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A VAST MOVEMENT FOR THE YOUNG

CELEBRATION

Educational optimism – the globalization of acceptance

Don Bosco has sanctified the joy of living and has offered young people the key to the attainment of happiness.... The Salesian consecrated or lay person builds within himself certain basic attitudes: * confidence that the good will ultimately prevail; * openness to human values; * education to daily joys and happiness. (*Charter of Salesian Identity, 22*)

Don Bosco was a realist, but throughout his whole life he revealed a great sense of hope. “The times in which he lived were not easy. In the course of his life he was involved in truly epoch-making changes.... In his writings he does not fail to mention the evils that afflicted those living at the time. Nevertheless...he strove for a better future. He did not allow himself to complain needlessly. He became actively involved, taking the side of the good and its promotion in all possible ways. In particular he did this by putting his hopes in the possibilities of a preventive form of education which not only provided a protection against evil and kept it at bay, but he also took the initiative and fostered what was best in his boys, in the young people, in his helpers, in society itself, far removed from any attachment to a particular political ideology.” (*Carlo Nanni*)

Don Bosco was a man of hope which was founded on God. In his writings we find constant references to the motives for the hope which had guided him throughout his life: the “*Lord’s goodness*” shown toward all; “*the Fatherliness of God*,” who never abandons his sons; the “*mercy of God*,” who always forgives; the “*power of God*,” who is always faithful to his promises; and again: the trials which are an invitation “*to turn to God in order to overcome them*”; obstacles and lack of success, which “*purify*” and increase trust; the “*merits of Christ*,” which have *bought* us at a high price; the “*help of Mary*,” mother, protectress, and advocate of our salvation.

■ **God was the source** from which his attitudes of impressive realism flowed: constant serenity; resistance to any discouragement in the face of difficulties (collapsed buildings, the death of benefactors, defections among his helpers, economic crises, political and ecclesiastical opposition); abandonment to Providence in the hardest trials; incessant work on behalf of his boys; the joy that made people say: “Here we make holiness consist in always being happy”; being on guard, because evil “*has its wiles and stratagems*.” But, above all, optimism with regard to the boys to be educated.

Carlo Nanni continues: “His optimism was not just a naturalistic trait, like that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, according to whom a boy is ‘by nature’ good, and is then ruined by society.... Don Bosco did not put the child on a pedestal.... Although he was ‘vulnerable,’ wounded, nevertheless, insofar as he was a creature made in the image and likeness of God, he preserved a radical capacity for good that needed to be fostered, helped to grow, assisted in order to be built up, with the reasonable, motivated help, open to values (sufficient to remember the ‘reason, religion, loving kindness’ of the Preventive System) and a friendly and encouraging presence of adults ‘in a family spirit’ among the young (the idea of ‘assistance’).”

■ **Don Bosco had experienced obstacles and rejection.** He thought like this: “Just as there is no barren or sterile land that cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man’s heart. No matter how barren or reluctant at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit when an educator cooperates with God’s grace by prayer and effort in making it fruitful and beautiful. **Even the most troublesome boy has a soft spot.**” The first task of the educator is to find it with patience: “When you have already advised, spoken, and

recommended and are about to lose your patience or just let things go, or about to give vent to your anger, try to be faithful in small things if you want to be successful in the great!" This is the challenge. We could become very discouraged with some youngsters, so many of them suffering from boredom, pointlessness, resignation, listlessness; and all for the lack of hope.

Psychoanalyst Vittorino Andreoli says: "I love teenagers, with all their fights, teenagers who struggle, who rebel perhaps against whatever gets in their way.... I have seen...teenagers who think they are being heroes and only succeed in being victims.... I want teenagers to dream, live for the future, a future they themselves have planned with enthusiasm, even a fanciful one."

So that a youngster can believe in all this, the contribution of an educator is needed, as well as an environment imbued with Christian hope. Don Bosco shows the way: great confidence in the good, great openness to human values, attention to the joys of everyday life. And again constantly preserving the dream: working so that the youngsters are happy today and for all eternity. This is dreaming with the dreams of God. ■