

# IUVENUM PATRIS

## Introduction to the reader:

In 1888, Don Bosco's Family celebrated the centenary of his death.

Go mark the occasion, John Paul II, wrote this special Commemorative Letter to the then successor of St John Bosco, Fr Egidio Viganò, SDB. The letter is a magisterial exposition of the educative spirituality of the saint.

-----

TO OUR BELOVED SON EGIDIO VIGANO  
RECTOR MAJOR OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY  
ON THE FIRST CENTENARY  
OF THE DEATH OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO  
JOHN PAUL II  
SUPREME PONTIFF

Dear Son,

Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

1. The well beloved Salesian Society is preparing to commemorate by appropriate initiatives the first centenary of the death of St John Bosco, the father and teacher of youth, and I am glad to avail myself of the opportunity offered by this circumstance to reflect once again on the problem of the young and meditate on the responsibilities of the Church in preparing them for tomorrow.

The Church has in fact an intense love for young people: always, but especially in this period so close to the year 2000, she feels invited by her Lord to look upon them with a special love and hope, and to consider their education as one of her primary pastoral responsibilities.

The Second Vatican Council declared with clear vision that "ours is a new age of history"<sup>1</sup>; and it recognized that efforts are being made everywhere to ensure an ever increasing development of education<sup>2</sup> In a period of cultural change the Church notes with concern in the field of education the need to come to grips with the profound cleavage between the Gospel and culture,<sup>3</sup> which undervalues the saving message of Christ and considers it of only marginal importance.

In my address to the members of UNESCO I had occasion to state: "There is no doubt that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the *spiritually mature* man, that is, a fully educated man, a man capable of educating himself and educating others".<sup>4</sup> and I noted a certain tendency to "a unilateral

shift to instruction" with consequent manipulations which can provoke "a real alienation of education"<sup>5</sup>. I recalled therefore that "*the primary and essential task of culture* in general and also of all cultures is *education*. This consists in fact in enabling man to be more man, to 'be' more rather than just to 'have' more and consequently, through everything he 'has', everything he possesses' to 'be' man more fully"<sup>6</sup>

In the numerous meetings I have had with young people in the various continents, in the messages I have given them, and in particular in the Letter which in 1985 I addressed "To the youth of the world", I expressed my intimate conviction that the Church is at their side and indeed must be so. <sup>7</sup>

I want to recall those same considerations on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the "dies natalis" of a great son of the Church, the holy priest John Bosco, whom my predecessor Pius XI did not hesitate to call "educator princeps" .<sup>8</sup>

This auspicious event provides me with the welcome opportunity to offer some remarks not only to you, to your confreres and to all the members of the Salesian Family, but also to the young people who are the beneficiaries of your educational work, together with Christian educators and parents, who are called to carry out so noble a human and ecclesial ministry.

I am also pleased that this commemoration of the Saint is taking place during the Marian Year, which directs our thoughts to "Her who believed": in her generous assent in faith we discover the fruitful source of her educative work<sup>9</sup>, first as Mother of Jesus and then as Mother of the Church and Help of all Christians..

## ST JOHN BOSCO, FRIEND OF YOUTH

2. John Bosco died at Turin on 31 January 1888. The almost 73 years of his life were accompanied by deep and complex political, social and cultural changes: revolutionary movements, wars and a migration of people from the countryside to the towns, all factors with an emphatic effect on the life of the people, especially of the poorer classes. Close-packed as they were on the outskirts of the towns, the poor in general and the younger ones in particular became victims of exploitation or unemployment: in their human, moral, religious and occupational development they were insufficiently followed up and frequently given no attention at all. Sensitive as they were to every change, the young frequently became insecure and bewildered. Traditional methods of education became disjointed and ineffective in the face of this rootless mass of people, and efforts were made for various motives by philanthropists, educators and ecclesiastics to meet the new needs. One of these who came to the fore in Turin through his clear Christian inspiration, courageous initiatives and the rapid and widespread extension of his work was Don Bosco.

3. He felt within himself that he had received a special vocation and that in the carrying out of his mission he was assisted and almost led by the hand by the Lord and the motherly intervention of the Virgin Mary. His response was such that the Church has officially proposed him to the faithful as a model of holiness. When on Easter Sunday of 1934, at the close of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, my Predecessor Pius XI of undying memory, inscribed him on the roll of Saints, he pronounced an unforgettable eulogy in his praise.

Young John, whose father had died when he was very young, was brought up with profound human and Christian insight by his mother, and was endowed by Providence with gifts which from his early years made him the generous and conscientious friend of his companions. His boyhood years were a sign of an extraordinary mission of education that was to follow. As a priest in a Turin then in a phase of rapid development, he came into contact with young people in prison and with other dramatic human situations.

He had the happy intuition of a real and attentive student of the Church's history, and from his knowledge of such situations and the experience of other apostles, especially St Philip Neri and St Charles Borromeo, he conceived the idea of the "Oratory", a name particularly dear to him in its connotations. The Oratory was to characterise all his work, and he would shape it in line with his original idea and adapt it to the environment, to his boys and to their needs. As principal protector and model for his collaborators he chose St Francis de Sales, the saint so zealous in many directions, because of the great human kindness he displayed especially in dealing with others.

4. The "Work of the Oratories" began in 1841 with a "simple catechism lesson" and subsequently spread in response to pressing needs and situations: hostels for the reception of those with nowhere to go, workshops and schools of arts and trades to enable them to find work and make an honest living, schools for humanities and open to vocational ideals, a healthy press, and recreational initiatives and methods in line with the period (theatre, band, singing, autumn outings).

The happy expression: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much" was the watchword and, even before that, the fundamental educational option of the Saint: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath".<sup>11</sup> And indeed he carried out for them a striking series of activities by his words, writings, institutes, journeys, meetings with civil and religious personalities; for them, above all else, he showed an attentive concern for each one individually, so that in his fatherly love the boys might see a sign of a higher love still.

The dynamic thrust of his love was universal in its extent and prompted him to respond to the call of distant nations and even of missions far overseas for a work of evangelisation which was never disjoined from authentic efforts at human advancement.

Following the same criteria and with the same spirit he tried to find a solution also to the problems of girls and young women. The Lord raised up at his side a co-foundress: St Mary Domenica Mazzarello with a group of young women who had already dedicated themselves at parish level to the Christian formation of girls. His pedagogical approach gave rise to other collaborators, men and women, some of them consecrated by stable vows, others , associated with him through the sharing of his pedagogical and apostolic ideals, and involved also the , prompting them to bear personal witness to the education they had received and to promote it in their turn.

5. So great a spirit of initiative was the result of a profound interior disposition. His stature as a Saint gives him a unique place among the great Founders of religious Institutes in the Church. He is outstanding from many points of view: he initiated a true school of a new and attractive apostolic spirituality; he promoted a special devotion to Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church; he displayed a loyal and courageous ecclesial sense manifested in the delicate mediation work he carried out between Church and State at a time when the relations between the two were difficult; as an apostle he was both realistic and practical, always open to the implications of new discoveries; he was a zealous organiser of foreign missions with truly Catholic sensitivity; he was an eminent example of a preferential love for the young, and especially for the most needy among them, for the good of the Church and society; he was the exponent of an efficacious and attractive pedagogical method which he has left as a precious legacy to be safeguarded and developed.

In this letter I want especially to consider in Don Bosco the fact that he realised his personal holiness through an educative commitment lived with zeal and an apostolic heart, and that at the same time he knew how to propose holiness as the practical objective of his pedagogy. An interchange between and is indeed the characteristic aspect of his personality: he was a , he drew his inspiration from a "holy model" -Francis de Sales, he was the disciple of a "holy spiritual director" - Joseph Cafasso, and he was able to form from among his boys a "holy pupil" -Dominic Savio.

## THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF ST JOHN BOSCO, THE EDUCATOR

6. The youth situation at the present day, a hundred years after the saint's death, has changed a great deal and presents a whole variety of different conditions and aspects, as is well known to educators and pastors. And yet today too there remain those same questions, which occupied the mind of the priest John Bosco from the beginning of his ministry in his desire to understand and his determination to work. Who are these young people? What are they looking for? Where are they going to? What are they in need of? These were difficult questions to answer at the time as they still are at the present day, but they are unavoidable and every educator must face up to them.

Today groups of young people can be found all over the world who are genuinely sensitive to spiritual values, and who are desirous of help and support in the maturing of their personalities. On

the other hand it is quite clear that youth is a prey to allurements and conditioning elements of a negative kind, the result of various ideological outlooks. The attentive educator will be awake to the practical reality of the youth condition and will know how to intervene with sure competence and wise foresight.. In this he knows that he is prompted, enlightened and sustained by the incomparable educative tradition of the Church. In this he knows that he is prompted, enlightened and.

7. Aware of being the people of whom God is the father and educator, according to the explicit teaching of Sacred Scripture (cf. *Deut* 1,31; 8,5; 32,10-12; *Hos* 11,14; *Is* 1,3; *Jer* 3,14-15; *Prov* 3,11-12; *Heb* 12,5-11; *Rev* 3,19), the Church, an "expert in humanity", has also every right to call herself an "expert in education". Evidence of this is the long and glorious two thousand years of history written by parents and families, priests and laity-men and women, religious institutions and ecclesial movements, which in educational service have given expression to their own particular charism as an extension of the divine education which has its summit in Christ. Thanks to the work of so many educators and pastors and of numerous Orders and religious Institutes, which have promoted institutions of inestimable human and cultural value, the history of the Church is identified in no small degree with the history of the education of peoples. Indeed, as Vatican II declared, the Church's concern for education is in obedience to the "mandate she received from her divine founder to announce the mystery of salvation to all men and to renew all things in Christ" .<sup>12</sup>

8. Speaking of the work of Religious and emphasising the enterprise they showed, Pope Paul VI, of venerable memory, said that their apostolate "is often outstanding in its admirable resourcefulness and initiative".<sup>13</sup> For St John Bosco, founder of a great spiritual Family, one may say that the peculiar trait of his brilliance is linked with the educational method which he himself called the "Preventive System". In a certain sense this represents the quintessence of his pedagogical wisdom and constitutes the prophetic message which he has left to his followers and to the Church, and which has received attention and recognition from numerous educators and students of pedagogy.

The term "preventive" which he uses is to be understood not so much in its strict linguistic sense as in the richness of the characteristics typical of the Saint's educative skill. It implies in the first place the intention of foreseeing and preventing anything that might give rise to negative experiences which could compromise youthful energies or commit young people to long and distressing efforts at recovery. But the term also includes deep intuitions, precise options and methodological criteria, all lived with particular intensity: examples are: the art of positive education by putting forward what is good through appropriate experiences which call for the involvement of the pupil and are attractive because of their splendour and lofty nature; the art of producing growth in the young persons "from within" by appealing to their inner freedom to oppose external conditioning and formalism; the art of winning the heart of young people so as to inculcate in them a joyful and satisfied attraction to what is good, correcting deviations and preparing them for the future by means of a solid character formation.

Evidently this pedagogical message supposes in the educator the conviction that in every young person, no matter how far he may seem to be from the straight and narrow, there are hidden sources of good which if properly stimulated can lead to an option for faith and honesty.

We may therefore fittingly reflect briefly on what, as a providential reflection of the Word of God, constitutes one of the most characteristic aspects of the Saint's pedagogy.

9. A man of tireless activity in many forms, Don Bosco has provided by his life a most efficacious teaching, to such an extent that even by his contemporaries he was considered outstanding as an educator. The few pages in which he described his pedagogical experience<sup>14</sup> acquire their full significance only when read in the light of all the long and rich experience he acquired through living in the midst of the young.

Education implied for him a special attitude on the part of the educator and a collection of practices, based on convictions of reason and faith, which serve as guides in pedagogical activity. At the centre of his vision stands pastoral charity", of which he says: he practice of the Preventive System is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says ' Love is patient and kind; it bears all things, but hopes all things and endures all things" .<sup>15</sup> It inclines the educator to love the young person in whatever state he may be found, so as to lead him to the fullness of humanity which is revealed in Christ, to give him the awareness and possibility of living the life of an upright citizen as a son of God. It leads to intuitive understanding and gives strength to what the Saint summed up in the well known threefold formula: "Reason, religion, loving kindness".<sup>16</sup>

10. The term "reason" emphasises, in line with the authentic view of Christian humanism, the value of the individual, of conscience, of human nature, of culture, of the world of work, of social living, or in other words of that vast set of values which may be considered the necessary equipment of man in his family, civil and political life. In the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* I recalled that Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church: the way leading from Christ to man" .<sup>17</sup>

It is significant to note that more than a hundred years ago Don Bosco used to attribute great importance to the human aspects and historical condition of the individual: to his freedom, his preparation for life and a profession, the assuming of civil responsibilities in an atmosphere of joy and generous commitment to his neighbour. He expressed these objectives in trenchant though simple words, like "joy", "study" ,"devotion" ,"wisdom", "work" "humanity". His educational ideal is characterised by moderation and realism. In his pedagogical plan there is a successful combination between the permanence of what is essential and the contingency of what is historical, between what is traditional and what is new. The Saint offers young people a programme which is simple but at the same time exacting, happily summed up in an evocative formula: an upright citizen because a good Christian.

In brief the "reason", in which Don Bosco believed as a gift of God and an unfailing obligation of the educator, indicates the values of what is good, and also the objectives to be aimed at and the means and manner of using them. "Reason" invites the young to an attitude of sharing in values they have understood and accepted. He called it also "reasonableness" because of its necessary accompaniment by the understanding, dialogue and unfailing patience through which the far from easy practice of reasoning finds expression.

It is true that all this takes for granted at the present day an updated and integral anthropology, free from ideological oversimplification. The modern educator must be able to read closely the signs of the times to glean from them the emerging values which are attractive to youth: peace, freedom, justice, communion and sharing, the advancement of woman, solidarity, development, and urgent ecological demands. It is true that all this takes for granted at the present day an updated and integral anthropology, free from ideological oversimplification. The modern educator must be able to read closely the signs of the times to glean from them the emerging values which are attractive to youth: peace, freedom, justice, communion and sharing, the advancement of woman, solidarity, development, and urgent ecological demands.

11. The second term, "Religion", indicates that Don Bosco's pedagogy is essentially transcendent, in so far as the ultimate educational objective at which it aims is the formation of the believer. For him the properly formed and mature man was the citizen with faith, who places at the centre of his life the ideal of the new man proclaimed by Jesus Christ and who bears courageous witness to his own religious convictions.

It is evidently not a question of a speculative and abstract religion, but of a living faith rooted in reality and stemming from presence and communion, from an attitude of listening and from docility to grace. As he liked to put it "the columns of an educational edifice",<sup>18</sup> are the Eucharist, Penance, devotion to Our Lady, love for the Church and its pastors. His educational process was a pathway of prayer, of liturgy, of sacramental life, of spiritual direction: for some it was the response to the call to a special consecration (how many Priests and Religious were formed in the Saint's houses!); for all it was a perspective and a path to holiness.

Don Bosco was a zealous priest who always referred back to its revealed foundation everything that he received, lived and gave to others.

This aspect of religious transcendence, the cornerstone of Don Bosco's pedagogical method, is not only applicable to every culture but can also be profitably adapted even to non-Christian religions.

12. Finally from a methodological point of view comes "loving kindness". Here we are speaking of a daily attitude, which is neither simple human love nor supernatural charity alone. It is really the expression of a complex reality and implies availability, sound criteria and an appropriate style of conduct.

Loving kindness is expressed in practice in the commitment of the educator as a person entirely dedicated to the good of his pupils, present in their midst, ready to accept sacrifices and hard work in the fulfilment of his mission. All this calls for a real availability to the young, a deep empathy and the ability to dialogue with them. Typical and very enlightening is the expression: "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you" .<sup>19</sup> With happy intuition he specified: what is important is "not only that the boys be loved, but that they know they are loved".<sup>20</sup>

The true educator therefore shares the life of the young, is interested in their problems, tries to become aware of how they see things, takes part in their sporting and cultural activities and in their conversations: as a mature and responsible friend he sketches out for them ways and means of doing good, he is ready to intervene to solve problems, to indicate criteria, to correct with prudent and loving firmness blameworthy judgements and behaviour. In this atmosphere of "pedagogical presence" the educator is not looked upon as a "superior" , but as a "father, brother, friend" .<sup>21</sup>

In a perspective like this priority is given first to personal relationships. Don Bosco liked to use the term "family spirit" to define the correct kind of relationship between educators and pupils. Long experience had convinced him that without familiarity it was not possible to show love, and unless love is shown there cannot arise that confidence which is an indispensable condition for successful educative activity. The picture of the objectives to be achieved, the programme to be followed, the methodological guidelines acquire concrete form and efficacy when they are marked by a genuine "family spirit", i.e. if lived in an undisturbed, joyful and stimulating atmosphere.

In this connection must be recalled at least the ample space and importance given by the Saint to recreational periods, to sport, music, the theatre or (as he liked to express it) the life of the playground. It is there, in spontaneous and joyful relationships, that the shrewd educator finds ways of intervening, as gentle in expression as they are efficacious because of their continuity and the friendly atmosphere in which they are made.<sup>22</sup> If an encounter is to be educative there must be a deep and continued interest which leads to the acquiring of a personal knowledge of each individual and at the same time of the elements of the cultural condition they have in common. It needs an intelligent and loving attention to the aspirations, the value assessments, the conditioning factors to which the young are subjected, to their situations of life, to the local models which surround them, their tensions, their claims and their collective proposals. It is a case of detecting the urgent need for formation of conscience, of a family, social and political sense, for maturing in love and in the



Christian view of sexuality, for developing the critical faculty and a proper flexibility in the evolution of age and mentality, keeping always clearly in mind that youth is not only a time of transition, but a real time of grace for the building of personality.

Even today, even though in a changed cultural context and with young people of non-Christian religions, this characteristic constitutes one of the very many valid and original elements in Don Bosco's pedagogy.

13. I want to point out, in fact, that these pedagogical criteria are not things of the past: the figure of this Saint, the friend of youth, continues to exert a fascinating attraction for young people of the most widely differing cultures under heaven. It is true that his educational message needs to be studied at still greater depth, to be adapted and renewed with intelligence and courage, precisely because of changed social, cultural, ecclesial and pastoral contexts. It will be well to keep in mind the new lines of thought and the developments that have taken place in many fields, the signs of the times and the indications of Vatican II. Nevertheless the substance of his teaching remains intact; the unique nature of his spirit, his intuitions, his style, his charisma are unchanged, because they draw their inspiration from the transcendent pedagogy of God.

St John Bosco is relevant to the present day for another reason too: he teaches us to integrate the permanent values of tradition with so as to meet in a creative fashion the newly emerging requests and problems: he continues to be our teacher in the present difficult times, and suggests a "new education" which is at once both creative and faithful.

"Don Bosco ritorna" - ('Don Bosco comes back') is a traditional hymn of the Salesian Family: it expresses the fervent hope and desire of a "return of Don Bosco" and of a "Return to Don Bosco" , so as to be educators able to preserve our fidelity of old, and at the same time be attentive, as he was himself, to the thousand and one needs of today's youth, so as to find in his legacy the starting point for a present-day response to their difficulties and expectations.

#### TODAY'S URGENT NEED FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

14. The Church feels herself directly implicated in the education question, because she is always there where man is involved since her mission». <sup>23</sup> This evidently implies a true love of predilection for the young.

Let us go to the young: that is the first and fundamental need in the field of education. "The Lord has sent me for Youth" : in this statement of Don Bosco we discern his fundamental apostolic option, directed to poor youth, to those of the lower classes, those most at risk.

It is useful to recall those striking words of Don Bosco to his boys which form the genuine synthesis of his basic choice: "Remember that whatever my worth, I am here at every moment of the day and night for you. I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare"<sup>24</sup> "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am even ready to give my life".<sup>25</sup>

15. So great a dedication of himself to the young, in the midst of difficulties sometimes of an extreme nature, John Bosco attained because of a singular and intense charity, i.e. an interior vitality that united in him in an inseparable manner love of God and love of his neighbour. In this way he was able to establish a synthesis between evangelising activity and educational work.

His concern for the evangelisation of his boys was not limited to catechesis alone, nor to liturgy alone, nor to those religious practices, which call for an explicit exercise of faith and lead to it, but covered the whole vast sector of the youth condition. It forms an integral part therefore of the process of human formation, not losing sight of defects but at the same time optimistic about progressive maturing, in the conviction that the word of the Gospel must be sown in the reality of their daily living so as to lead the boys to a generous commitment of themselves in life. Since they are living through a period of particular importance for their education, the saving message of the Gospel must sustain them throughout the educational process, and faith must become the unifying and enlightening element of their personality.

Some consequences follow from this. The educator must have a special sensitivity for cultural values and institutions, by acquiring a deep knowledge of the human sciences. In this way the competence he achieves will become a valid instrument for sustaining a programme of efficacious evangelisation. Secondly, the educator must follow a specific pedagogical plan, which, while defining precisely the dynamic evolution of the human faculties, inculcates in the pupils the conditions for a free and gradual response.

He will also be concerned to direct the whole educational process to the religious objective of salvation. All this requires a lot more than the insertion in the educational curriculum of a few periods reserved for religious instruction and ritual expression; it implies the very much deeper obligation of helping the pupils to open their minds to absolute values and interpret life and history in accordance with the depth and riches of the Mystery.

16. The educator, therefore, must be clearly conscious of the ultimate objective, because in the art of education the ends aimed at play a decisive part. If they are not completely clear or are mistaken or even forgotten, a unilateral approach or deviations will result, as well as being a sign of incompetence.

"Modern civilisation tries to impose on man - as I said to UNESCO - a series of *apparent imperatives*, which its spokesmen justify by recourse to the principle of development and progress. Thus for example, instead of respect for life, the 'imperative' of getting rid of life and destroying it; instead of love which is a responsible communion of persons, the 'imperative' of the maximum sexual enjoyment apart from any sense of responsibility; instead of the primacy of the truth in action, the primacy of behaviour that is fashionable, of the subjective, and of immediate success" <sup>26</sup>

In the Church and in the world the integral educative vision that we see incarnated in John Bosco is a realistic pedagogy of holiness. We need to get back to the true concept of "holiness" as a component of the life of every believer. The originality and boldness of the 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) but at the same time 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.

An education of this kind requires at the present day that the young be equipped with a discerning conscience that is able to perceive authentic values and unmask the ideological hegemonies which make use of the means of social communication to enslave public opinion and subjugate minds.

17. The kind of education which, according to Don Bosco's method, fosters an original interaction between evangelisation and human advancement, calls for precise attention to certain points from the heart and mind of the educator: the acquiring of an educational sensitivity, the adopting of an attitude which is both motherly and fatherly, the effort to assess what is happening in the growth of the individual and the group in the light of a formative plan which brings together in wise and vigorous unity the educational purpose itself and the will to find the most suitable means of attaining it.

In modern society educators must pay particular attention to the educational factors of a human and social character which history has shown to be more important, and which are interwoven with grace and the demands of the Gospel.

Perhaps never in the past did education become so vital and social an imperative, implying the taking of a position and the firm will to form mature personalities, as at the present day. Perhaps never in the past has the world had such need of individuals, families and communities which make of education their 'raison d'etre', to which they dedicate themselves as a primary objective and to which they unreservedly devote their efforts and seek collaboration and help, so as to try out and renew with initiative and a sense of responsibility new educational methods. To be an educator

today implies a true individual choice of a way of life, to which those who exercise authority in the ecclesial and civil communities owe a debt of recognition and help.

18. The experience and pedagogical wisdom of the Church ascribe an extraordinary educative significance to the "family", the "school", "work", and the various kinds of "associations" and groups. This is a time for the relaunching of educative institutions and a moment to recall the irreplaceable educational role of the "family", of which I had occasion to speak in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. Education (or lack of it) in the family remains in fact a decisive factor for good, and unfortunately sometimes for evil; and on the other hand it is always indispensable to educate the younger generations to acquire from the family environment the responsibility for interpreting daily happenings in the light of the perennial teaching of the Gospel, without losing sight of the Gospel, without losing sight of the demands of a necessary renewal.

The central place of the family in the work of education at the present day ranks among the most serious of moral and social problems. "What can be done - I asked of UNESCO - in order that man's education may be carried out *above all in the family*? The causes of success and failure in the formation of man by his family always lie both *within* the fundamental creative environment of culture which the family is, and also *at a higher level*, that of the competence of the State and of the organs on which these causes depend".<sup>27</sup>

Along with the educational action of the family must be emphasised that of the "school", which is able to open wider and more universal horizons. In John Bosco's view the school, in addition to fostering the cultural, social and professional dimensions of the young, had to provide them with an efficacious structure of moral values and principles. If it failed to do so, the young people would find it impossible to live and act in a consistently positive and upright way in a society characterised by tension and strife.

A further part of the great educational legacy left by the Piemontese Saint was his preferential interest in the world of work, for which young people had to be carefully prepared. This is something, which is felt as an urgent need at the present day, even amidst the profound changes that have taken place in society. We share Don Bosco's concern for rendering the new generations professionally competent with proper technical skills, as has been done in such praiseworthy fashion for more than a hundred years in the schools of arts and trades and the workshops with such commendable skill by the Salesian Brothers. We share his concern for the fostering of an ever more incisive education to social responsibilities, on the basis of growth in the understanding of the dignity of the subject,<sup>28</sup> which Christian faith makes not only lawful, but to which it gives energy with incalculable implications.

A final item to be pointed out is the importance given by the Saint to youth groups and associations in which youthful dynamism and initiative grow and develop. By giving life to a whole variety of activities he created living environments which made good use of free time for the apostolate, study, prayer, joyful occupations, games and cultural pursuits where the young could come together and grow. The notable changes of our own time with respect to the nineteenth century do not exempt the educator from taking a fresh look at situations and conditions of life, allowing the necessary space for the creativity which is typical of youth.

19. Considering then the needs of today's young people and at the same time calling to mind the prophetic message of Don Bosco, the friend of youth, one cannot forget that in addition-or rather, within-any educational structure, those typical educative moments of the personal conversation and meeting with the individual are indispensable: correctly used, they become occasions of true spiritual guidance. This is what the Saint did, employing with particular efficacy the ministry of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In a world so fragmented and so full of contradictory messages, it is a real pedagogical gift to offer the young the possibility of knowing and elaborating their individual life-plan, as they seek out the treasure of their own personal vocation on which depends the pattern of their life. The educative work of one who thought it sufficient to satisfy the requirements, albeit legitimate ones, of profession, culture, and even lawful relaxation, would be incomplete unless he included in it as leaven those objectives which Christ himself put to the young man in the Gospel, and with which he even linked the joy of eternal life or the sadness of selfish possession (cf. *Mt* 19,21f.).

The educator loves and truly educates young people when he puts to them ideals of life which transcend them, and agrees to walk side by side with them in the laborious daily maturing of the option they have made.

## CONCLUSION

20. In this centenary commemoration of St John Bosco, "the father and teacher of youth", one may say with firm conviction that Divine Providence invites all you who are members of the great Salesian Family, also as parents and educators, to recognise ever more clearly the *inflexible need for formation of the young*, taking up with fresh enthusiasm the tasks needed to carry it out with the enlightened and generous dedication that belonged to the Saint. Among the educators I address especially, and with deep solicitude arising from the seriousness of the problem, the clergy directly engaged in the care of souls: the education of youth is a challenge directed primarily to them.

I am convinced, and the meetings with young people that I have always asked should be included in the programs of my apostolic journeys support this conviction, that there already exists an abundance of projects and initiatives for the Christian education of youth; but we must not forget

that at the present day young people are exposed to dangers and temptations unknown in other ages, such as drugs, violence, terrorism, the pornographic element in many films and television programs, and obscenity in words and pictures. All this means that in the care of souls the necessary education of youth be given pride of place with appropriate methods and adequate initiatives.

The mind and heart of John Bosco can suggest to priests the proper means to this end. The seriousness of what is at stake demands an increased awareness of the situation: the Lord will certainly ask them for an account of what they have done in this regard. Let priests direct their first concern to young people. On youth depends the future of the Church and of society!

I am well aware, worthy educators, of the difficulties you meet with and of the disappointments you experience at times. Do not be discouraged as you follow the privileged way of love that is education. Be strengthened by the inexhaustible patience of God in his pedagogy towards humanity, the unfailing exercise of fatherhood revealed in the mission of Christ, teacher and shepherd, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, sent to transform the world.

The powerful though hidden efficacy of the Spirit is directed to bringing about the maturity of humanity on the model of Christ. He is the animator of the birth of the new man and the new world (cf. *Rom.* 8:4-5). In this way, your educational labours will be seen to be a ministry of collaboration with God and will certainly be fruitful.

Your saint, who is our saint too, used to say that education is a "matter of the heart"<sup>29</sup> and that one must "open a way for God in the boy's heart not only in church but also in the classroom and workshop".<sup>30</sup> It is precisely in the human heart that the Spirit of truth is made present as consoler and transformer: he unceasingly enters the history of the world from the heart of man. And as I wrote in the encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, also the "the way of the Church passes through the heart of man"; indeed, she is "the heart of humanity": "with her heart which embraces all human hearts she implores from the Holy Spirit 'the righteousness, the peace and the joy of the Spirit' in which, in the words of St Paul, consists the Kingdom of God"<sup>31</sup> By your work, dear educators, you are sharing in a wondrous manner in the motherly function of the Church<sup>32</sup>

Keep always before you Mary most Holy, the most lofty collaborator of the Holy Spirit, who was docile to his inspirations and so became the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. She continues through the centuries "to be a maternal presence as is shown by Christ's words spoken from the Cross: 'Woman, behold your son'; 'Behold your mother'».<sup>33</sup>

Never take your gaze off Mary; listen to her when she says: "Do what Jesus tells you" (Jn 2,5). Pray to her too with daily solicitude, that the Lord may continue to raise up generous souls who can say yes to his vocational call.

To her I entrust you, and with you the whole world of youth, that being attracted, animated and guided by her, they may be able to attain through the mediation of your educative work, the stature of new men for a new world: the world of Christ, Master and Lord.

May my Apostolic Blessing, the pledge and promise of heavenly gifts and testimony of my affection, strengthen you in the faith, and may it console and protect all the members of the great Salesian Family.

Given at Rome, from St Peter's, on 31 January, the memorial of St John Bosco, in the year 1988, the tenth of my Pontificate.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

-----

#### END NOTES

1. *Past. Const. on the Church in the modern world Gaudium et Spes*, 4
- 2 Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* - preface
- 3 Cf. PAUL VI, Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), p. 19.
- 4 Address to UNESCO (2 June 1980), 12: AAS 72 (1980), p. 743.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 13; *I.c.*, p. 743.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 11; *I.c.*, p. 742.
- 7 Letter to the youth of the world *Parati semper* (31 March 1985): A,4S 77 (1985), pp. 579-628.
- 8 PIUS XI, Lett. Decret. *Geminata Laetitia* (1 April 1934): AAS 27 (1935), p. 285.
- 9 Cf. Encyc. Lett. *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 12-19: AAS 79 (1987), pp. 374-384
- 10 *Il Giovane Provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 7.
11. *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 18 Turin 1937, p. 258.
- 12 Declaration on Christian education *Gravissimum Educationis* - preface.
- 13 Apost. Exhort. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 69: A,4S 68 (1976), p. 59.
- 14 Cf. *Il Sistema Preventivo*, in "Regolamento per le case della Società S. Francesco di Sales", Turin, 1877, in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti Pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.VV.) LAS, Rome 1987, 192ff
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195
- 16 Cf. *Il Sistema Preventivo*, in , Turin 1877 in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 166 ff.
- 17 Encyc. Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 13.14: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 282.284-285.
- 18 Cf. GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 168.
- 19 *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 4, S. Benigno Canavese 1904, p. 654.

20 *Lettera da Roma*, 1884, in GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.W.), LAS Rome 1987, p. 294.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 296

22 Concerning the relationship between *recreation* and *education* in the thought and practice of John Bosco, it is well known that Salesian Oratories are distinguished for the large amount of time given to sport, music, and every kind of initiative forming part of healthy and formative recreation.

23 Cf. Encyc. Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 13.14: A,4S 71 (1979), pp. 284-285.

24 *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 7, Turin 1909, p. 503

27 *Ibid.*, 12; I.c., pp. 742-743

28 Cf. Encyc. Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 6: AAS 73 (1981), pp. 589-592.

29. *Memorie Biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol 16, Turin 1935, p.447

30. *Ibid.*, vol 6, pp815-816

31. Ency. Letter *Dominum et vivificantem* (18 May, 1986), 67

32 Cf. CON. ECUM. VATIC. II Declaration on Christian education, 3

33 Encyc. Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987), 24: A,4S 79 (1987), p. 393.