on the "Strenna." As its title states, it invites us to place again before our young people young people a new and serious proposal of holiness—a committed and joyful spirituality that would pervade and power their ordinary Christian life.

The Rector Major introduces the subject by recalling the conquest of Mt. Everest some fifty years before (1953) as a symbol of the spiritual ascent to which Don Bosco called his young people. Then as examples of the conquest the Rector Major, as the subtitle of the commentary indicates, recalls the fiftieth anniversary of Dominic Savio's canonization" [1954] and the 100th anniversary of Blessed Laura Vicuña's death (1904). He emphasizes that it is a matter of challenging our young people (in Don Bosco's words) "to give themselves totally to God."⁽²⁾

In the presentation the follows, we shall first speak of Don Bosco's and the Salesians' priorities in their work of education of young people. Next, we shall describe the Salesian spirituality of young people, its nature and characteristics. Finally, from Fr. Chávez' commentary we shall gather a florilegium of salient statements apt to bring such description into sharper relief.

In the first place, we should speak of the priorities of the Salesian mission, namely, the preferential thrust of the Salesian mission according to the charism of the founder.

I. DON BOSCO'S AND THE SALESIANS' OPTION FOR THE YOUNG

1. The Young, Absolute Priority of the Salesian Mission

The lessons young John Bosco read in, and learned from, the vocation dream that he dreamt at the age of 9 imparted the basic direction to his whole life—a ministry to the young. In the constitutions he wrote for the two religious congregations



that he founded this option was clearly articulated. Besides striving for holiness, the Salesian fathers and brothers were to be "engaged in all works of charity, both spiritual and temporal, on behalf of young people, especially poor young people."⁽³⁾ The Salesian Sisters were to work for the salvation of their neighbor, "especially through the Christian education of girls of the working classes (*figlie del popolo*)."⁽⁴⁾

In its Special General Chapter of 1971-72 (SGC), the Salesian Society engaged in a radical re-examination of its mission, the result of which was a restatement of the "absolute priority" of the young, especially the "poor and abandoned" among them. That this was Don Bosco's "absolute priority" in the first place was taken as axiomatic.⁽⁵⁾

The question remained with regard to the meaning of the term "young." After all, the liturgy spoke of Don Bosco as "father and teacher of adolescents (*adulescentium pater et magister*)."⁽⁶⁾ The SGC concluded that the mission of the Salesians was to pre-adolescents, adolescents and young adults, in accordance with the age that corresponds to those decisive stages in human life in different human groups and cultures. Care of younger children might be undertaken occasionally in function of the older

groups. ⁽⁶⁾ (It should be said that the Salesian Sisters at the time had a different view regarding this last point.)

2. The “Poor and Abandoned”

The SGC, after stating the priority of “poor and abandoned” young people and the meaning to be attached to the term “young,” went on record also regarding the meaning of the qualifiers “poor and abandoned.”

It concluded that by “poor” we are to understand the victims of any form of poverty. It may be material poverty (the root cause of many other kinds of deprivation); it may be social and cultural poverty (experienced as frustration and alienation); it may be affective poverty (as is the case with orphans and children of broken homes and dysfunctional families); or again it may be and moral and spiritual poverty (lacking moral values or even a knowledge of God).

Don Bosco in his instructions often referred to the “poorer and more abandoned” or “the poorest and most abandoned,” and therefore more needy, young people, perhaps wishing to establish a priority among priorities for the Salesian mission.

This is the case, according to the SGC, when young people live in extreme poverty, suffer hunger, are illiterate, and therefore cannot hope for a normal life unless they are helped. It is the case of young people who struggle with serious religious and moral problems, who find themselves enmeshed in marginal cultures of delinquency and addiction. Such diverse kinds of poverty are often found in accumulation in Third-World countries, as well as in the larger cities of developed countries, where the children of the very poor live in the hopeless conditions of a “Fourth World.” Many Salesians, so the SGC noted, believe that, since programs of social reform financed by public agencies often do not reach the outer margins of poverty, it is our mission to address these dire needs and so witness to Christ’s saving love. ⁽⁷⁾

The renewed Salesian Constitutions state: “With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are ‘poor, abandoned and in danger,’ those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty.” ⁽⁸⁾

The Salesian option for the young embraces all these young people in all their real needs. As they are the objects of the Salesian educational effort, they are thereby also challenged with a realistic call to holiness.

3. Young People—Young Men and Young Women

A determination of the age and social condition of the beneficiaries of the Salesian mission, important as it was, was insufficient to deal with the socio-cultural developments that were already in effect at the time of the SGC. For example, in accordance with Don Bosco’s spirit and practice, which was the spirit and practice of the

time, boys and girls were educated separately. The Salesian Fathers and Brothers worked with boys, the Salesian Sisters with girls.

But the second half of the twentieth century witnessed socio-cultural developments that brought boys and girls together not only in school but also in practically every other area of their social life.

As far back as 1965, the Nineteenth General Chapter of the Salesian Society took note of these developments and stated, “we cannot ignore the contacts between the sexes which are a commonplace in modern living.” ⁽⁹⁾ The SGC (1871-72) spoke even more distinctly on the subject. In a paragraph entitled “Young Women,” referring back to the statement of GC XIX, recognized “a need for an integrated education for our young people. In this education all the values of life (love, beauty, etc.) seen in the light of the divine plan, will be precious elements for the maturing of their personality.” ⁽¹⁰⁾ The Seventeenth General Chapter of the Salesian Sisters (1881) spoke in similar terms and directed the Sisters involved in education to “adopt a balanced position [in the matter], and to equip themselves, as other modern educators were doing, to work also for young men whenever pastoral reasons demanded it.” ⁽¹¹⁾ The Salesian Regulations of 1884 allow provincials, under certain conditions, to “open our schools to young women.” ⁽¹²⁾

By the end of the twentieth century coeducation was regarded as normal both by the Salesians and the Salesian Sisters. ⁽¹³⁾ And symbolically enough, in 1996, the two Salesian schools at Valdocco (Salesians and Salesian Sisters) by common agreement went coeducational.

In his letter on the New Evangelization, the Rector Major, Fr. Viganò, while recognizing that coeducation complicates rather than simplifies the educational endeavor, writes:

The two sexes, complementary as they are one to the other, require that persons be formed according to the specific requirements of their sex on the one hand, and on the other that a kind of reciprocity be cultivated in them [for maturity]. [...] Experience shows that this will not be effective without a spirituality of young people. ⁽¹⁴⁾

II. A SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Salesian Education, Salesian Spirituality and Call to Holiness

According to the official document referred to above (Fr. Chávez’ commentary on the “Strenna” for 2004), the challenge of the Salesian proposal of holiness is addressed to all young people (“tutti i giovani”), young men and young women, including those most at risk. Normally both young men and young women under Salesian auspices

receive a spiritual formation together with their education imparted in accordance with the Salesian educational method. For the method is also a way of the spiritual life.

Pope John Paul II, speaking of Don Bosco educator and spiritual master in his letter *Juvenum patris* (for DB 88) writes:

We need to get back to the true concept of “holiness,” as a component of the life of every believer. The originality and the boldness of a plan for a “youthful holiness” is intrinsic to the educational art of this great Saint, who can rightly be called the “master of youth spirituality.” His secret lay in the fact that he did not disappoint the deep aspirations of the young (the need for life, love, expansiveness, joy, freedom, future prospects). At the same time, however, he led them gradually and realistically to discover for themselves that only in the “life of grace, i.e., in friendship with Christ, does one fully attain the most authentic ideals.”⁽¹⁵⁾

2. A Salesian Spirituality of Young People, Bosconian Style

Don Bosco did in effect conceive and impart a spirituality intended for young people—“a method or way of life,” to use his expression, that bears a typically Bosconian stamp. He invited the young people of his earliest Oratory to choose certain values, to adopt and act by certain standards, to organize their life as believers in a way that was “Catholic”—in a word, to live in accordance with a spirituality and thereby enter the “way of holiness.”

That spirituality was a simple one to be sure, but it was also designed and able to take the young people far along the way of holiness. Moral lessons and spiritual guidance were proposed through the *Companion of Youth* (*Giovane provveduto*, 1st ed., 1847). They were also given expression in Don Bosco’s biography of Louis Comollo (1st ed., 1844), in his *History of the Church* (1st ed., 1845), in his *Bible History* (1st ed., 1847) and in the *Regulations of the Home Attached to the Oratory* (unpublished at the time). These spiritual writings and the all-important, in fact decisive, presence and inspired word of Don Bosco himself, the educator and spiritual master, nourished the spiritual life of young people like Michael Rua, Dominic Savio and others in the 1850s. The great “experiment” in the education of young people, and in the same act in a spirituality of young people, continued in narrative form in the biographies of Dominic Savio (1859), Michael Magone (1861) and Francis Besucco (1864), in which Don Bosco described three different, and yet so similar, spiritual journeys.

The Bosconian style is evidenced in all of Don Bosco’s writings intended for young people. But it is given the most

distinctive expression in the introductory section of the *Companion of Youth*, just mentioned.

The Introductory Address (“Calling on the Young”) is Don Bosco’s most personal statement of his love for young people. He writes, in summary, “to discourage you from virtue the devil tries to deceive you in two ways. The first is to make you believe that the Christian life is a life of sadness. On the contrary, it is a life of joy: ‘Serve the Lord with gladness.’ The second is to deceive you into putting off giving yourself to God to your old age. You would be taking a grave risk. It is important that you make a decision for God when you are young. This book is meant to show you the way.” He concludes:

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who has a greater love for you in Jesus Christ, or who cares more about your true happiness.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Address is followed by four series of meditations providing spiritual and ascetical guidelines for a young person’s Christian life. They are indebted to St. Alphonsus’ *Maxims for Eternity*, and *Preparation for Death*, to Charles Gobinet’s (1614-1690) *Instruction de la jeunesse*, and to others.

In the paragraph, “Means to lead a good Catholic life,” the chief structural concepts are as follows: God loves the young, and wants them all to go to heaven. A life of virtue is a life of joy, as the saints have shown us. Obedience, spiritual reading, and the word of God are ways to virtue.⁽¹⁷⁾

In the section, “Means of Perseverance,” Don Bosco gives advice on temptation, deceits of the devil, purity, devotion to Mary and vocation. There are also things to guard against. They are idleness, bad companions, bad conversations, scandal, temptations and suggestions of the devil.⁽¹⁸⁾

Seven important considerations follow—all except one derived literally from St. Alphonsus’ *Maxims for Eternity*. They deal with such topics as the end of man, sin, hell, etc. The last meditation, on Heaven, is derived from St. Francis de Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life*.⁽¹⁹⁾

Thus was the Spirituality of Young people in the Bosconian style created and handed down to subsequent Salesian generations. It imparted purpose and depth to Salesian educational efforts for years and lifetimes to come.

3. Don Bosco's Spiritual Insights Adapted to New Generations of Young People

The evolution of ideas and lifestyles begun and increasing in momentum during the latter half of the twentieth century called for an adaptation of traditional Salesian spirituality to the new realities, so as to enable Salesian educators to make a realistic proposal of holiness to young people today. This was in effect attempted by the SGC (1971-72) and by the twenty-first GC (1977). Later in 1990, the twenty-third GC of the Salesian Society as part of its theme "Educating young people to the faith," undertook to articulate at some length such Salesian education to the faith in terms of a "Spirituality of Young people." The section is in effect entitled, "Salesian Spirituality of Young People (La spiritualità giovanile salesiana)," ⁽²⁰⁾ with the understanding that it is also spirituality for adults, that is for the educators. Educator and pupil need each other and are collaborators in this undertaking.

Pope John Paul II in his DB-88 letter to the Salesians (Juvenum Patris) writes: "[Don Bosco] realized his personal holiness through an educative commitment lived with zeal and an apostolic heart. [...] At the same time he knew how to propose holiness as the practical objective of his pedagogy [educational method]" ⁽²¹⁾ Again the Pope, as quoted above (but it bears repeating), writes:

The originality and the boldness of a plan for 'youthful holiness' is intrinsic to the educational art of this great Saint [Don Bosco]. He can be rightly called the "master of youth spirituality". His secret lay in the fact that he did not disappoint the deep aspirations of the young (the need for life, love, expansiveness, joy, freedom, future prospects). At the same time, however, he led them gradually and realistically to discover for themselves that only in the "life of grace," i.e. in friendship with Christ, does one fully attain the most authentic ideals. ⁽²²⁾

4. Five Pivotal Aspects of the Salesian Spirituality of Young People

The chapter on Salesian Spirituality of Young People of GC XXIII (1990) is divided into five extensive paragraphs that are prefaced by a "Synthetic Presentation" of the five paragraph headings with a brief explanation for each and with references to articles of the Salesian Constitutions. These represent the five pivotal aspects or components of this spirituality.

(1) It is a Spirituality of the Quotidian (Ordinary Daily Life)

Ordinary daily life, as was the case with the life of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Const. 12) is the setting in which the young person recognizes the presence of God actively at work, and lives in that presence working toward personal realization.

(2) It is a Spirituality of Joy and Optimism

The young person lives ordinary daily life in an atmosphere of joy and optimism, without however failing to meet one's commitments and responsibilities (cf. Const. 17 and 18).

(3) It is a Spirituality Based on a Deep Friendship with the Lord Jesus

The Risen Christ (cf. Const. 34) renews the young person's life daily and infuses it with fresh hope, imparting to it meaning and fulfillment.

(4) It is a Spirituality of Communion in the Church

Daily life is experienced in the Church (cf. Const. 13 and 35), as the natural setting for growth in faith through the sacraments. In the Church the young people find Mary (cf. Const. 20 and 34), who leads, accompanies and inspires them on the way.

(5) It is a Spirituality of Responsible Service

Daily life is offered to the young people as an opportunity for generous service (cf. C 32), whether ordinary or extraordinary. ⁽²³⁾

III. RECTOR MAJOR'S COMMENTARY ON THE "STRENNA" FOR 2004 INSIGHTS AND SALIENT STATEMENTS

After a fairly extensive Introduction (see above), designed to set the stage and provide inspiration, the Commentary is divided into four long paragraphs:

1. The Significance of this Jubilee (Dominic Savio's and Laura Vicuña's) — These young saints exemplify the "high standard of ordinary Christian living," the aim of Salesian education and Salesian spirituality for young people.

2. Memory — The great number of young saints and saintly young people that is our heritage in education and spirituality challenges us as educators and spiritual guides.

3. Prophecy — The prophetic witness of all our saintly young people of the past speaks to our young people of today.

4. Dominic Savio and Young People's Holiness in the Third Millennium — The holiness of Savio and other young people, some mere children, alerts us to the spiritual potential inherent in the young, waiting to blossom in spite of the negative pressures from modern culture.

IV. FLORILEGIUM: BRIEF ANTHOLOGY OF SALIENT PASSAGES

[1. Challenging all young people]

[We believe] that from their teenage years youngsters are capable of making courageous life choices as Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña [and others] did. We recognize that young people have resources for good waiting to be developed, capable of choosing Jesus and his gospel values, and determined to fight for these values. We may and should, therefore, challenge them, in Don Bosco's words, to give themselves totally to God.

[Furthermore] great ideals are meant to be put not just before the few, the select group of the "elect," but before everyone, because everyone has a vocation [to personal holiness] and a mission [to others]. ⁽²⁴⁾

[2. Don Bosco calls for a high standard of ordinary Christian living]

The high standard of ordinary Christian living asked for by Don Bosco could be summed up in basic ideas: cheerfulness, study and piety; or equivalently: cheerfulness and the perfect fulfillment of one's duties. But it is important to note that here, as in his other educational insights, the

aim was holiness, that is, conformity to Christ through obedience and humility—giving oneself entirely to God, serving others and finding happiness in it. [He asked] neither for long prayers nor for sacrifices inappropriate to young people, but for cheerfulness and the carrying out of their ordinary duties in church, school and society. Just as he recommended to the people at large love for the Eucharist, devotion to Our Lady, etc., or to educators reason, religion and loving kindness; or to the Salesians work, temperance and prayer—from the young he asked for cheerfulness, study and piety.

I would say that in Don Bosco's mind these are different ways of expressing the nature of Salesian spirituality, which, while naturally taking on different forms, remains the same in its essentials. Spirituality, in fact, is the force that powers our life of faith, and that gives meaning, purpose, unity and direction to our whole life. It is the expression of our fundamental religious option in terms of the way we live our ordinary daily life. It gives authenticity to our motives and our choices in life. ⁽²⁵⁾

[3. Significance of Dominic's and Laura's jubilee]

We could ask ourselves what these two young saints, Dominic and Laura, have to say to the youngsters of today. [...] “[They remind] young people of the third millennium that true happiness requires courage and a spirit of sacrifice, the refusal to compromise with any kind of evil, and the readiness to pay the price for fidelity to God even with one's life.” ⁽²⁶⁾

[4. Holiness the product of the Salesian educational method]

Our saints, especially the young ones, are the best seal that we have of the authenticity and validity of the Salesian educational method. [...] Don Bosco, the extraordinary educator that he was, knew the hearts of the young so well that he was able to direct them “joyfully” along paths that others considered too difficult and beyond the reach of ordinary youngsters. [...] ⁽²⁷⁾

Our task and our expertise lie in being travelling companions of the young. ⁽²⁸⁾

[5. Adolescence and young adulthood important stages of growth]

Adolescence and young adulthood are not waiting times, but stages of growth in which the young person's potential for good is developed, courageous decisions are made, and questions about life and its meaning are answered. One must reject the notion that many young people have to settle for a life without ideals. Rather one must encourage the young to work for a better world.

Important values such as honesty, justice, solidarity, communion, involvement, defense of human rights and of the dignity of the individual, concern for the environment, for peace, should be pursued as real commitments. There's where the hope of a better world lies. No one can take the

place of the young; it is they themselves who have to become responsible agents for change. ⁽²⁹⁾

[6. Holiness possible in young people:]

Savio was not yet 15; Vicuña not yet 13; Namuncurá not yet 19; the 5 Polish martyrs of Poznan between 19 and 23]

Taken together, these young people cover the age of adolescence and young adulthood, 13 to 23. They developed their holiness to maturity in a Salesian atmosphere, just like many other boys and girls who have found inspiration in Dominic Savio. This fact forces us to recognize the great educational force of the Salesian charism. [...]

Why [is all this] of practical interest to us? Because it is important that parents, teachers, educators, and adults in general recognize the potential to be found in the souls of young people. It can happen that the expectations we have, the trust we are able to build up, the proposal we make are far below [young people's] capacity and willingness. It is not common today to set the highest standards. Indeed often today what is proposed is a life without ideals. [...] ⁽³⁰⁾

[7. Differences in times and cultures are bridged by the fact that all young people are “young”]

The cultural awareness of young people in today's world, as well as their expectations, are different [than they were in Savio's time]. Yet their deepest aspirations remain the same: a thirst for love, happiness and life. Differences are bridged by the fact that he or she is a young person. The question: To which fountains are we leading them so they can quench their thirst? ⁽³¹⁾

[8. What our young people are like in reality and how we might respond]

In young people we can recognize:

—a great desire for life and meaning; [...]

—hesitation and compromises in seeking a full and happy life;

—sufficient ability to distinguish between the worth of what is on offer: the long-lasting from the ephemeral, what is ennobling from what is destructive;

—a desire to share worthwhile experiences with their peers and with adults;

—generosity, even though often fragile and fleeting.

If this then is what our young people are like, what can Don Bosco and Dominic Savio offer as a program of youthful holiness?

This program is of interest to us because, translated into present-day terms, it is a proposal of holiness for young people of today.

Here are the points:

(1) Accept life as a gift, develop its best aspects with gratitude and live it with joy.

(2) The heart, the backbone, the source and the guarantee of growth is the experience of God through living

in God's presence, friendship with Jesus and a way of life faithful to Jesus: "Being faithful in carrying out one's duties spiritual and temporal."

(3) Adopting a plan of life that includes being open to society, to service, to solidarity and to charity. "Working to gain souls for God."⁽³²⁾

CONCLUSION

1. Beatitudes for Young People on the Way of Holiness (J. Aubry)

In 1990, the year of GC XXIII, a book appeared under the editorship of the Salesian Generalate in Rome and intended for the Salesian Family. It offered a number of essays ("conferences on important aspects of Salesian spirituality"), one in particular by Fr. Joseph Aubry on Salesian spirituality of young people.

This author states that Don Bosco in the Companion of Youth (*Giovane proveduto*) outlined a way of happiness that was also a way of holiness for young people. He then presents the basic principles of this "way of happiness-holiness" in the literary form of beatitudes.⁽³³⁾

(1) Blessed are you, young people, for God loves you with a love of predilection and wants you to be happy. — That young people are greatly loved by God was Don Bosco's deepest conviction.

(2) Blessed are those who choose to serve God, for thereby they choose life in its fullness. — In order to receive the happiness that God offers out of love one must accept God himself and must be willing to "serve God." This means doing God's will with love, doing what pleases God in everything, and practicing the Christian virtues by imitating Christ.

(3) Blessed are those who choose God while young and do not put it off, for thereby they choose a life of happiness, followed by a peaceful death and a happy eternity. — Those who fail to make their fundamental religious option and do not give themselves to God in their youth put at risk both their present and future life.

(4) Blessed are those who find the means of doing God's will, for thereby they enter the way of holiness. — One who wishes to persevere in the way of happiness looks for help to sustain him/her on the journey. Fortunate indeed are they, if they find educators to show them how they may serve God and so remain in God's joy. Consequently they accept the demands of daily duty, seeking God in prayer and instruction, using the sacraments of reconciliation and communion, and taking Mary as mother and help. The young person will also need the courage to withstand and overcome the enticements of evil, and to bear the pain entailed in fidelity to conscience and to God.

(5) Blessed are those who make these choices, for thereby their progress toward holiness is assured. — "Serving the Lord in holy joy" is a simple but effective method apt

to lead young people to holiness.

2. Closing Comment

Don Bosco firmly believed that young people can commit themselves to a life of holiness, and that holiness is possible in the young who make an early decision for the Lord. For him Christian holiness does not require biological maturity in a person. It is not dependent on prolonged prayers, ascetical practices, miracles, ecstasies, or any other charismatic experiences. It depends solely on the faithful fulfillment of the duties of ordinary daily life and on one's generous offering of self to God in love in spite of difficulties encountered. This describes a "spirituality of the quotidian." Don Bosco wrote: "Let us stick to easy things, but let us do them with perseverance."⁽³⁴⁾

Endnotes

⁽¹⁾ The clause "as the criterion of ordinary Christian living" is a quote from Pope John Paul II's proclamation, *Novo millennio ineunte* (NMI) #31. The Rector Major's commentary on the yearly "strenna" is traditionally in the form of an address delivered at the generalate of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who also handle its publication (Rome: Istituto FMA, December 2003).

⁽²⁾ P. Chávez, Commentary, Introduction and # 1 ("Significance of this Jubilee").

⁽³⁾ SDB Constitutions, 1874.

⁽⁴⁾ FMA Constitutions, 1877.

⁽⁵⁾ SGC XX, Capitular Documents, Doc. I, Ch. 1 ("The Mission...") C) # 45-57.

⁽⁶⁾ SGC XX, # 45-46.

⁽⁷⁾ SGC XX, # 47-48.

⁽⁸⁾ SDB Constitution 26 (1984),

⁽⁹⁾ GC XIX, Document 17 ("Formation of the Young"), Ch. 5A, p. 196.

⁽¹⁰⁾ SGC XX, # 51.

⁽¹¹⁾ FMA GC XVII (Rome, September 15, 1981 - February 28, 1982) Atti, p. 112.

⁽¹²⁾ General Regulations (1884) # 3.

⁽¹³⁾ Cf. Acts of the Salesian International Colloquium of 1992 entitled "Coeducazione e presenza salesiana," a cura di Cosimo Semeraro (Leumann: Elle Di Ci, 1993) 234 pgs.

⁽¹⁴⁾ E. Viganò, in Acts of the General Council # 349 (July-September 1994) p. 23.

⁽¹⁵⁾ P. John Paul II, *Juvenum patris*, # 16.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Translation mine. Cf. *The Companion of Youth* by St. John Bosco (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), p. 4.

⁽¹⁷⁾ *The Companion of Youth*, pp. 6-15.

⁽¹⁸⁾ *The Companion of Youth*, pp. 16-35.

⁽¹⁹⁾ *The Companion of Youth*, pp. 36-55.

⁽²⁰⁾ GC XXIII, *Educating Young People to the Faith*, Capitular Documents, pp. 100-120, in Acts of the General Council # 333 (May, 1990). The official English translation of "Spiritualità giovanile salesiana" is "Salesian youth spirituality." But "Salesian spirituality for/of young people" seems more appropriate.

⁽²¹⁾ P. John Paul II, *Juvenum Patris*, # 5.

⁽²²⁾ P. John Paul II, *Juvenum Patris*, # 16.

⁽²³⁾ GC XXIII, *Educating Young People to the Faith*, Capitular

Documents, in Acts of the General Council # 333 (May, 1990), p. 103.

⁽²⁴⁾ Commentary, Introduction.

⁽²⁵⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 1.

⁽²⁶⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 1. The Rector Major quotes words of Pope John Paul II spoken of St. Maria Goretti on July 6, 2003.

⁽²⁷⁾ Here, starting with well-known names such as Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncurá, and passing over the many martyrs, the Rector Major names 18 saintly young men and women from 10 different countries, all of them products of Salesian education.

⁽²⁸⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 2.

⁽²⁹⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 3.

⁽³⁰⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 4.

⁽³¹⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 4.

⁽³²⁾ Commentary, Paragraph 4, final sections.

⁽³³⁾ Joseph Aubry, "Foi et bonheur. Don Bosco propose à ses jeunes les Béatitudes évangéliques," in *Avec Don Bosco vers l'an 2000. Vingt conférences salésiennes* (Rome: Salesian Generalate, 1990), pp. 52-83. The "beatitudes" interpret Don Bosco's ideas of holiness for young people as presented in the *Giovane provveduto*. Cf. *The Companion of Youth by St. John Bosco* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), Part I.

⁽³⁴⁾ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele* [...] (Turin: Paravia, 1861), p. 47.

Readings:

A — From Sacred Scripture (Jesus Blesses the Children): Mark 10:13-16 (Cf. Mt 19:13-15; Lk 18:15-17) —

[Mk 10:13-16] ¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them you in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

B — From Salesian Sources —

1. First Draft of Don Bosco's Constitutions (1858), Preamble, Rua Ms., Italian [Italics mine]:

At all times it has been the special concern of the ministers of the Church to promote, to the best of their power, the spiritual welfare of the young. The good or evil moral condition of society will depend on whether young people receive a good or a bad education. Our Divine Savior himself has shown us the truth of this by his deeds. For in fulfilling his divine mission on earth, with a love of predilection he invited children to come close to him: *Sinite parvulos venire ad me* [Let little children come to me].

The Supreme Pontiffs, following in the footsteps of the Eternal Pontiff, our Divine Savior, whose vicars on earth they are, have at all times by the spoken and written word promoted the good education of the young; and

consequently have they favored and supported those institutes that are dedicated to this area of the sacred ministry.

At the present time, however, this need is felt with far greater urgency. Parental neglect, the abusive power of the press, and the proselytizing efforts of heretics demand that we unite in fighting for the Lord's cause, under the banner of the faith. Our efforts must aim at safeguarding the faith and the moral life of that category of young people whose eternal salvation is more at risk precisely because of their poverty.

This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first established in Turin in 1841.

2. Salesian Constitutions (1984) # 26; # 31.

26. The young to whom we are sent

The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer.

We are called to the same mission and are aware of its supreme importance: young people are at the age when they must make basic life-choices which affect the future of society and of the Church.

With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are "poor, abandoned and in danger"¹, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty. R 1.3.11.15.26.

¹ cf. MB XIV, 662.

OUR PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the Poor He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord- (Lk 4,18-19).

31. Total development

Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order.¹

We educate and evangelise according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man.² Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form "upright citizens and good Christians".³ R 45, 22

¹cf. EN 31.

²cf. GS 41.

³Plan of Regulations of the Oratory, 1854 (MB 11, 46; BM 11, 36).



Presentation of the 2010 Strenna

«Truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others.»¹

On the occasion of the centenary of the death of Don Michael Rua, who was totally faithful to Don Bosco and to his charisma, I want to invite the whole Salesian Family to act as a real movement of disciples and apostles of Jesus and to be committed to the evangelization of the young.

Being committed to evangelization is the fruit and the consequence of being the disciple of the Lord Jesus, who following Him becomes his zealous missionary. In this way we want to take up the challenge of helping the young «to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ»²

The 2010 Strenna takes its cue from the year of St Paul which has almost finished and from the Synod on the Word of God during which I spoke about the passage in St Luke about the disciples on the way to Emmaus, which on account of the contents and the method is seen as a model for the evangelization of the young.

**“Sir, we want to see Jesus”
In imitation of Don Rua,
as authentic disciples
and zealous apostles
let us bring the Gospel
to the young**

Many groups of the Salesian Family see themselves already in harmony with this commitment. By way of example I refer you to two quotations from the General Chapters of the SDB and the FMA.

The XXVI General Chapter of the Salesians recognizes the urgent need to evangelise and the centrality of proposing Jesus Christ: «We perceive evangelization as the principal requirement of our mission, aware that the young have a right to have Jesus proclaimed to them as the source of life and promise

of happiness now and in eternity»³. Our « fundamental purpose is that of proposing that everyone should live their human life as Jesus lived it. [...]at the center ... should be the proclamation of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel, together with the call to conversion, to the acceptance of the faith, to their taking their place in the Church; then from this will come faith journeys and forms of catechesis, liturgical life and the witness of charitable work »⁴.

Then the XXII General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians recognizes that it is the Love of God which urges us on: «The Upper Room where the apostles were together is not a place for them to stay but one from which to launch out. The Spirit changes them from fearful men into zealous missionaries who, full of courage, carry the good news of the Risen Jesus along the world’s highways. Love leads to exodus and to a going out of oneself towards new frontiers to make a gift of oneself: love grows through love.»⁵ Mary, who from the Upper Room teaches us to throw open the doors was the first to experience the exodus and to set out on her journey. The first to be evangelized became the first evangelizer. Carrying Jesus to others, she offers her service, brings joy, makes love an experience».⁶

Suggestions for putting the Strenna into practice

Here are some ideas which will be useful so that the groups of the Salesian Family may together be engaged in bringing the gospel to the young. They are offered to the individual groups but also to the Consultative Committees of the Salesian Family at local and Province level.

1. The local and Provincial Consultative groups to reflect on and re-think the pastoral approach, so as to make effective the choices regarding the centrality of the proposal of Jesus Christ, personal and community witness, the reciprocal relationship between education and evangelization, attention to the variety of circumstances and the involvement of families.

2. Starting from the “Mission Statement of the Salesian Family,” identify in the local and Provincial Consultative groups the best ways to plan and organise together experiences of the evangelization of the young.

3. In particular, foster collaboration among the Salesian Family at Province and local level, so as to carry out the mission to youth, as an updated for of proclamation and catechesis, involving the young people themselves as evangelizers of their peers.

4. Make good use of the Apostolic Exhortations at the conclusion of the continental Synods in order to identify priorities and approaches suited to the specific contexts for the evangelization of the young. In the case of Latin America, use the “Continental Mission” issued by the Assembly of Bishops held at Aparecida; in the case of the Africa and Madagascar Region, follow the guidelines of the next Synod of Bishops.

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva
Rector Major
Rome, 2 June 2009

^[1] BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 84.

^[2] BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 18.

^[3] GC26 SDB, n. 24.

^[4] BENEDICT XVI, Letter to Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, Rector Major of the Salesians, on the occasion of the XXVI General Chapter, 1 March 2008, n. 4.

^[5] Cr. BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, n. 18.

^[6] GC XXII FMA, *The greatest of these is love*, n. 33.