



TUGBOATS

...an additional help to steer a willing heart and mind into the harbour of life or out into the sea of living, as did Don Bosco, with and for the thousands of young people of his times.

Challenges & Signposts





THE REAL CHALLENGE – NOT TO PROCLAIM BUT TO BE, DON BOSCO.

Fr Tony D'Souza sdb

Way back in 1982, the Salesians of Don Bosco set up residence in Nairobi, Kenya. It was their first presence in East Africa, and till then, Don Bosco was unknown to a majority of the Kenyans. In fact, in the first month, seeing the board, 'Don Bosco – Salesian Fathers' at the entrance to the villa, a gentleman walked in and asked to see Mr Don Bosco. But in less than six months the name and fame of the Founder of the Salesians spread, and on 31st January, a surprisingly big gathering attended the festive Holy Mass, presided over by Maurice Cardinal Otunga to celebrate St John Bosco. Other Religious Congregations were already working in Kenya effectively and with great missionary zeal among the people but they perhaps, did not make much mention of their Founders and someone even remarked, "Don't the other religious congregations have founders?"



However, in this bicentenary year of the Birth of Don Bosco (2015), what is clearly visible in the vibrant celebrations across the world, is less of an extravagant euphoria and more of a serious commitment, to be 'like Don Bosco with the young and for the young'.

The 27th General Chapter of the Salesians (SDB) had already discussed intelligently and deliberated wisely on the importance of being realistic and relevant. It redefined the identity of every Salesian to be like Don Bosco: 'Mystics of the Spirit, Prophets of fraternal life and Servants of the young'.

Yes, Don Bosco was not only realistic and relevant in responding to the situations and needs of youth in his times, he was also bravely resilient, like a tennis ball.

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Just as a tennis ball bounces higher, the harder it hits the ground, Don Bosco possessed that admirable quality of 'resilience', an important ingredient of Gospel radicality exemplified in Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding the stiff opposition, persecution, passion and death on a cross, Jesus did not succumb but bounced back. Resilience, ultimately for Jesus is Resurrection. Resilience in Jesus Christ, then, more than grit, is a 'mysticism' founded on total trust in God and unconditional fidelity to His Will.

Resilience characterised the life of Don Bosco, too. He lived in deep 'union with God' and he literally 'hoped against hope'. Don Bosco grew up from childhood through tough challenges of poverty and faced all kinds of obstacles to realise his vocation as a priest and his mission to be a friend of poor, marginalised youngsters. The harder he hit the floor of difficulties, the higher he bounced to achieve his goals, trusting in Divine Providence and Mary, the 'help of Christians'. It is in fact, this quality of faith-propelled resilience that is needed to grow into Mystics of the Spirit, Prophets of fraternal life and Servants of the young.

To respond to the complex needs of modern youth, groping in a world of confused values and false promises; and, to carry forward the Salesian Mission beyond this bicentenary year, the Salesian Family would do well to shift from being mere story-tellers of the glories of Don Bosco and strive to emulate the realism, relevance and resilience of Don Bosco, the Mystic, the Prophet and the Servant of the young, with the young and for the young.



BEWARE OF THE MORAL ROT WITHIN

Fr Thomas Anchukandamn sdb

The Roman Empire has arguably been one of the most astonishing political achievements in human history and the question that has haunted many for centuries has been, of course, why it fell! It was as if the light of civilization flickered and dimmed with the arrival of the ferocious 'barbarians' at the gates and the eventual destruction of humanity's best hope! This is what Western historians dealing with the fall of the Roman Empire have taught us and want us to believe. But the fact is that Rome had lost its claim to the moral high ground way before it lost the Empire to a people it termed barbarian. Rome had degenerated into an arena of slavery and blood-sport and would succumb not to enemies from without, but to the rot from within!

The religious in the world are called to live by a higher standard of Christian life and we Salesians are no exception. However, it appears that often they are found wanting in this at various levels with a tendency to lower the standards, moving on a tangent and conforming to the standards of the

world. This only leads to their losing out on the moral high ground which in the type of life we have freely chosen to live. This needs to be maintained at all cost to prevent internal rot from setting in leading eventually to a loss of credibility and ultimate collapse! The easy tendency to blame external forces must also be eschewed at all cost for as Cassius would tell Brutus in Julius Caesar, "The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars but in ourselves..!"

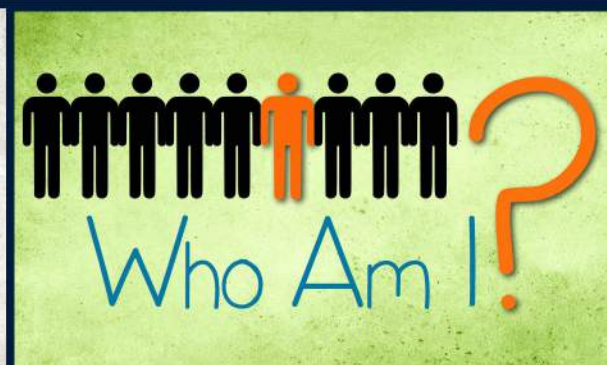
Living a higher standard of Christian life today is dependent on three factors: a) a deep spirituality; b) a deep sense of communion despite the unavoidable socio-economic or any other differences; and c) a profound and passionate sense of mission. John Wesley, the Protestant preacher would give credible expression to the above when he said: "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth!"

WHERE ARE WE NOW?



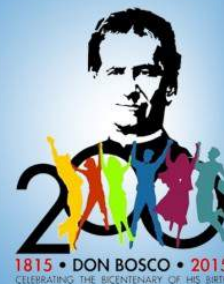
A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.

Dalai Lama



CONSUMERISM





CALL FOR A SYSTEMIC TURN BY SALESIAN INDIA

Fr Jose Maliekal sdb

Challenges facing an organization can be systematic or systemic. Systematic refers to what is being done, to keep an established and organized system running, as a matter of routine. Systemic, on the other hand, refers to something that affects the whole system, and which, if altered, would give a new direction to any organization.

One of the systemic challenges facing the Salesian Congregation in India is for it to grow over the selective amnesia, as regards its patrimony of Oratorian temerity, a legacy left behind by Don Bosco and the missionaries. The paralyzing effect of this amnesia is long visible in the Indian Provinces, which have customized themselves to the corporate culture, in their dependence on Funding Agencies, for resources. Not that money will reach our doorsteps, unless we look for it. But to be conditioned by a near-total dependence on the Funding Agencies and their stipulations, often leads to a bonsai-ing of our pastoral imagination and

daring, making us oblivious of the ever-present Divine Providence and its inscrutable ways.

Another systemic challenge, which the Indian Provinces would do well to go through, would be a paradigm shift, from staying at the plane of programmes, which never challenge the status quo, to taking up a stance of challenging the system. Helder Camara, the Archbishop of the Diocese of Olinda and Recife, in Brazil, from 1964 to 1985, an outspoken critic of the 1964-85 military dictatorship and a catalyst in the powerful movement for social change, once famously stated, "When I was helping the poor, they extolled me as the Mother Theresa of Brazil, but when I started asking, 'Why there is Poverty?', they started labeling me as a Red – a Karl Marx." I wish Salesian India and the youth for whom and with whom, we are working, allowed themselves to be challenged by this much-needed 'Why' dimension, in all our undertakings.

Know Don Bosco

1. What is the central theme of the dream in Rome?
2. What are the characteristic virtues of Salesians?
3. What was the special mark of Don Bosco's spirituality?
4. What was the topic of the important dream Don Bosco had in 1847?
5. What was the motto of Archbishop Louis Mathias?

(Names of those who send the right answers will be published in the next issue. Please send your answers to manunsdb@yahoo.com)

Answers for the January 2015 Issue

1. Who was the first Salesian to die in India? When?
Fr Enrico Vigneron; died on 20th November 1907 after a difficult operation
2. Who was the youngest provincial to take charge in Salesian India?
Fr Tony D'Souza (INB)
3. Who was the longest serving Novice Master in India?
Fr Egidius Sola (18 years)
4. The first native to be elected as the provincial in India and of which province?
Fr Panakkezham Thomas (INM)
5. Name the Indian Salesians appointed /elected as provincials outside South Asia?
Fr George Chalissery, Fr Thomas Thayil, Fr Tony D'Souza, Fr Simon Manjooran



THE TERMITE OF COUNTER-WITNESS

Sr Karre Kamalabhai fma

Religious life has taken many different forms and shapes down the centuries. Many good things were done in the past by the witnessing religious who sacrificed their life for the good of many. Many vocations came to the church seeing the credibility and visibility in the church. But today the young people think twice to join the seminary or the convent. They find no evidence that religious are always better, more inspiring and committed compared to lay people. They find no meaning as they witness the counter witness given by the so-called followers of Christ.

The Salesian congregation too is not far from this culture of counter values by some of its members. Conflicts in communities have become common due to some individualistic attitudes of persons. Power-consciousness and cultural narrow mindedness of the religious often tend to bring about divisions at local and regional levels. In most cases the individual (himself/herself) becomes the criterion of truth. It may be that no Salesian member professes this openly but his/her behaviour with regard to mission, to piety and relationship smack of this hidden agenda.

To counter this trend, one should focus more on the mission of the community rather than seek personal pastoral initiatives. Furthermore, conflict in community must not be seen as negative but as an opportunity for maturing and so solve them in the light of the Gospel through prayer and sacraments. Finally, to be happy in this way of life we need a sense of God, take care of our own personal prayer, make an effort to be loving and helpful and be generously dedicated to our mission.

How thrilling life can be if we make an adventure where inner strength masters our ego, and creative goodness turns deserts of disillusionment into fertile gardens of hope for poor young people.



CHALLENGING THE COMFORT OF MEDIOCRITY

Br Vincent Castilino sdb

Among the few issues that plague Salesian India today, one of the most lethal one is the comfort of mediocrity. It is basically a state of life wherein one, not only does not have the passion to live by one's convictions, but is not willing to have any convictions at all! Even if one does have a couple of convictions, one lacks the courage to stand by those, leave alone be willing to properly discern one's principles... merely staying afloat with a tag before and after one's name. The luxury such a lifestyle offers is very alluring and addictive.

A possible way out of this vicious circle is to live a life truly like Jesus did. Shorn of all glory, prestige, comfort, and ease, He lived a committed and passionate life (life in its fullness). Besides His very life itself being a constant challenge, He did not hesitate to spell out the demands of the Kingdom. He made no compromises. Whatever the circumstances around Him, His values remained constant. In our own life too, a greater sense of personal responsibility for our own growth, and a commitment to the mission that we have freely chosen to be part of will be of great help. Furthermore, this needs to be based upon a personal experience of the person of Christ. All of this is easier said than done... but if not done, the only possible consequence is that we would be Salesians only in name, not in spirit nor in truth.

BEING PROPHETS AMONG THE YOUNG

Sr Josmy Jose fma

One of the greatest challenges to our mission among the young is linked to our prophetic ability to read the signs of the times, in other words, what is God saying to us and asking of us through these young people with whom we interact.

In the Strenna 2015, the Rector Major Ángel Fernández Artime says, “This challenge begins with our having the ability to listen and having the courage and the daring to enter into a dialogue that is “horizontal,” without entrenched positions, without considering ourselves ‘a priori’ in possession of the truth. [...] We never emerge from an encounter with them unscathed but rather mutually enriched and stimulated.” I think the “horizontal” dialogue can be the “educative presence among the young.” Prophet Ezekiel gives us a beautiful example for this kind of encounter.

“I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land (Ez 34, 11). Yes, 200 years ago God brought forth a shepherd for the young, in the first place for the poorest of the poor, but also for all the youngsters all over the world. God called him to be a mentor in the lives of youngsters of his time from a family rich in faith and humanity. As in the time of prophet Ezekiel we know very well that, even Don Bosco had a difficult time culturally, socially, economically and religiously. Even then, it is evident from his thousands of letters that he was not only a man who related with God alone, but also a man who was able to strengthen the relationships between people. In other words, able to have a “horizontal dialogue” with young of his time.



I would like to conclude my reflection with the words of Don Ceria. Speaking of Don Bosco’s three principles for the education of the young, he comments: “It is easy to enunciate principles like these, easier still to admire them, but to put them into practice costs constant sacrifice.” We speak a lot about being with the young and with their problems, but what is the reality? Are we in constant dialogue with the young in our daily life? How well are we able to lead them to realize their life projects as did Don Bosco?





CHALLENGES AND SIGNPOSTS

Fr Francis Vattukulam sdb

It is only through struggle that a worthwhile goal is achieved. There exists struggle because there is a challenge. The greater the challenge, the more endearing the goal becomes. This is evident from the life of a pupa that becomes a butterfly. Therefore, one need not be alarmed that we Salesians today have many challenges staring us straight in the face. Here I list a few of them.

Consumerism is a dangerous trend that we find creeping into the Congregation. It consists of a tendency and insatiable desire to acquire goods. What comes along with this trend is secularism, which makes us religious conform to the world rather than to Christ, who lived obedient, poor and chaste. A remarkable change can be effected if we can live by the 'vow of the essential'.

Individualism is another challenge that poses a threat to religious life. Here one is concerned only about one's own work and the other members in the community hardly exist for him. In fact, others are seen as a threat and a hindrance. This leads to compartmentalization of work. Here one forgets that the ministry is entrusted to the community and that the ministry is only designated to a particular individual. Therefore what is required is

co-responsibility and team spirit.

Further on we find also an unhealthy 'professionalism' that is primarily concerned about merely academic qualification. The focus here is on 'having' than on 'being'. It comes with a presumption that academic qualifications make us automatically professionals in our ministry. Here one forgets that the 'professionalism' that is expected of each one of us is in the spiritual sphere. It is the 'primacy of the Spirit' that makes us real professionals of a religious nature.

Another recent challenge that cannot be set aside is the use of means of social communication. The danger comes when we forget that these are only means and tools for our ministry. These can give rise to some 'categorical imperatives' in the form of: my personal space, my personal time, etc., which can be a great hindrance to life in communities. Here community moments become an obstacle to the above said 'categorical imperatives.' As a result, the urgency of using the means of communication can become an escapism from being with the community. Let us not forget that 'it is by living and working together that we fulfill our vocation' (Art. 49).



Inspiration

It is not that the *whole* vehicle is at fault, most often it is only a matter of a change of oil, a little greasing, a check on the indicator lights, a change of brake fluid, and so on.

It is *parts* that require attention for the better functioning of the *whole*.

Layout: Liju Joseph