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A FRUITFUL GRAFTING
OF THE PEDAGOGY OF DON BOSCO
IN THE EDUCATIVE ACTION OF
MOTHER EMILIA MOSCA

In the CENTENARY of the
PREVENTIVE SYSTEM of DON BOSCO

*"An incomparable model of
Christian, pedagogical
humanism" - Paul VI*

*"The rich evangelical heredity
of our Father" - Don Ricceri*

*These pages are meant
to be a love-filled effort
to bring into the open
the perennial updatedness
of the principles which
motivated*

*Mother Emilia Mosca
of San Martino
to work with filial fidelity
and intelligent
adaptability in the existential
situation presented by
the feminine world.*

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PREFACE

Why resurrect figures from the past, no matter how glorious they may be¹ at a time when the contemporary world and its ideals thirst for what is modern, for models that exemplify the climate produced by Vatican Council II?

However, history has its rights and that same Vatican Council II teaches us: "The renewal of religious life demands a continual return to the sources... and to the primitive spirit of the Institutes... Therefore let the spirit and aims of the founders as well as the sound traditions be faithfully interpreted and observed because these constitute the patrimony of each Institute" (P.C. 2).

Indeed, the more one feels the need to adapt one's spirit to the signs of the times, the more necessary it becomes to really understand the essence of that spirit at a deep level, in order not to betray it under the pretext of renewal. This is the raison d'être of this study which takes us back to the origin of the educative mission of the FMA and revives for us the example and teaching of this exceptional soul, Mother Emilia Mosca of San Martino.

Like Saint Mary Mazzarello, she grew up in a world influenced by Don Bosco, and certainly never dreamed of creating

¹ DALCERRI L., *Un cammino di croce e di luce, Madre Emilia Mosca di S. Martino* - Profilo, pp. 120 (Roma, Scuola tip. priv. FMA, 1976).

a new pedagogy for the education of youth. She took everything from the Founder, but at the same time she adapted it to the milieu in which she worked, to the special mission entrusted to women in the society of those days. True, times are different now; woman has gained entrance into careers and positions not dreamed of in the past. What counts is not so much the details of an adaptation to the demands of a specific time, as the spirit and updated understanding with which new problems are faced.

In the history of pedagogy and education the same topics are treated again and again but each of the great masters has approached and explained them in an original manner, thus giving an enduring contribution towards their solution.

It is enough to quote a sentence of Pouillet (1810-1846), which deserves to be inscribed in gold in the books of pedagogy of all times:

"Education is not easier but it is more simple than those who are not in this field think. It is not necessary to believe that splendid theories or complex systems surround this topic, or that it is some mysterious art whose secrets only the experts know.

Once education is reduced to an art, a system, a method, man becomes tied up in knots, illuded, disoriented, pressurized. He exerts pressures on others, and deceives them without their realizing it. Instead, all that is required is to supervise constantly and sincerely, to instruct clearly, to warn frequently, to punish fairly and in moderation, and above all to encourage with untiring constancy and to love with unchanging tenderness.

All this may require a little virtue, but very little art; experience, but no deep research; an eye for practical observation, but not the genius of profound speculation. All this can and must be done with simplicity."²

It is beautiful to recall all this in the centenary of the

² VALENTINI E., *Il sistema Preventivo del Pouillet*, in «Rivista di Pedagogia e Scienze Religiose» (1969), pp. 179-180.

pamphlet on the Preventive System, which Don Bosco composed with so much love and published in a bilingual edition (Italian and French) in August, 1877.³

This was the school which inspired Mother Emilia Mosca. By putting this teaching into practice, she became a master and a model in the field of education. Spiritual masters have always held that the spirit of an Institute can be gleaned from the life and writings of the Founder, and from the achievements of his first disciples.

It is with this in mind that Sister Lina Dalcerra offers us Mother Emilia Mosca as a teacher of Salesian pedagogy. She wants to help us discover in ever greater depth the tradition of the whole Institute in the field of feminine education and to be able to adapt it to the spirit of the times.

If these pages are read in this spirit, I believe they will bear fruit and help us to bring about the renewal demanded by the present moment.

Father EUGENIO VALENTINI

Rome, Salesian Pontifical University
January 31, 1977

³ The facsimile of this edition is published in the *Opera Omnia* of Don Bosco, compiled by the Don Bosco Study Center of the Salesian Pontifical University: GIOVANNI BOSCO, *Opere edite*, Vol. XXVIII (Rome, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano), pp. 380-446.

INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The Institute of the Daughters of Mary help of Christians, founded by Saint John Bosco in 1872, has a place among "the wonderful variety of religious communities which have made it possible for the Church... to be well equipped for every good work (cf. *Tim.* 3, 17) and prepared for her ministry of building up the body of Christ." (cf. *Eph* 4, 12).¹

It began in Mornese (Alessandria) with a group of fifteen young girls, most of whom were illiterate, but in less than a century, it enjoyed a staggering development both in numbers and complexity of works.²

This development is confirmed by the statistics which give a fairly clear idea of the education-oriented activities and of the scholastic institutions at all levels which it operates.

When we compare the point of departure with the point of arrival we are forced to ask ourselves, "Who is responsible for having set it on a course of such progress? What caused it to develop from an embryonic Institute consisting of a group of young girls, — indisputably zealous but very ill-equipped on the human level — to such a vast and complex educational

¹ PC 1, in *Concilio Vaticano II* (Alba, Ed. Domenicane, 1966).

² Cf *Annuario Pontificio* (Tip. Poliglotta Vaticana, 1975).

organization?" We need only consult the historical sources of the Institute³ which outline its development step by step.

From this documentation, somewhat concise but faithful, arises the name of Mother Emilia Mosca of San Martino. She has gone down in the history of the Institute under the title of the responsibility which she held in the Institute: that of "Mother Assistant."⁴

The organizational model of the scholastic and educational sector of the Institute was molded by her. She is also attributed with the fruitful grafting of Don Bosco's educational ideas into the very new feminine branch of his work.

This was a formidable task which, when reduced to simple terms, reads thus: "She guided that tiny group of humble and unlettered Sisters, united by their faith and by the words of Don Bosco, to create a highly competent educational Institute for girls, moulding schools and teachers."⁵

In fact, it was she who opened and organized the first schools, including kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools. She set the educational tone for the boarding schools and orphanages. She prepared the first Sisters for university studies and for teaching. It was she who used her uncommon degree of determination in that epoch characterized by open Masonic antagonism and succeeded in obtaining official

³ *Cronistoria FMA*, Vol. 2 (Roma, Scuola Tip. Priv. FMA) and some unedited material; CAPETTI G., *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo*, Vol. 3 (Roma, SGS); MACCONO F., *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Vol. 2 (Torino, Scuola tip. Priv. FMA, 1960); LEMOYNE G.B. - AMADEI A. - CERIA E., *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. 19 (Torino, SEI, 1939); MORAND WIRTH, *Don Bosco et les Salésiens* (Torino-Leumann, LDC, 1969).

⁴ The title "Mother Assistant" which was used only at the beginning of the Institute corresponds to that of "General Councillor for Studies" which substituted it and which until the recent General Chapter (1975) was conferred on the Superior entrusted with the overall responsibility for studies in the Institute..

⁵ DALCERRI L., *Madre Marina Coppa* (Torino, Scuola tip. Priv. FMA 1956), p. 154.

State recognition for the first, and well organized, Teachers' Training College of Nizza Monferrato.⁶

Above all, Mother Emilia Mosca possessed in an eminent degree what Father B. Fascie termed "a personality outstandingly suited to an educator."⁷

This is how she was seen and felt by those who knew her and had her as an educator. The archive reports used as documentation for this study give similar testimony. This documentation can be summarized by the succinct definition of a past pupil who later became a valiant missionary: "For us, she (Mother Emilia) was really our little Don Bosco."⁸

The expression may seem to be dictated by an exaggerated, admiring enthusiasm. However, the content has been confirmed by the third successor of Don Bosco, the Servant of God Father Philip Rinaldi, who repeated several times: "The person who best understood and implemented the system of Don Bosco for the education of girls was Mother Emilia Mosca."⁹

Even men in the education department appreciated her worth and recognized her extraordinary administrative capabilities and her undoubted ability as an educator: "What a virtuous and intelligent woman! I am certain that if she had been known, she would have been proposed to take charge of the entire sector of feminine education in the nation. A few may have been equal to her, but none would have surpassed her."¹⁰

Judgements such as these, formulated even by people outside the Salesian world, prove that her ability as an educator made an impression.

Her role as an educator and her ability to be the ingenious

⁶ Cf MAINETTI G., *Una educatrice nella luce di S.G. Bosco* (Torino, Lice 1952) e DALCERRI L., *Un cammino*.

⁷ GENGHINI C., *Un anno di assistenza sotto la guida di Madre Assistente, Suor Emilia Mosca - Quaderni delle FMA n. 11* (Torino, Scuola tip. priv. FMA, 1965) p. 10.

⁸ R4663 D., *Ispettrice missionaria*. Report kept in the Archives.

⁹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ FRANCESIA G.B., *Suor Emilia Mosca* (San Benigno Canavese, Libreria Editrice, 1905), p. 134.

and faithful interpreter of the educational thought of Don Bosco as applied to the feminine world, justify the present study.

The study has its limitations and its difficulties in the fact that Mother Emilia Mosca, who was so occupied with the task of designing an organizational master plan for the schools and of translating the Preventive System of Don Bosco into everyday life, left no official writing of a strictly pedagogical nature.

Some of her letters and a collection of her personal reflections are extant. While these documents do give some insights, they do not have a deliberate pedagogical aim.

On the other hand, we have a considerable number of written testimonies signed by persons who were taught and guided by her. These testimonies have already been used as the documentary resources for the two biographies previously published.

The first of these, rather succinct, was published in 1905, five years after Mother Emilia's death. The author, Father John Baptist Francesia, affirms that he had been eager to write these biographical outlines after a visit to the Mother House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato. He had noticed how much "Mother Assistant" was remembered and how much the Sisters desired that her memory should be perpetuated in writing.¹¹

However, owing to the basic motive of the author for writing it, "to describe briefly but faithfully her special virtues,"¹² for the spiritual benefit of the Religious for whom it was written and also owing to the personal temperament and specific literary training of Father Francesia, this biography is more a narrative than a historical study, more aimed at edifying than at analyzing the documents.

The author certainly does not omit reference to what

¹¹ Cf *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Mother Emilia did for the schools and for education, but he exerts most of his effort in drawing her moral portrait and, in the dimension that interests us in the study, he restricts himself to describing anecdotes which are surrounded by a certain poetic mystique.

The second biography, *Una educatrice nella luce di San Giovanni Bosco*, is by Sister Josephine Mainetti. The title she chose highlights the aspect which she wished to stress. In fact, the author dedicated the longest chapter of the book, the third in Part Two, to Mother Emilia's educative activity. Nor does she limit herself to this, for the whole scheme of the work and her treatment of Mother Emilia's life and figure have this perspective.

Nevertheless, even Sister Mainetti's book has a definite narrative and biographical note, and the author, while not betraying the truth of the documented facts which she uses, produces a literary rather than a critical analytical presentation of these same facts.

The most interesting document from the educational perspective, despite the fact that it is unpretentious and fragmentary, is a recently printed (1965) book for the use of members of the Congregation: "*Un anno di assistenza sotto la guida di Madre Assistente, Suor Emilia Mosca*," by Mother Clelia Genghini.

The witness who reported these notes, Mother Clelia Genghini, was Secretary General of the Congregation for forty-three years and was a General Councillor at the same time. We can say of her what the historian of the Salesian Congregation, Father Eugene Ceria, said when presenting a booklet of similar title and content written by Father Joseph Vespignani:¹³ "The witness is above all suspicion, and the testimony reported here is characterized by scrupulous fidelity."¹⁴

¹³ VESPIGNANI G., *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco* (Torino, SEI 1932).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

We are dealing with a diary in which Mother Clelia daily wrote down the little episodes, conference notes, good nights, attitudes, corrections, observations and directives of Mother Emilia in reference to the practical application of her educative formation. It is a course of study composed of scenes from real life. They are pages of education in practice more than in theory.

By reading and penetrating these notes, however, we discover the principles which illumine and direct the practice.

There is no question of the diary's being an account of acts and words without definite continuity and sense of direction, and without reference to motivating and unifying ideas.

These ideas are the same as Don Bosco's but they contain the specific dimension required for their application to the education of girls.

If the diary is read without making the effort at going beyond the facts and words in order to grasp the underlying principles, it could disorientate instead of guiding. Father Fascie has pointed out, after studying it: "...We must remember that Mother Assistant was an exceptional person... If any ordinary Sister, at the beginning of her career as an assistant, tried to copy her exactly, she most certainly would not get the same results."¹⁵

Thus the episodes, the words, and the insights noted in the diary derive their teaching value, not so much for what they are in themselves, nor from the fact that they are associated with Mother Emilia "in her moral and spiritual greatness"¹⁶. Rather, their value lies in the fact that they can be linked together to express an educational orientation, and the pedagogical principles which inspire and mould them.

If these are not perceived, the diary could indeed be in-

¹⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

terpreted — to quote Fascie again — "as a convenient guideline for the whole year, to be followed literally."¹⁷

The present work aims at abstracting the guiding principle from the actual material, the concrete incidents, the succession of events.

Obviously such an endeavor will not be accomplished by confronting it with a closed or prejudiced mind. Her manner of action, pedagogical insights, and tone of interpretation make sense only if they are set in the total context of "Mother Emilia's superior, educative personality."¹⁸ This personality which Fascie brings to light, can only be grasped in the totality of her life and action.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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chapter one

THE FORMATION OF MOTHER EMILIA MOSCA AND HER SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENTS AS REVEALED BY SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DATA.

1. SIGNIFICANT DATES IN HER LIFE

- 1852 – 1st April: born at Ivrea of Count Alexander Mosca di San Martino, son of the renowned architect whose brainchild was the bridge which bears his name on the River Dora, near Turin; and of Eugenia Garelo, a descendant of the Counts Bellegarde of St. Lary.
- Serious financial problems, always weighing on the little family, made it necessary for the parents to confide their little Emilia to her maternal grand mother who lived in Aosta.
- 1863 (?) – first Communion at the school of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Aosta, one of whom was her aunt.
- 1864 – sent back to her family by her grandmother — living in a small rented house in Turin — after a short stay with her parents, she is taken gratis into the Holy Family Institute, commonly known as the house of the "green girls."
- 1870 – obtains her diploma as a certified French teacher from the Royal University of Turin. Then leaves the Institute of the Holy Family.

- 1871 – Goes as tutor to a noble family in Turin.
- 1872 – December: Two decisive encounters. The first with St. John Bosco, who accepts her as a French teacher for the new Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese. This is a prophetic event because it brings her face to face with her vocation. The second meeting is with St. Mary Mazzarello, the co-foundress. She would give her Italian lessons, but Emilia would become a faithful disciple of Mother Mazzarello following in her footsteps along the road of renunciation, poverty, dedication. The steps of this following were:
- 1873 – 5th August: Religious clothing;
- 1874 – 14th June: Religious profession;
- 1875 – 5th August: Perpetual profession.
- This date makes her a permanent member of the Institute. She is appointed private secretary to Mother Mazzarello and is charged with giving the Institute its educative structure.
- While she prepares herself spiritually for the commitments of religious life, she does not neglect her preparation as a teacher: In October, 1874 she obtains her qualification as an elementary school teacher.
- 1878 – September: The House of Nizza Monferrato is opened to substitute Mornese as the Mother House. Sister Emilia organizes the whole educational enterprise.
- 1880 – 5th May: She obtained certification as a teacher of pedagogy.
- 1880 – August: Second General Chapter of the Institute: Mother Emilia is elected first Assistant General, an office in which she is officially entrusted with the

tasks of organization and direction of the schools of the Institute, a task she is already fulfilling.

Journeys within Italy and abroad to France, Belgium and Africa take place almost every year beginning from 1878.

- 1896 – May: unexpected news of the death of her parents and of a brother in Brazil.
- 1900 – 7th June: Official recognition of the Teachers' College at Nizza Monferrato.
- 1900 – Early in September: leaves for France (Marseilles).
September 29: on return to Nizza Monferrato, stops at Vallecrosia.
2nd October: leaves for Alassio where she dies suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage.¹

This is the brief span of her life: forty-eight years.

“The events of one's life always have an influence — either small or great — on the formation and course of action of a person. Sometimes these happenings determine the whole direction of a life.

In fact, together with situations of time and environment, they serve to construct a personality, and to incline it towards a certain field of action.”²

Some of these elements can be discovered in the life of Mother Emilia Mosca: elements which throw light on her personality and explain her characteristic disposition as an educator.

In the points which follow we shall discover which of them emerge in a special way.

¹ Cf. FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*; MAINETTI, *op. cit.*; DALCERRI, *Un cammino*.

² DALCERRI L., *Lo stile educativo di madre Emilia Mosca di S. Martino*, in “Rivista di Pedagogia e Scienze Religiose” (Torino, sett.-dic. 1967), 235.

2. THE HARD LESSONS OF LIFE

"A financial disaster" — we read in her biography — "threw Count Alexander and his young wife... into cruel uncertainty regarding the future." In order to prevent little Emilia from suffering the consequences, they begged her maternal grandmother to accept her into her "austere" home at Aosta.

The home was austere, and the education was austere; everything was marked by the "extremely severe and rigidly aristocratic system"⁴ common among the nobility of that time.

The grandmother never showed her grandchild the slightest sign of affection. Her objective was to get Emilia "used to work", to control "her impulsive character" and to chain "her little heart to her duty."⁵

Some of the episodes recounted in her biography were certainly told by Sister Emilia herself. They exemplify the type of rigid life she underwent. At table the grandmother kept Emilia sitting in front of her on a high hard chair, under her control; the child was not allowed to raise her eyes to look at what was on the tray carried by the servant; she was never allowed "to express a personal like or dislike! And when it was time for the dessert and fruit to be served... she had to get up from table, bow and leave the room."⁶

Later she herself was to remark pointedly "that was the training one received in the houses of the nobility in those times!"⁷

Emilia spent the most vital years of life, her preadolescence, in this rigid and constraining form of upbringing — a form that is certainly negative from a pedagogical point of view.

With this as a premise, we might expect the disastrous consequences which nearly always follow the application of

a coercive system of education: either total passivity or rebellion; either a completely uncontrolled character or withdrawal into an apathetic lack of communication.

How did Emilia react? "I did not cry; I kept silence."⁸ The possibility that her silence was the result of a passive and spineless acceptance of a state of affairs over which she was powerless to rebel, is to be excluded.

Emilia, who possessed a very strong will, later admitted that she had imposed on herself "the discipline of keeping quiet and dissimulating thus growing in firmness and strength of will.

Strength of character and resoluteness of will were to become so much part of her that they constituted part of her fears of facing religious life. This is the problem which she brought to Don Bosco on the vigil of her religious profession:

"I fear I shall not persevere."

"Are you willing to serve the Lord?"

"Yes."

"And then what is your problem?"

"I am afraid of my will."

The pithy and faith-filled response of the Saint: "Let us nail it to the wood of the cross,"¹⁰ restored peace and tranquility to her troubled soul.

However, her strong character required continuous exercise of self-control in order to prevent it from annoying others. Her biographer, who had the good fortune of knowing her personally, attests: "It is true that she never managed to subdue certain sharp reactions, which caused her suffering and humiliation."¹¹

³ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹¹ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Not in self-justification, but perhaps to console herself a little, she wrote: "One cannot demand perfect amiability from persons of strong character; a rock has its sharpness and is not made of malleable rubber."¹²

This character trait of strength and energy, which to some may have seemed "harshness," certainly resulted from having had to act in this way during her preadolescence, and from the marked lack of affection and understanding in the environment in which she was raised during the most decisive years of her personal formation.

However, this very strict schooling in self-control and in an active sense of responsibility and duty shaped her personality. Furthermore, it also had an effect on the motivations which would inspire and direct her educative action.

The basic principle she was to express in a thousand different ways, would be concentrated in her affirmation: "There is no point in forming shiny flat surfaces, but consciences and wills ready to face life."¹³

She would demand, however, that this formation be given according to the laws of Don Bosco's preventive system. In fact, when she eventually came into contact with the pamphlet written by Don Bosco, she could confirm by experience the radical differences which he pointed out between the preventive and repressive systems.

When, at twelve years of age, she returned to her family, she found all the affection which had been denied her before. But she also found, to her dismay, the terrible dichotomy which existed between their title of nobility and the reality of their life. This drastic revelation destroyed in an instant the dream of grandeur which in her grandmother's house, may have compensated somewhat for the lack of affection.

Her pride caused her to react with: "Can't I go to Aosta

with grandmother?" Her father's reply, "She doesn't want you!" destroyed any illusions which the girl may have had.¹⁴

The sad family situation, despite frequent groundless hopes of righting itself, seemed irreparable and constrained the young teenager to face reality, once she had overcome her first reaction. Once again she detached herself from her family in order to relieve their economic straits. This time she went to the Holy Family Institute. She hoped to find a way to help her dear ones, first by earning a degree, and then finding a position as a governess and teacher of French.

This hard school of sorrow, which was to climax in the exile and unexpected death of her father, mother and one of her brothers in some unknown place in Brazil and under unknown circumstances, would have a profound effect on her formation.

Besides instilling a sense of realism in facing situations, it would teach her how to find things out for herself and get things done in spite of difficulties. It would teach her radical detachment, a decisive orientation toward the true values of life — the spiritual, eternal ones which are not subject to change; it would create in her that mystical outlook, which would place her beyond human events.

Her intimate thoughts, which are gathered in her personal notebook, reveal this.

This deep interior life will have great influence in her mission as educator. The many who will come in contact with her, will always feel her to be spiritually rich, a bearer of true values, vitally incarnated and operatively lived.

This will become one of the greatest sources of her persuasive power and of her "personality so well adapted to an educator," as Father Fascie has described her.

¹² MOSCA E., *Raccolta di note e pensieri personali* (manuscript).

¹³ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹⁴ Cf *Ibid*, p. 19.

3. HER CULTURAL FORMATION AND HER INITIAL EXPERIENCE AS AN EDUCATOR

We know nothing of Emilia's early studies. Most likely her grandmother, following the custom of the nobility of the time, had her taught by a tutor in the house, or else sent her to the Sisters of Saint Joseph in the city.

What we do know is that when she left Aosta, besides having completed her elementary education, she was already in possession of a reasonable amount of culture gathered from reading the books in her grandmother's library. She also knew French very well and spoke it with the ease of one who possesses it securely.

During her short stay with her family she had neither the time nor the opportunity to engage in intellectual pursuits. Possibly this was another reason, besides the economic one, why her parents sent her to the Holy Family Institute in Turin.

The Institute had been founded in 1853 by a zealous priest of Turin, Father Gaspare Saccarelli, "...with the objective of providing accommodation, care, moral and physical training, education for poor girls (ages 10-18) according to their social condition and financial means. They had to be Catholics, of Italian descent, orphaned (either father, mother, or both), abandoned but not delinquent."¹⁵

Emilia went there in 1864 on the sole grounds of poverty. The founder had died in January of that year and had been replaced by Canon Bergher. The direction of the house was in the hands of lay people and, at that time, was administered by Countess Santorrina De Rossi of Santarosa who was completely dedicated to her task. There were 230 boarders there at that time.

¹⁵ *Statuto organico della Sacra famiglia* (Torino, Tip. Industr. Piemontese, 1932).

The education "was family like informal without sophistication."¹⁶

Work was of primary importance: this was necessary as a source of income, as well as a practical preparation for life which, at that time, for women was confined to the family.

"Divided into age groups... they learn from wise and capable teachers whatever a mother of a family should know, from knitting stockings to basic sewing; from dressmaking, to cross-stitch, to embroidery; and they succeed so well that their work is appreciated in the city and they receive a continuous stream of orders..."¹⁷

But in the city the Institute was also known for another reason. The girls were "funeral escorts," an occupation sanctioned by an article of the Regulations.¹⁸ They took part in numbers corresponding to the solemnity of the funeral, under the care of "and older pupil,"¹⁹ somberly dressed, wearing a white veil on their heads and a green dress which gave them the name in the city of the "green girls"²⁰ or simply the "Greenies."

It was a dull task for them, certainly not in keeping with the merriness which is characteristic of young people. Custom led to indifference and it could have degenerated into a burdensome task carried out superficially. Besides, although they were assigned turns for accompanying funerals, it always took them away from their scholastic and professional preparation. Today in fact, the Institute of the Holy Family no longer performs this service.

Even this was an experience for Emilia. She would keep it in mind in the organization of the orphanages. Her aim

¹⁶ Cf REFFO E., *L'Istituto della Sacra Famiglia nel primo cinquantenario di sua fondazione* (Torino, Tip. Artigianelli, 1903), p. 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁸ *Statuto organico*, art. 8.

¹⁹ *Regolamento organico*, art. 20 (Torino, T.I.P., 1933).

²⁰ REFFO, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

would be to put the orphan in possession of an academic qualification or train her in some profession, so that she would be able to earn an honest livelihood. This is highly important, not only for economic, but also, and especially, for moral ends.

At the Holy Family Institute "the days were spent at prayer, work and study. Those who showed ability in the latter field were encouraged to apply themselves assiduously to it."²¹

The perceptive directress immediately recognized Emilia's intellectual potential and suggested she give some lessons to her companions. "It was her first experience of her future life as a teacher, taken in the highest sense of the word. Her little companions felt that she was superior to them. They looked up to her respectfully and listened to her words, marked by a slightly authoritative tone. They did not resent her ascendancy but took it for granted that one who had such fine manners, who was so intelligent and so sure in her views, so logical in her explanations should stand out, even though she was only a girl."²²

This gesture of trust made her aware of herself and her potential. She began to nurture the hope that one day she would be able to obtain a diploma, certifying her to teach the French that she read and spoke so fluently. It is possible that the wise directress encouraged her along these lines.

She decided to complete her French cultural studies and to present herself to the Royal University of Turin for the examinations.

She applied herself with great tenacity. Her biographer assures us that "those were years of intense study and intense work, years of privations, sacrifice and hope."²³

It was a case of self-tuition, during which she worked out a method of study which made the acquisition and assimilation

of the ideas easier and which developed a fine cultural background.

In December 1870, hardly 18 years of age, she presented herself to the Royal University of Turin. She took the usual examinations and obtained the desired diploma.

At eighteen years of age she had to leave the Holy Family Institute, but she left it equipped with a good moral and religious formation, and a qualification which enabled her to provide for herself.

Emilia's primary concern was to find a position for herself. Her first idea was to seek a post as governess in some noble family. Her parents liked the idea, but were worried about providing her with suitable references. She cut these worries short by her decisive: "I myself will be my primary recommendation."²⁴

In 1871 "through the intervention of a friend,"²⁵ she was accepted as a governess in a noble family in Turin where "her task was to do a little teaching and to be a lady-in-waiting."²⁶

This was to be another new field of experience, preparing her for her future mission as educator. Very probably this assignment taught her in practice the value of educative action seen as a personal rapport, a value which she would always stress. She held that education, even when imparted collectively, is never a mass production. It must become strictly personal, a one-to-one education.

However, this job was of short duration. After only a few months "of earning her livelihood in that house, the need for her services ceased and she had to leave."²⁷

Thus, once again she found herself thrown into uncertainty. "She returned to her sad home, to bring consolation, to build new hopes, but not defeated by this new trial."²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁵ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁸ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²² MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

4. TWO DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS

At this point in her life she met Don Bosco. The encounter was to give decisive orientation to her life and mission.

The Saint made her face the problem of her vocation in all its reality.

Emilia had never thought of becoming a religious. She had refused even to consider the idea. All her concern had been to find a position which would enable her to help her family's financial difficulties.

Actually, before her encounter with Don Bosco, no fewer than five confessors at different times and places had suggested to her that maybe it was God's Will for her to become a religious. Emilia rebelled at the very idea of it. Through confidences which she shared later, we seem to hear an echo from the Confessions of St. Augustine: "My God you called me, and I refused to give myself to you! I resisted but God followed me with His call. Lord, you were there where I fled from you."²⁹

She also refused to consider Don Bosco's suggestion. But now she had to face the problem head on. The environment of Mornese, rich as it was in spiritual values, would help her solve it without any great trauma.

This is an added proof that the environment has great influence, for better or for worse. It acts on us without our noticing it, just as climate works on the physical organism. One suddenly realizes that one has changed.

It happened like that with Emilia Mosca. The action of the environment, created by the distilling of innumerable little things, changed her outlook. She was particularly impressed by the sense of peace and lack of tension which permeated it. It was a peace that bloomed from the seed of piety. There was a simple, solid piety, which was the natural

²⁹ Cf. FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30.

consequence of an abiding atmosphere of silence, which in turn caused an interior enrichment and a living union with God.

Without any external stimulus, urged by her growing attraction for the interior life Emilia exclaimed: "Oh, how I love this life! If only I had known it before!"³⁰

The meeting with Don Bosco was destined to lead her to the solving of her personal vocation in a complete way — a religious vocation and a vocation to be a religious educator, who would implement the principles of the Preventive System. Although this system was not new because it was based on the gospel, it nevertheless was given a new form and style by this great educator of youth.

This point is, however, so important to the topic of this study, that it will be dealt with in special section.

Another encounter, equally decisive for her, was that with St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello.³¹

St. Mary Mazzarello, specifically because of the total spirituality of her leadership, her discretion and charming simplicity, was to have a great influence on Sr. Emilia Mosca.

Having the highest respect for the freedom of choice of the other person, she would act as a model and as the personification of that ideal of life which would appeal ever more to Emilia, who would discover in it the incarnation of her highest and most intimate aspirations.

This was what helped Emilia decide, after a few months stay in Mornese, to follow the path suggested to her by Don

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³¹ Co-foundress of the Institute of the F.M.A. and its first Superior General. The daughter of upright peasants, rich in faith, she had no human culture beyond being able to read. However, she possessed a keen intelligence especially from the practical angle which made her a woman unsurpassed in the office of government. The high level she possessed of this talent, caused Pius XI when proclaiming her heroic virtues (discourse 3rd Mary 1936), to style it "the gift of government." To these natural, human gifts, were added those of the spirit which were given to her in no ordinary measure. (cf John 3,34) Among others, she possessed an outstanding facility for discernment of spirits.

Bosco and become a religious, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, and follower of a Saint who was wise, though unlettered. Another proof of the validity of the principle that it is important "to be" in the field of education. Mother Emilia, before actuating it in herself and impressing its importance on the educators for whom she was responsible, experienced it at the school of formation of St. Mary Mazzarello.

Emilia would continue in this school of living and life-giving contact, this true sharing in the spirit right until the death of the Saint on 14th May, 1881. In fact, Mother Emilia was her private secretary. Right from the beginning she carried the responsibility that she was to hold all her life: that of realizing all the scholastic and educational undertakings of the Institute, with the duty of having implemented in each one the pedagogical ideas of Don Bosco.

At Mornese she continued her teaching practice which enriched her expertise and experience.

When she arrived there in December, 1872 the house was at the very beginning — a beginning that knew hardship and humiliation. Emilia asked to be allowed to begin her work at once. In her Italian classes, she discovered an unusual mixture: in addition to the girls who were still few, there were the Sisters, including Sister Mary Mazzarello.

It was a matter of making do with nothing. All the normal equipment was missing: classrooms, desks, books... However, Emilia was not put off by the conditions and, through her creativity, she nurtured that seedling educational institution to a full and perfect organization from the technical and didactic point of view.

We have a confirmation of this fact in the declaration of the Department of Education Inspector at the end of his first visit, which was detailed and protracted, that this school could compete with the public schools which were naturally better equipped materially and didactically.³²

³² FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

Even though she had a diploma in French, Sister Emilia did not possess the requisite qualifications to teach in an elementary school and Don Bosco thought it wise that she acquire them. Once again Sister Emilia, with her usual tenacity, began to study with a novice. She had no teacher and no one to guide her.

This event is also recorded in the life of St. Mary Mazzarello because they were "the first in the Institute to take public examinations." However, "the preparation was very hurried. They passed everything except mathematics."³³

With the help of a Salesian priest, they managed to get through this part successfully too, in October of the same year, 1874.

When, later on, she set up the teachers' college in Nizza Monferrato, Sister Emilia undertook studies again, in order to be qualified to teach philosophy of education and so acquire the right to be head of that College. She did not have to take examinations but she had to submit a thesis. Her topic was: "A historical essay of the education of women in Italy from the beginning of Christianity to the end of the 18th Century."

In a document dated 8th May, 1890, she was granted the desired qualification.

Her choice of topic was in keeping with the end of all her educational activity: the formation of the woman. Mother Emilia had a true insight into the meaning of this formation. She did not interpret it as the inclusion or exclusion of women in the cultural and profession field, but as an offering of appropriate and specific models of what woman is meant to be, a point which she elaborated in her thesis.

³³ MACCONO F., *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, I (Torino, Scuola Tip. Priv. FMA, 1960), p. 272.

5. HER ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians held its Second General Chapter in August, 1880. Mother Emilia Mosca was elected "First Assistant."³⁴

This office confirmed her officially in the task she was already performing with regard to the organization and general direction of the schools of the Institute. What is more important it recognized her as an authentic interpreter and faithful guardian of Don Bosco's principles of education.

This office and the title which accompanied it, became so linked with her person that Mother Emilia became known as "Mother Assistant;"³⁵ a term that became the personification of the task assigned to her. Indeed, it was she who impressed on the Institute its educational physiognomy to the extent of its becoming in the female sector, the twin of the Salesians' works for boys.

We know how hard it was for Mother Emilia when, in 1872, she started this work, and how her tenacity and capacity as an organizer and her spirit of initiative helped her to face it. "She had to get things moving and get others to share the work. Her gift of creativity influenced her helpers who became as enthusiastic as she was. Her refined and thoughtful ways made others want to follow the path indicated by her."³⁶

The school of Mornese and that of Nizza owe their form and organization to her. When other houses were opened, she took the thought of the school. She gave directives, guidelines and help; she requested reports; she encouraged or pointed out deficiencies according to the need.

Here, for example, is an excerpt from a letter written to a regional superior: "I am sending you, in accordance with the deliberations of the Chapter, the form for the report on

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 274.

³⁵ See note on page 14.

³⁶ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

the schools, and I ask you to please fill it in as accurately as possible and to return it to me soon.

Meanwhile I take advantage of this occasion:

1. To recommend the teachers to hold to the unity of method which was so recommended by the last General Chapter:

2. That the teaching in every class be conducted with zeal and diligence and that, at least twice a week, catechism and Bible history be taught:

3. That you be very strict in not allowing into the house books or periodicals, be it for teaching or reading, which are not permitted or recommended by the Salesian Superiors."³⁷

In September, 1878 with the opening of the house of Nizza Monferrato in the ex-convent of Our Lady of Grace, she had to start from scratch. This time too she did not permit herself to become overwhelmed. She first got the kindergarten and elementary school started, then added the complementary courses and crowned all with the Teachers' College. This had been her goal as she considered it a powerful means of doing good. Her hidden thirst was to prepare Christian teachers who would then go out and be the leaven in the mass and help renew the world in Christ. She was also concerned with the serious and Christian preparation of the teaching Sisters. The confusion of ideas, which existed at the time and which were often contrary to the Church's teaching, rendered her task more difficult.

We have proof of the intensity of this struggle in the systematic failure of her students when they took the required annual examinations in the public schools.

In July, 1894 she wrote: "I am really worried about and tired of these annoying examinations. We have not yet heard

³⁷ MOSCA E., *Letter to the regional superior of Spain, Mother Chirina Giustiniani*, April 21, 1893.

the results of the third year students; in the second year one passed the language examination and only with the bare minimum! This is really victimization. I do not think the third year will fare any better. What can we do? Also in this we must adore the will of God who uses these injustices for this end." ³⁸

This trial resulted in her doing all in her power to get the permission to have the examinations in the house. She succeeded after overcoming many obstacles presented by the State and the Department of Education.

However, once she had overcome one difficulty, others cropped up from unexpected quarters. She was permitted to have internal examinations but was denied the right to have the teaching practice there, even though it was provided for by Art. 93 of the Regulations then in effect.

Obstacles, instead of hindering her, urged her on to new enterprises. She decided to aim at government recognition for the training college, in order to assure peace and stability for the school.

It took audacity to attempt it in those days, but Mother Emilia launched out with the support of that great son of Don Bosco, Professor Father Francis Cerruti, the first General Councillor for Studies of the Salesians. Father Eugeno Ceria, the historian of the Salesian Congregation, defined him as "a great arouser of energy." ³⁹ He also knew how to carry through and give the necessary support and encouragement to Mother Emilia in her difficult undertaking.

It was necessary to raise a building to meet the standards required for a recognized school: classrooms, science laboratories, a library, offices for the administration and secretarial

³⁸ Mosca E., *Letter to Mother Louise Cucchietti*, 25th July, 1894.

³⁹ The Historian of the Salesian Congregation, Father Eugeno Ceria has written of him: "By nature methodical, strongwilled and very practical, he carried out his task for 30 years with the maximum prudence, unchanging calm and unbroken constancy... In every field he showed himself very capable of stirring others into action. He was a born animator."

personnel, a gymnasium... Mother Emilia faced the task with a will.

Naturally, the actual building was not enough; the teaching personnel needed the requisite qualifications; she sent her Sisters to universities and Teacher Training Institutes. This was a new initiative in the Institute, which stirred up perplexity even among the Sister. With that determination and courage which always characterized her when it was a matter of good to be accomplished, Mother Emilia faced the situation, overcame the obstacles and reached her desired goal.⁴⁰

The proceedings for full recognition, which were started with the Department of Education, went ahead very slowly, amidst continual obstacles and unforeseen happenings; visits of inspectors, unjustified holdups, changes of personnel.

She wrote to the regional superior of Rome asking her to follow things up: "...it is vital that the documents which are now in the offices of the Ministry of Educations, be passed on to the State Council; this latter opens its sessions in the middle of April and, if the matter of our recognition is not brought up at the first meeting, there is no chance of our obtaining it this current year." ⁴¹

Difficulties did not originate only at the level of the Ministry. The local representatives of the scholastic authorities, who were openly against private institutions, did their utmost to delay proceedings by sending in unfavorable reports. Because of these, the head official of the Department of Education was appointed by the Ministry to inspect the school.

When Mother Emilia tried to find out when the visit would take place, he replied: "Don't you say *Qua hora non putatis?* It is my duty to make the inspection and I shall do so when it is convenient for me. Make sure you are well prepared. There

⁴⁰ Cf MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

⁴¹ Mosca E., *Letter to the regional superior Mother Louise Cucchietti*, March 25, 1900.

are many unfavorable reports about you and your system. You will not stand a change if even only half of them are true." ⁴²

He arrived unexpectedly. He made a very detailed inspection of the premises and examined the student body class by class. At the end he turned to Mother Emilia and, being an honest man, he did not mince matters. He said "I am amazed. Everything is up to standard!" ⁴³

Notwithstanding this unexpected commendation, the proceedings at Rome went at a snail's pace. Once again Mother Emilia turned to the superior at Rome: "Go to the Minerva building again and try to get that decree from them; I won't be at peace until they pass it on to the Department of Education." ⁴⁴

At last on June 7, 1900, the decree of official recognition, arrived. It was both a goal reached and a victory gained — especially if we look at it in the context of the anticlerical atmosphere of the time.

The acquisition of this recognition gave the educational standards of the Institute a firm foundation. It served as a model for the standard of future foundations.

These accomplishments in the founding of schools would be sufficient to make Mother Emilia's name live forever in the Institute. However, they represent only one aspect of her intense work in the field of education.

⁴² Letter from the head of the Department of Education Sir Joseph Roberto.

⁴³ Cf FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 100; MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ MOSCA E., *Letter to Mother Louise Cucchietti*, 1st June, 1900.

FIDELITY TO AND GIFT OF INTERPRETING AUTHENTICALLY THE EDUCATIONAL VIEWS OF DON BOSCO

1. SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY OF DON BOSCO'S MESSAGE REGARDING EDUCATION

Don Bosco's philosophy of education "which is rooted in Catholic Tradition, born in daily life and from daily life, which is not spelt out in any real written theory of education, nor fossilized in 'any rigid and stereotyped system' (Don Fascie), could appear to the superficial observer, very simple and easy both to understand and practise." ¹

Indeed, its very straightforwardness, which is expressed in norms drawn from the practice, could tempt us not to look beyond the norms and to assess it as pure methodology, thus causing us to lose sight of *the primacy of content and ends* ² which in actual fact constitute its substance.

There is then the risk of missing the real meaning, and of reducing the System to a simple application of precepts, while the reality of the Preventive System is "an essence in which global and wisdom-filled ideas, principles, Christian maxims, and truths of faith converge...; means, techniques, methods, rules for action drawn from tradition and from the then common practice, models of action, the tone, colour and

¹ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 327.

² Cf BRAIDO P., *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco* (Zurich, Pas-Verlag, 1964), p. 402.

special accent given to the practice by the personality and temperament of Don Bosco, by his genius, and intuitive powers, confer on the essence its own distinctive and specific tone, and style."³

Besides, in Don Bosco's view of education, methodological principles must be interpreted from the perspective of the spirit that inspires them. If this is not done, there remains the risk of falling into equivocations and of introducing such imbalance into our educational practice that we compromise the effectiveness of our efforts.

In this way "loving kindness," which is the most vital ingredient of the Preventive System, cannot be understood as a mere instinctive affective reaction, but as an elevated synthesis of human and supernatural love, of affectivity and rationality: this makes it what Professor Habrich⁴ so aptly termed "educative love."

The same can be said of "assistance and vigilance," on which Don Bosco insisted and about which he gave us many norms and recommendations. "In themselves... they can show either a concerned love and friendship or be a sign of distrust, suspicion and pessimism. If these norms are taken out of their true context of loving kindness, trust, confidence and cordiality, our vigilance becomes nothing more than a ritual or a formalism which, before long, loses all significance or, worse still is regarded as repressive. The dividing line between an authentic and a false interpretation is thin, as Don Bosco often pointed out to his Salesians."⁵

The spirit which inspired this continual "assistance and vigilance" in Don Bosco was "love, esteem and trust."⁶ It has nothing to do with "acting like a policeman," but rather

³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴ Quoted by FASCIE B., *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco* (Torino, SEI, 1935), pp. 31-32.

⁵ DHO G., *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova* (Torino, Leumann, LDC, 1974), p. 107.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

it is an effective educative presence which does not coerce. It is dedication, help, a sharing of life, which stimulates and leads to the maturation of the young people.

"It is to be noted that Don Bosco's conception of the educator-student rapport demands such an atmosphere of reciprocal trust, of complete confidence, of spontaneous dialogue, of genuine sharing in the life of the young people, and constant and concrete collaboration for common interests, that it constitutes a very delicate and vulnerable complex of interventions on the part of the educator. Don Bosco never hid this. Indeed the mission can be accomplished successfully only by the total consecration to one's students that Don Bosco demanded of his educators."⁷

Even these few clarifications on some of the key points of the Preventive System, expose the superficiality and lack of understanding of those who regard it as a system of education which poses no problems and which demands no study or reflection in order to comprehend and put it into practice. Father Braido had a point when he stressed: "Be careful not to allow yourself to be deceived into thinking that the most obvious and easily understood aspect of the methodology of the Preventive System is all there is to it. Do not lose sight of the fact that the deepest and truest meaning of both the system and the methodology has to do with its philosophical content and structure."⁸

Mother Emilia Mosca grasped this. All her pedagogical and educative action proves it. Her interpretation and implementation of it reveal "gifts of unusual intelligence, of comprehension, of spiritual harmony with it" which led her to achieve such "a perfect synchronization of thought and action"⁹ with the Educator of Youth that she merited to be called "the little Don Bosco."¹⁰

⁷ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 328.

⁸ BRAIDO, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

⁹ DALCERRI, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁰ ROCCA DECIMA. Report in archives.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM.

We have already stated that Don Bosco's message on education is at once simple and complex. Its form is simple and simplifying, its total depth of meaning is profound. It is extremely interesting from a pedagogical point of view because of the many aspects of its content, each one of which can be considered as the one that gives significance and value to the educational work of the Saint.

But the deepest significance, the one that justifies, gives value to, and acts as the bedrock of all the other aspects, is quite distinct from them and much deeper than any of them.

To grasp this is to grasp the very soul of the educational action of Don Bosco, to get to the heart of his philosophy of education, of his Preventive System; it is to grasp the authenticity of his message to the world.

Don Bosco "who possessed that intuition which understands the signs of the times and masters them"¹¹ and who lived "the history of his time with awareness,"¹² saw clearly that his times were dominated by a naturalistic philosophy of education which was heavily influenced by the ideas of Rousseau.

He did not attempt to disprove it publicly; he did not combat it in the theoretical field, but neither did he accept it and gloss it over with a varnish of Christianity. He took a definite, clear-cut and decisive stand. He saw in the theoretical and practical naturalism of the day, a resurrected paganism: "There is only one cause of the present ills of society: pagan education."¹³

¹¹ CERRUTI F., *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola* (S. Benigno Canavese, Libr. Salesiana, Ed., 1886), p. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³ MB XVII, p. 442.

"When I think of this pagan materialism which has infiltrated into the elementary schools and even into the kindergartens, I feel sad and frightened. Poor little children! What will become of them, impregnated as they are from their earliest years with these cruel educational principles? We must go back, right back; we must undertake a fundamental reform, otherwise we are fighting a losing battle..."¹⁴ "...we must return to the reality of the gospels."¹⁵

All Don Bosco's work for education can be summarized thus: to teach and have the gospel relived in its most authentic aspects. He was always motivated by "a Christian conscience and a Christian based science" in all his efforts for education.

In strict coherence with the principles which animated him, he designed and rooted all his action on behalf of education solidly and without compromise on a firm, theological, supernatural foundation which permeated its every realization.

Only when we accept that supernatural values are at the center of the educative action of the Saint, can we really comprehend it totally. He is "the educator and philosopher of education who believes in the absolute, objective values of the gospel."¹⁶

God and supernatural realities are for him the beginning and end of education. This attitude is valid and effective in so far as we hold Christian values as both ends and means. Don Bosco states this clearly: "...they say that I go in for religion too much, and I do in fact hold that without religion one cannot do any good among youth."¹⁷

Supernatural realities also form the bedrock of Mother Emilia's educative action which makes no sense if we try to remove its basically Christian dimension.

Those who were taught by her affirm: "While she gave her lessons, she transformed the school into a palace of God;

¹⁴ MB III, p. 605.

¹⁵ CERRUTI, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁶ BRAIDO, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

¹⁷ MB XIII, p. 557.

science and the arts vied with one another in reminding us of His presence, of our duties and of the one thing which alone is necessary: to save our souls and help others save theirs.»¹⁸

Hers was truly "a school of genuine Christian education."¹⁹ It was an education which could not be described as parallel to life, but in life and for life. We can apply to her what Caviglia said of Don Bosco: "...a system and conception of life as the source from which every activity sprang and to which every activity, assigned by duty, tended."²⁰

Such an education is undoubtedly above all natural means and all mere human effort. Mother Emilia was well aware of this: "Human knowledge is too defective to lead a soul to God."²¹

Supernatural ends demand supernatural means. Because of this, the methodology of Don Bosco and of Mother Emilia is primarily the pedagogical methodology of the sacraments. One of the fundamental pedagogical principles of the Saint reads: "Remember that the first method in order to educate well, is to make good confessions and good Holy Communion."²² Frequent Holy Communion and daily Mass are the pillars on which the educative structure must rest."²³

Mother Emilia echoes him: "Enlighten, remind, animate... give much importance in private and in public... to the happiness enjoyed by those who possess the grace of God, of the way in which it is reacquired should it be lost, of the advantage derived from preserving it and of increasing it by frequent recourse to the sources of grace: confession and Holy Communion."²⁴

The themes which recur most frequently in her good nights,

¹⁸ SORBONE CAROLINA, *A report kept in the archives.*

¹⁹ General Archives of the FMA.

²⁰ CAVIGLIA A., *Un documento inesplorato*, in «Salesianum» (1948), p. 318.

²¹ MOSCA, *Raccolta.*

²² *MB IV*, p. 555.

²³ *MB III*, pp. 354-355.

²⁴ MOSCA E., *2ª Conferenza alle insegnanti e assistenti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

conferences and in her private conversations were the sacraments, the Mass and prayer.

She was absolutely convinced that sacramental grace is the most effective educative power, an influence which is not confined to the psychological sphere, but enables the soul to open itself to the direct action of God. The result is a meeting of minds of the educator and the student in a fusion which blends them both in God.

The fundamental inspiration of the Preventive System and the correct way to interpret the educational philosophy of Don Bosco is precisely this supernatural orientation understood and lived well by Mother Emilia.

The religious inspiration which animated her is, in fact, what explains her fruitful and effective educative action.

On the other hand, "side by side with the religious goal, to which Don Bosco always gave first place in his convictions, which were strengthened by his upbringing, mentality and way of acting, he also placed concern for basic human formation ("good Christians and upright citizens"). Naturally, his way of translating this into practice was largely determined by the times in which he lived, by the environment and culture. He wanted "health and wisdom" as well as sanctity; "the civic, moral and scientific education of youth as well as religion; joy and study as well as piety... These and other demands emphasize the concretely humanistic educative ideal of Don Bosco."²⁵

Don Bosco did not underestimate and still less did he deny human and natural values. Rather, we see them present implicitly and "generously realized in practice as in the growth of all personal energies, and involvement in social work ("turn out good members of their families, of society, and educated citizens *MB III*, p. 293); a sense of solidarity and of religious charity."²⁶

²⁵ BRAIDO P., *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova* (Torino-Leumann, LDC, 1974) pp. 46-47.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47.

The placing of God and supernatural ends and means in a central position explicitly includes the positive evaluation of the temporal in the service of supreme and eternal goals. Don Bosco was always fully aware of the dimensions of unity and complexity in the human being.

The recognition of the existence of the humanistic-temporal aspects of man and the urgency of meeting man's needs, did not contradict but integrated in an admirable way the theocentric dimension which was always upper most in the mind of the saintly educator.

We find the same balance in Mother Emilia when it comes to evaluating the gifts of nature and of grace. She always gave the human and temporal values their rightful place in the overall hierarchy of values: she always took them into account in her efforts to give an all-round formation to the girl. The body with its level of health, its energy, its powers; the spirit with its intellectual capacity, its creativity, its will-power; the particular needs, modes of expression; the existence of a certain degree of physical and psychic energy; the socializing tendencies as expressed in friendship, in social activities, in apostolic action; joy, spontaneity and aesthetic expression... Mother Emilia accepted all these things as conditioning positively or negatively, the efficiency of her educational activity.

3. UNDERSTANDING HIS EDUCATIONAL STYLE

"In the field of education Don Bosco is a man of concrete syntheses. The basis of his whole education is the synthesis of the human and the divine, of nature and grace. These aspects are evident also in his methodology. Another outstanding example is the synthesis inherent in his concept of *amorevolezza* (loving kindness) which is a style of education: the style of the Preventive System in action."²⁷

²⁷ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 333.

This *amorevolezza*, while totally rooted in theological charity, as expressed in the words of St. Paul: "Caritas benigna est, patiens est, omnia suffert, omnia sperat,"²⁸ passes through a prism of authentic human love: "I have been away from you for a few days, my dear boys, and my only desire is to return to you and to do all the good I can on your behalf. I am totally consecrated to and have sacrificed everything for your good."²⁹ Thus we see that Don Bosco had worked out a perfect synthesis of supernatural and natural love.

"Here we find ourselves face to face with a characteristic and distinctive element of the concept of Don Bosco's way of educating: an interpretation of charity which translates into *amorevolezza* (supernatural love, linked with paternal and fraternal human reasoning and understanding) which leads the educator to live the life of his students, to love not only their souls but everything that they love. This same *amorevolezza* changes the teacher-pupil relationship into a filial and fraternal one and the environment of the house (oratory, hostel, school...) into a family."³⁰

Don Bosco, in fact, summarizes all his philosophy of education in this principle which explains, justifies and actuates it: "Education is a matter of the heart."³¹ Full of insight, Caviglia comments: "Don Bosco tried to help his numerous boys become good and holy, and he made genuine saints of several of them. The springboard of all his work of spiritual up-building, for those who turned out to be genuine saints and for others was always the same: the human heart."³²

Mother Emilia, affirms, in perfect keeping with Don Bosco's way of thinking: "The true insight both of how to educate

²⁸ Bosco G., *Il sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*, 2nd part.

²⁹ MB VIII, p. 47.

³⁰ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 156.

³¹ MB XVI, p. 447.

³² CAVIGLIA, *op. cit.*, p. 662.

and of how to govern comes from the heart.”³³ This is why she exhorted her teachers and assistants: “...make yourselves loved by your students and you will open a way to their hearts of which they will give you the key.”³⁴ Those who had her as their teacher prove that she possessed that art: “She had the special gift of winning hearts,”³⁵ which established the rapport necessary for education.

The secret of cultivating this gift is an effective human love which radiates warmth and total dedication to the pupils. Don Bosco frequently expressed this love “...my dear boys, you know how much I love you and how totally I have consecrated myself entirely for your good.

The little knowledge I have, the little experience which I have acquired, all that I am and all that I possess... I want to put at your disposal. At any time and in any necessity you can count on me... As far as depends on me ‘I give myself totally to you.’ It may be a poor offering but when I say ‘I give myself totally,’ the implication is I reserve nothing for myself.”³⁶

When an educator can honestly repeat these words and mean them, his disciplinary problems are over. The students’ clash against authority and bid for freedom are at an end because, when *amorevolezza* is exercised in the way just described, the educational authority is fully at the service of freedom. It is then a service of love, which has no other principle and no other law except respect for the healthy liberty of the student, and no other goal than the education of this same liberty in truth and in love.³⁷

This position removes us both from being totally teacher – centered or pupil – centered depending on whether our pedagogy

³³ MOSCA, *Collection*.

³⁴ MOSCA, *2nd Conference*.

³⁵ General archives of the FMA.

³⁶ MB VI, p. 362.

³⁷ Cf BRAIDO G., *La pedagogia della libertà* (Torino, SEI, 1951), pp. 112-114.

is based on the popular theories of yesterday or to-day. Both eras have concentrated on one figure: either the teacher or the student, and have raised numerous questions about the educational relationship.

On this point Mother Emilia exhorted: “Never forget that we must love our pupils as adopted daughters, and that we must love them with an affection which is at once tender and strong.”³⁸

This love worked the miracles of education and conversion of which we read in the history of Don Bosco’s Oratory. Religious vocations flourished around it. A boarder of those times writes: “...religious vocations multiplied just as the violets flourish in spring under their green leaves.

“Anyone who flicks through the pages of the enrollment registers of those times will find that in relation to the number of boarders there was never perhaps a higher proportion of vocations.

And the secret? There was love! The girls were loved with a love stronger than caresses and favouritism...”³⁹

It is certainly true that Salesian *amorevolezza* is, as Don Bosco called it, “the key” which gives the educator access to the heart of his students. He must be able “to avail himself of this position, which is always denied to the rigid and the harsh,”⁴⁰ to resolve in a balanced and natural way one of the the most delicate and demanding tasks of education.

Mother Emilia was convinced of this: “Don Bosco’s way works miracles. There are very few young people who rebel in the face of genuine goodness. One gets discipline with a blend of kindness and firmness, and by never asking what is above the strength of the child. If you act differently you frustrate them instead of helping them find the freedom of the children of God.

³⁸ MOSCA E., *Letter to Sister Orsolina Rinaldi*, January 17, 1895.

³⁹ ROCCA DECIMA, *A report kept in the archives*.

⁴⁰ CERIA E., *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco* 4 (Torino, SEI, 1959), p. 209.

We must never put our pupils in difficult situations or in conditions which make them suffer unnecessarily. There is no point in giving orders, or even words of advice without having considered them in our heart and chosen the opportune moment.”⁴¹

Loving kindness or *amorevolezza*, in order to have a true educational value, must be based on a healthy equilibrium which, while surrounding the child with a genuine and heartfelt love, avoids every form of false affection, and renders the teacher-pupil relationship a shared search for true values.

Don Bosco, who loved his boys so tenderly that he could say: “My children you will find people more learned than I... but it will be hard for you to find someone who loves you more in the Lord.”⁴² Nevertheless fearing that his collaborators might be led to interpret this love in a mistaken fashion, he took care to warn them: “Youth can be used by the devil as a dangerous weapon against people consecrated to the Lord.”⁴³ He also established as a norm in his Preventive System: “Let them avoid like the plague every form of exclusive affection and friendship with the boys.”

Mother Emilia wrote in her private memoirs: “Education must be tender and firm, neither rigid nor soft.”⁴⁴ She recommended to the assistants, “You must be as mothers and sisters, but always mature, religious in demeanor, and truly Salesian. Have the hearts of mothers and sisters but keep your hands to yourself. Measure your words, keep your glance firm and your discipline constant. Be foreseeing mothers and sisters, but be strong with yourselves and use common sense. Remember you are preparing them for life.”⁴⁵

There is unanimous testimony that she herself “was very

⁴¹ MOSCA E., *Conferenza alle insegnanti e assistenti* (other manuscript version).

⁴² BOSCO G., *Il giovane provveduto* (Torino, Paravia, 1847), preface.

⁴³ MB IX, p. 922.

⁴⁴ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

⁴⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

affectionate but very dignified. She was reserved in her dealings with others and in her glances but she was also very maternal. So much was this the case that it was impossible not to feel a filial reverence, almost a devotion, when approaching her.”

She herself reveals the key to this perfectly balanced synthesis: “It is possible to be simultaneously kind and firm when one sees God in others and only wants His glory and their salvation.”⁴⁷

It is vital that our *amorevolezza* retain an awareness of its supernatural source. This is an essential condition for maintaining that “way of implementation,” that style, which characterized and rendered fruitful the work of Don Bosco in the field of education.

Therefore, the comprehension and successful application of this simple principle of methodology, demand a broad vision, the penetration of motivation, and a sense of balance.

Mother Emilia perceived its immense value for education. She succeeded in grasping its multiple facets, its indispensable supernatural and natural aspects and managed to translate them into the practice of education with that particularly delicate balance suggested by her woman’s psychology.”⁴⁸

4. SPIRITUAL HARMONY AND CONCORDANCE

When two persons think alike and agree on the solution of a common problem, not because one gives up his way of seeing things, but because they understand and feel alike about the matter in hand, we find that wonderful harmony of thought, which is indicative of a deeper spiritual concordance.

It is not necessary to spend much time together for the

⁴⁶ General Archives, FMA.

⁴⁷ MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript version).

⁴⁸ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 336.

development of this harmony. A single meeting is sufficient, because the two people destined to form this unity, have within themselves all that is necessary to evoke a response from each other. They resemble electric wires which have all that is necessary within themselves and only need the switch to be turned on to give light.

According to Sertillanges, such meetings, especially among saints, are part of heaven's plan. They are ordained to fulfill the work of God,⁴⁹ and they are established only through "the mediation" of a "divine contact"⁵⁰ because, being designed for spiritual growth, they can live and breath only in the circuit of God's Grace.⁵¹ They are in fact conditioned... "by a common capacity to converge on an attraction towards a superior level which is capable of transforming the original meeting into a triad in which God blesses and crowns the association."⁵²

The full and perfect dovetailing of the principles of education of Mother Emilia Mosca and of Don Bosco can be explained on a higher plane than mere verbalizations or even intellectual reasonings. We are dealing with a meeting of souls which surpasses the limits of the sensible world and is rooted in an authentic and true spiritual affinity.⁵³

It is the interior attitude which coordinates the thinking and acting in a harmony of means, methods and ends which put the two educators on the same path.

The basis of these spiritual meetings are often found in circumstances arranged by Providence which may spring from very different situations. However the lessons learned by those concerned form an impression on souls which give them a similar orientation.

⁴⁹ SERTILLANGES, *L'amore* (Brescia, Ed. La Scuola 1955), p. 155.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵² DEVAUX J., *Teilhard de Chardin e la vocazione della donna* (Rome, Ed. A.V.E., 1966) p. 20.

⁵³ Cf DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, pp. 336-337.

It was like this in the case of Don Bosco and of Mother Emilia.

The shepherd boy of Becchi suffered in his childhood from the aloofness of the priests whom he encountered.

The little countess Emilia suffered tremendous lack of sensible affection when she was living with her grandmother — a fruit of the method of upbringing common in 19th century aristocratic homes.

Hence we see in both souls the creation of a fascinating factor for perfect mutual understanding.

But this historical factor is not sufficient to explain and justify fully the complete harmony of their souls.

What then is the true basis of this harmony? There are probably many contributing elements, but it seems enough for this study to point out what we consider to have been the three main factors which gave them a common orientation: a passion for souls, a largeness of heart, and a healthy realism.

"The theory behind Don Bosco's pedagogy," says Caviglia, "is not only primarily but also radically and essentially a spiritual pedagogy of souls."⁵⁴ This pedagogy is rooted in precisely this "passion for souls" on which his whole life was polarized, and which was expressed also in the distinguishing motto of his congregation: "Da mihi animas coetera tolle."

"For Don Bosco, the catalyst and basic principle as well as the objectives at which he aimed" was "to save souls in the most religious sense of the expression. All the human means used had to be coordinated with and subordinated to his end. All the art inspired by his goodness and genius had only this end."⁵⁵ He possessed, in fact, his own style of translating his anxiety for the salvation of souls into a way of life.

"Padellaro expresses it well: 'Don Bosco realized that before a child can learn to say *yes to God*, the educator must

⁵⁴ CAVIGLIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-319.

⁵⁵ CAVIGLIA A., *Il Magone Michele. Una classica esperienza educativa*, in « Salesianum » (1949), p. 454.

say yes to the child.⁵⁶ Because of this conviction Don Bosco said yes to joy, to fun, to youthful energy. When he took joy as the lever of his educational work he blessed and encouraged games, outings, and the noisiest activities of young people. He even took part in them himself in order to get the young to say yes to God, to avoid sin, to appreciate grace, to reach heroic levels of sanctity.

This key to Don Bosco's way of educating is incarnated in the person so typical of the Salesian environment: the assistant, the brain child of Don Bosco. He is at once brother, father, and friend to the young people in his care, Guard "of honour of God"⁵⁷ and protector of grace in the souls confided to him. He shares the life of the young 'by loving what they love'⁵⁸ in order to lead them to love what God loves."⁵⁹

Mother Emilia, who identified herself with her educative mission, became filled with a passion for souls at her first contact with Don Bosco. Like that of the saint, her pedagogy became a "spiritual pedagogy of souls."

Her biographer was able to attest, "Her goal was always that followed by our holy founder, an apostolate designed to save souls. The aims of teaching was education; the aim of education was salvation in order to lead youth to Jesus Christ."⁶⁰

This was the objective which animated all her activity and the principle she taught her collaborators. "Take heart! Let us work with great zeal in the field entrusted to us by our heavenly Father. Let us try to win the hearts of all those who approach us so that we may have a rich harvest to take back to Him on the day of reckoning. Oh what joy we will experience in heaven when we find ourselves followed there by

⁵⁶ PADELLARO N., *Il messaggio educativo di don Bosco* (Torino, SEI, 1930), p. 21.

⁵⁷ VALENTINI E., *Assistenza salesiana*, in « Salesianum », XXI, n. 4 (1959), p. 683.

⁵⁸ BOSCO G., *Lettera da Roma del 1884*, in MB XVIII, pp. 107-114.

⁵⁹ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, pp. 337-338.

⁶⁰ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

numerous souls whom we have had the privilege of helping to save."⁶¹

"Her burning desire for the salvation of souls rendered her, as it did Don Bosco, always present to her collaborators and to her pupils. This availability was an enlightened and willed response to her consecration and led her to personify, not only because of duty or title, but in an essential form, the ideal Salesian assistant. In this role she was full of that Salesian amiability and joy which caused her to approach and win all hearts. She led the young to say yes to God, a yes backed by the slogan: *Servite Domino in Laetitia*. In this, Sister Emilia truly mirrored Don Bosco."⁶²

This holy zeal for souls, which was shared by Don Bosco and by his faithful daughter, Sister Emilia, can only be explained and justified by the great love of God which filled both.

"To understand Don Bosco is to know his heart. His heart must be understood in the noblest and deepest meanings of the terms. These terms are seen within a framework of intelligence, faith, action. His affection was intense, but always controlled. In keeping with his personal educational ideas it was always visible, expressed, communicated."⁶³

It would be possible and rewarding to make a list of all the expressions of affection used by Don Bosco. However, a few will serve our purpose here.

"...I have had to live away from you for a few days already, my dearest sons. It seems to me that months have passed."

"You are really my delight and joy and I am deprived of both when I am separated from you..."⁶⁴

"Don Bosco loves you in the Lord with his whole heart."⁶⁵

⁶¹ MOSCA E., *Lettera a madre Chiarina Giustiniani*.

⁶² DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, pp. 338-339.

⁶³ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 116.

⁶⁴ CERIA, *Epistolario I*, p. 207 - Letter of July 23, 1861.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97 - Letter to Father Bonetti, June 16, 1870.

"I am present bodily here, but my heart and my thoughts and even my words are always at the Oratory and among you. This is a weakness in me but I cannot overcome it..."⁶⁶

"It was a victorious weakness which opened his way to the hearts of the young so that he could take them to God; it was a sanctified weakness which grew in sacrifice and dedication to the point of giving his very self for the good of the young."⁶⁷

This love, which is charity in its most authentically Christian form and which, to quote Pietro Braido, "is the beginning and end of the pedagogy of Don Bosco,"⁶⁸ was also the magnetic force which influenced the philosophy of education of Mother Emilia Mosca.

It was the interior flame which urged her towards a total giving of herself to her mission and which gave her that spiritual ascendancy by which she was able to elevate and transform souls.

Her students affirm: "She loved us!... she loved us with a mother's love and she had such a spiritually uplifting influence on us that her affection made us improve even without our noticing it."⁶⁹

"...she had imbibed the words, the glance, the gestures, the heart, the method of Don Bosco. She inherited from him that power of fascinating the young which rendered her mistress of their hearts. We were prepared to undertake anything and to put up with anything in order to become what she wanted us to be."⁷⁰

Her biographer points out, "There was a fountain of goodness and of tenderness in her. She found her happiness, her

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 193 - Letter to Father Rua, February 9, 1872.

⁶⁷ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, pp. 339.

⁶⁸ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 405.

⁶⁹ ROCCA DECIMA, Reports kept in the archives.

⁷⁰ DOLMETTA MADRENITA, *Secondo Convegno Internazionale exallieve delle FMA* (Torino, May, 20-23, 1920). Special number.

way of practising virtue and her salvation in sharing this affection which found its source in the love of God.⁷¹

This "treasure" of "goodness and of tenderness" mirrored "the measure of the greatness of her soul."⁷² There was no rationing of this measure in her. The following quote testifies: "...my heart is more than close to you; I want to comfort you, or at least to help... but I cannot find words to express my real feelings. I wish I could suffer instead of you."⁷³

Her numerous letters all attest the same thing. Father Francesia wrote: "Her love was so sensitive that she always knew by intuition who had intimate, interior sufferings."⁷⁴ She gave herself to all "with such goodness, she listened with such sympathy, that those who spoke to her knew that she was not concentrating on anything else, or interested in anything else during the time they were talking to her, but only in what they were saying."⁷⁵

The ever present creativity of love rendered her ingenious in finding ways of arranging those personal encounters which are worthy of the title of a meeting of minds, and which are the only ones capable of effecting genuine transformations. The creative quality of her love was the overflow of the heart of one who was at once a mother and an educator.

The third element of her spiritual affinity with Don Bosco was her healthy "realism."

"Don Bosco was a solid realist, whose realism was Christian and evangelical and which made him reject all *ecstatic* supernaturalism, but hold on to a balanced evaluation of all things in God. He really loved nature, beauty, youthfulness, love, joy... Don Bosco was convinced that Christianity is never inhuman but is, rather, the most sure and balanced form of

⁷¹ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁷² MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

⁷³ MOSCA E., *Letters to Sister Eulalia Bosco*, April 26, 1892.

⁷⁴ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ General Archives FMA.

humanism... As a result of this perspective, his pedagogy was truly human."⁷⁶

This sound realism was strongly characterized by a spirituality which adhered objectively to natural and supernatural reality, without formalism and without superstructures.

The supernatural ideal, which was very much stressed by Don Bosco, is rendered capable of permeating all reality and every event of daily life. It takes on all the values that are associated with it.

His evaluation of reality was evangelical and consequently, it was optimistic. This optimism overflowed to his view of life which he took and transformed into a joyous vision of all things in God, Who is the beginning and end of all creation. Everything, therefore, had a deep religious significance for him. Don Bosco — as Father Caviglia points out so opportunely — “sanctificied the joy of living,”⁷⁷ he drew from everything an occasion for spiritual uplifting and for praising God.

We read in the *Memorie Biografiche*, “It can be said that Don Bosco was one of those souls who knew how to take the divine model and draw from Him the most convincing example of a beautiful and serene life.”⁷⁸ This, in the fullest Christian sense, demands a perfect harmony of the divine and the human. This is the way of perfect equilibrium, of integrated humanism and of integral Christianity. It is the balance that was taught and described by the Second Vatican Council, especially in its document *The Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*.

Mother Emilia also possessed this appreciation of life, of nature, of human and earthly values.

“Nature in all its forms spoke to her of the presence of God: ‘The feeling aroused by nature is like the dawn which

⁷⁶ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 405.

⁷⁷ CAVIGLIA, *Un documento inesplorato*, p. 655.

⁷⁸ *MB VIII*, p. 302.

in Eden drew Adam’s attention to the presence of God’.⁷⁹ Through it God renders himself ‘visible, tangible, perceptible in a manner...’ ‘The light of God radiates from a leaf, from a flower, from a piece of metal, as it radiates from a star.’⁸⁰

...Beauty immersed her in God: ‘Beauty is a divine quality, it is the mirroring of the infinite through the finite: it reflects God.’⁸¹ She knew how to pick out this reflection of God, the essential beauty, everywhere: ‘every creature has its ray of beauty.’⁸²

...Truth was the path that guided her straight to God: ‘Truth is a queen whose eternal throne is in heaven and imperial seat is in the bosom of God.’⁸³

Mother Emilia was an assiduous seeker of truth because she felt that every truth acquired was a step towards God, the Essential Truth. As an educator and a teacher she was dominated by the desire to open hearts and minds to this truth.”⁸⁴

However, we must always remember that her soul, which was always attracted to beauty and truth, was magnetized by “the world of souls.” “She looked at this world with tremendous realism and saw both its positive and negative aspects. She was always willing to bring healing, to uplift, to console. She realized that souls had to be approached as individuals and not fitted into predetermined categories. They have to be approached with love, because only love can plumb the depths of souls: ‘Every soul is a world to be studied, a source in which the infinite love and omnipotence of God is to be seen through reflections.’ ”⁸⁵

Don Bosco, who drew inspiration from St. Francis de Sales, the Saint who stressed so much the fundamental notion

⁷⁹ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ DALCERRI, *Un cammino di croce*, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

of the sanctity of the duties of one's state in life, was guided by his spiritual realism. As a result he demonstrated in word and action that everyone must reach sanctity in his particular life situation by adapting to the demands and circumstances of concrete reality.

"This," wrote Caviglia, "is his ideal and program of reaching sanctity, his spiritual system. According to this latter, sanctity can be sought and lived in the events of the day and the moment, and by using the opportunities offered by the way of life one has chosen."⁸⁶

The sanctity of Don Bosco was certainly characterized by his adaptation to and acceptance of concrete reality, both in the general situation and in the duties of the moment.

This was the lesson which Sister Emilia had learned at the school of her spiritual mother, St. Mary Mazzarello: "True religious piety consists in performing all our duties in the established time and place and motivated by love of God."⁸⁷

Life presented itself to her, therefore as a realistic task of self-sanctification, to be reached through the ordinary events of everyday, the concrete situation, and, in a special way through the dispositions manifested through obedience. This latter was her favorite virtue, certainly not because it was the one that she found easiest to practise. "I love obedience best. I do all in my power to allow myself to be guided in everything by obedience."⁸⁸

She engaged her strong-willed, down-to-earth temperament, in facing all situations, in fulfilling all her tasks and duties. She put her whole self into everything because she knew that in this way she was doing God's will and was allowing him to realize the designs for her sanctification.

"Don Bosco blended 'realism of life' with his spiritual realism. This assured the balanced interaction of the dynamics

⁸⁶ CAVIGLIA, *Il Magone Michele*, p. 464.

⁸⁷ MACONO, *op. cit.*, II, p. 57.

⁸⁸ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

of human effort and trust in God, vigilance and simplicity, seeking help from the rich and the powerful and having unlimited trust in Divine Providence. He wrote: 'Wherever hard work and strong will can accomplish something for the glory of God, I am there ready to put everything I have into it.'⁸⁹

He was ready to request money for his students and his buildings. He had to cope with many difficulties. He was there to neutralize the pitfalls set for him by his powerful adversaries and by heretics. He always tried to determine the best course of action, to avoid the influence of the false philosophies of the era and to succeed in reaching a determined goal."⁹⁰

Mother Emilia followed the same route. Her "realism" was what led her to confront serenely, courageously and at times even enthusiastically, the numerous difficulties attending the organization of the schools of the Institute. Reaction gave her the spirit to face her adversaries. It helped her to use effectively all the required processes and benefits of public relations which would help her reach her goals.

We see in her too, a spiritual realism backed by a realism of life.

Both Don Bosco and Mother Emilia translated this realism into pedagogical terms. Both desired very much to form their students into people of realistic ideals, who looked at life from the concreteness of the duties of their state.

Caviglia wrote that, "Those who knew Don Bosco as an educator realized that this concept was the basis of all his efforts in the fields both of ordinary life and of spiritual life."⁹¹

"All Don Bosco's spirit can be expressed by bringing into focus the way in which his saintly boys fulfilled their duty."⁹²

⁸⁹ CERIA, *Epistolario*, I, p. 463.

⁹⁰ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 341.

⁹¹ CAVIGLIA A., *Don Bosco. Opere edite e inedite* 4 (Torino, SEI, 1943), p. 99.

⁹² CAVIGLIA, *Un documento inesplorato*, p. 658.

"Don Bosco held precision in the fulfilling of the duties of one's state as an ideal."⁹³

Mother Emilia's pedagogical realism followed in the same footsteps. She never lost sight of the twofold goal proposed by her saintly master: prepare persons for this life and for the next.

Means, methods, educational ends, while always enlightened by clear and firm guidelines, were always suggested in the concrete situations of life and of action, which left no doubts and which aimed at a formation for life, in life.

The pages of her diary bear witness to this. They give us insight into her human and Christian formative action from the vantage point of concrete situations and environment, in such a way as to convince us of her "pedagogical realism."⁹⁴

This perfect synchronization of Mother Emilia with her father and teacher, besides underlining the spiritual affinity between their two souls which we have already seen, also speaks of a living participation in the charisma which God gave her so that she could fulfill her mission in the Church.

"Mother Emilia strove constantly to become rooted in Don Bosco's spirit and directives regarding education. She really wanted the young tree of the female part of the Salesian family to be nourished by the same vital sap and to produce the same fruits."⁹⁵

She constantly urged her collaborators: "Let us remember that we are Daughters of Don Bosco and that this charity must permeate us all and make us replicas of the perfect model which God has deigned to give us."⁹⁶

"It is my desire, and I want it to be your desire too, that you become true educators according to the mind of Don

⁹³ CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco. Opere*, p. 100.

⁹⁴ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 342.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

Bosco. If you really desire this, you must put everything that you've got into reaching this ideal."⁹⁷

"By virtue of her foresight, she perceived, even in those times, the conception and propagation of a multitude of ideas. Under the umbrella of *contemporary* these ideas would have shaken the faith of many in a system such as Don Bosco's, which was devoid of scientific appearance and she put her collaborators on guard against it.⁹⁸ Not all of them will have been formed at the school of Don Bosco. "I think I should warn you about a danger which could make head way as the number of Sisters increases. They will come to us from state schools, from the schools of other Religious Institutes, with other systems of education. It is only natural that each one will esteem the system followed where she was educated...

Let us be careful! Every congregation has its own characteristics. Let us be satisfied with Don Bosco. We share his charisma. Let us keep our own character as an Institute."

However, the fidelity which she professed, upheld and lived must not be misunderstood as a passive, superficial acceptance of the educative system of Don Bosco.

She who knew how to transpose it into the feminine key and how to adapt it intelligently for girls is our concrete exemplar of a fidelity which is at once creative and dynamic. She perceived in Don Bosco's thought not only "a sacred deposit to be preserved" but a "fruitful seed to be developed."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹⁸ DALCERRI, *Lo stile educativo*, p. 343.

⁹⁹ MOSCA E., *1st Conference to the teachers and assistants*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁰ PAUL VI, *Motu Proprio Magisterium vitae*. May 24, 1973.

DIALOGUE: THE KEY TO EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. DIALOGUE AS A PREMISE TO THE EDUCATIONAL ENCOUNTER

Leon Barbey wrote: « Education is an encounter;”¹ in reality it is an encounter which, because of the spiritual values involved, surpasses mere contact, which bespeaks “the physical, the superficial, or is simply superimposition.”²

Encounter involves coming to know and acknowledge each other as persons, a mutual entering into each other’s way of thinking, reciprocal giving, a meeting of spirits and the establishment of a communion of souls.

Barbey goes on to assert that “education demands a personal self-giving of the educator to the student.”³ The actualization of this demands, as a conditioning premise, the encounter of the educator with his student. A gift of this nature, which is so decisive for the orientation and life of the student, “is possible only if lived by both parties (the educator and the student) at the level of their personal life.”⁴

Without this encounter there can be no education. Encounter forms the catalyst of every educative action because it

¹ BARBEY L., *L'educazione è incontro*, in « Pedagogia e vita », serie XX, febbraio-marzo (1959), p. 196.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

provides the right springboard: understanding. Understanding is an act of spiritual harmony. It gives one admittance to the soul and life of the other. It creates a unison with the young person's feeling about life in order to gain his confidence and so be in a position to give him guidance, support and encouragement on the right path.

How can one arrive at that point of encounter which is the *conditio sine qua non* of the educative action? "It is necessary that the young person hear himself addressed by the secure voice of one who uses his 'hidden name,' for him to become aware of feeling the vibrations of that wave length which calls for a soul-deep response from him.

Under these conditions the young person becomes aware that he has his own identity and is not being confused with others, that the truth of his being is allowed to blossom. There is no longer any need for him to hide his real self, to defend himself because he knows his educator is a friend."⁵

Therefore, it is dialogue which establishes contact, which holds the secret key necessary to gain admission to the heart of the young, hearts which "are always closed to harshness."⁶ Dialogue, if really authentic, penetrates the soul, investigates its secrets, wins it over and leads it to truth.

Don Bosco, great educator that he was, perceived the worth and efficacy of dialogue, learned how to conduct it and became a master at it.

The updated and realistic outlook of Don Bosco relies heavily on this fact. He understood, with a clarity rivaled by few, that education is possible only through "the mysterious influence of a presence that is 'really met,' that attracts, envelops and magnetizes."⁷

This dual relationship is the basic structure of Don Bosco's philosophy of education. Pietro Braido affirms: "Education for

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁶ CERIA, *Epistolario IV*, p. 209.

⁷ BARBEY, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Don Bosco is a dialogue, not a monologue. It is not a generic interpersonal rapport but a rapport of persons in active and factual collaboration. It is a conversation of more than one voice, often of just two (as in the intimacy of the Confessional and of spiritual direction, of the private conversation or the little personal word, the *parolina all'orecchio*) and often of several voices. In this latter form the voices of companions or of the whole school staff can play a part.

→ Because of this Don Bosco's pedagogy is the 'pedagogy of the heart' because only in genuine love, fed by sentiments illumined and purified by reason and religion, is there true communication.

If affection and dialogue are missing, so is the Preventive System. As a logical implications, Don Bosco's system rejects authoritarianism and legalism. It just cannot contemplate the educator-student rapport in terms of polemics and rights."⁸

At the very base of Don Bosco's vocation is the need to dialogue with the young. The words of the 11-year-old John to Father Calosso are both significant and indicative of his program of life:

"Why do you wish to become a priest?"

"To be able to approach and to instruct many of my companions in their religion. They are not essentially bad, but they become bad because there is no one to look after them."⁹

These words were the fruit of painful reflection on the part of little John who admitted: "I saw many good priests dedicated to their ministry, but it was never possible to develop a personal rapport with them.

Often in tears he thought aloud or repeated to others, 'If I were a priest... I would approach children. I would try to speak kindly to them and to give them good advice. How I would love to have a conversation with my parish priest.'¹⁰

⁸ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, pp. 404-405.

⁹ Cf *MB I*, p. 178.

¹⁰ BOSCO G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (Torino, SEI, 1946), p. 44.

This silence froze him. This contradiction in those who were "the ministers of the Word" was a source of anguish for him. However, at the same time it became the inspiration for him to aim at becoming "one" with his little ones, to love them, to make himself loved by them, to approach them and have real dialogue with them.

In addition to this, of course, was the path pointed out to him from on high at the age of nine years. His future mission was revealed to him in a dialogue, and in dialogue he was taught the method to follow, to make himself the friend of the abandoned and rebellious youth who surrounded him.

Hence "dialogue" became the heart of his methodology, of his pedagogy, of his life with the young. All "the decisive encounters that he had with the young whose hearts he won for God take the form of a dialogue. The first of these encounters with the orphan boy who felt alone and was ill-treated by the sacristan was successful because it was conducted in dialogue."¹¹

It was a tiring dialogue for Don Bosco who found it hard to make headway because the second party was closed, confused, trembling with fear.

All the questions put by the Saint received only muffled, discouraging replies. The boy stood before him with bowed head, the typical attitude of one who is controlled by a sense of inferiority and guilt.

Don Bosco sought even a tiny crevice through which to begin to gain entry into that unsocialized soul. Among the many "no" replies Don Bosco would have to get one "yes" in order to disperse the clouds and relax that fear-furrowed face into a spontaneous and open smile. Don Bosco hit on the magic question:

"Can you whistle?"

¹¹ PADELLARO N., *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco* (Milano, Ed. Le Stelle, 1968), p. 29.

At that question, Bartholomew Garelli lifted his head and smiled. Nothing further was required to establish contact and to make him affectionate towards Don Bosco.¹² The door of his heart was thrown wide open. His confidence was gained and they could engage in serene conversation. This conversation gave birth to the apostolic activity of the Saint.

Don Bosco used this method, with different nuances and in different gradations, according to the individual temperament of each one, in all of his encounters with boys. Thousands of these meetings are documented. Of particular importance are those with Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besuc-co and John Cagliero.

The Saint, gifted with unusual psychological insight, took each one according to his individual make up and knew how to share his most intimate interests.

Don Bosco's dialogue with his boys were not bogged down by the conventional: He avoided verbal clichés and standard attitudes.

Padellaro says aptly: "Every word of Don Bosco showed the secret of revealing good-natured irony, of taking advantage of a little happening, of telling an interesting anecdote, of describing ordinary events in order to break a solemn mood which can be created by the very fact that the speaker is a person in authority. He knew how to get his point across, how to apply moral maxims to the ordinary events of life. He knew how to give a suggestion rather than a command, how to make listeners understand rather than to sound authoritarian and dogmatic.

His dialogues were replete with silences and things taken for granted. They were respectful of the right to privacy and the secrecy of every soul. This secrecy was never violated by unfair verbal strategies."¹³

His dialogues always had only one aim, an aim specified

¹² Cf *MB II*, pp. 73-74.

¹³ PADELLARO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 30.

by him in his famous letter from Rome in 1884. It was to give birth to that "confidence which creates vital contact between the Superiors and the young confided to their care."¹⁴

Mother Emilia Mosca not only gathered from her master the basic outlines of the Preventive System but also knew how to assimilate its most vital details. These she got, not by studying at a school of theory, but assimilating them during her personal meetings with him.

Of course it always remains true that because she suffered the lack of dialogue at some period herself, she understood with the insight given by personal suffering, the necessity of a close teacher-student two-way relationship.

At an age when she had most need of being expansive, she had to close herself up in silence because her authoritarian grandmother simply did not believe in dialogue. Don Bosco could at least dialogue with his mother who, even if illiterate, had a deep wisdom which she shared with him.

Mother Emilia felt complete freedom with Don Bosco's method. Feeling fully at home with it, she was able to actualize it without any problems.

One from among many episodes serves to show how she possessed that art of making dialogue possible. This incident has many points of similarity with the episode of Bartholomew Garelli.

The girl concerned writes: "I remember that her appearance, which seemed to me severe and unsympathetic, frightened me. I avoided her; often I cried a lot from homesickness in some remote corner of the house.

On one occasion Mother Emilia found me crying. She took me by the hand and gently led me to her office. Kindly she said, 'Sit down and tell me what is making you so sad. I am your mother now. Maybe I am not as pretty as she is but... look at me carefully I have eyes, a nose, a mouth just like her. What do you say?'"

¹⁴ Bosco, *Letter from Rome*, 1884.

Here we have the echo of the "Do you know how to whistle?" of Don Bosco to Garelli. The magical effect was the same and produced the same opening for an intervention on the part of the educator. It made the girl smile. The narrator continues: "On seeing me smile she said, 'Now we are friends. Promise me to come to me whenever you need anything!'"¹⁵

There was no need of a formal promise. An unbreakable spiritual bond had been established between the educator and the student.

Her philosophy of education was based on open, preventive dialogue because she was a motherly educator who followed the students as individuals.

A written report confirms that she seemed "not only to read our thoughts, but to give them the importance they had for us. She sympathized with the little worries and troubles which are so common among children at school. Nothing was of no account to Mother Assistant. She was always extremely careful not to hurt."¹⁶

Her biographer describes several of these encounters and all tell of her motherly interest and a reciprocal trust.

"The student are coming out of school. Mother Assistant is standing in the corridor with her usual kind expression. Seeing one looking sad, she calls her, 'You look sad... what has happened? Are you ill?'"

'No.'

'What is wrong then? Are you worried about something?'"

'No.'

'What can it be then?'"

'I couldn't do the exercise which was assigned. I just couldn't succeed.' At this she burst into tears.

'I'm sorry. Let us see if we can do anything about it. How do you feel about doing it in my office tonight when I am out?'"

¹⁵ PONTREMOLI CATERINA, *A report kept in the archives*.

¹⁶ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

'In your office? I? Alone?'

'Yes, lock the door from the inside and write. You will find everything you need paper, pen, ink. Do you want to?'

And when you have completed it, leave it on my desk. Lock the door behind you and bring me the key...' Mother Emilia smiled.

'Oh, Mother Assistant! I alone in your office?!' uttered the girl, entirely overcome by such a sign of trust.

'Yes. I am not afraid to trust any of my students who pray. Now go and cheer up!' ¹⁷

Another girl in her final year of boarding school, had been giving trouble for about two months. Reprimands were coming to her from left and right. She admits, "I was tired of everyone and of everything and especially of myself."

She met Mother Emilia who smilingly said:

"Don't you want to tell me something?"

"Yes and no Mother..."

"Well, there is something I want to tell you. Come with me to my office. Here, sit down, take this book (the Imitation of Christ), make the Sign of the Cross. Open and read it!"

The girl obeyed mechanically and a little confused. Her eyes fell on a passage that seemed written just for her. She was overcome by it and cried.

This was sufficient for Mother Emilia. She didn't scold her, nor mention anything. She just invited her to think over a few things. "Have you got the message?" she asked her. "Good, take it to heart. Keep the book and consult it often. Go away now and keep cheerful." ¹⁸

The short encounter was enough to make that girl happy and enable her to overcome the crisis.

It is true that the success of a conversation depends largely on how it is carried out. This is really the fruit of the

¹⁷ Cf *Ibid*, pp. 197-198.

¹⁸ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

approachableness of the person, of the pedagogical tact of the educator and of the latter's ability to convey a message. It would be "naive to hold that interpersonal contact is the only condition required in the educational process." ¹⁹

Mother Emilia undoubtedly possessed all the necessary qualities. She knew that there is a meeting of souls only if two meet each other at the level of persons. Because of this she believed very much in showing trust and giving responsibility.

She knew the road to constructive dialogue.

2. THE METHOD OF DIALOGUE

Don Bosco pointed out this road in two of the most fundamental laws of his Preventive System: reason and loving kindness. He was absolutely convinced that the essential components of dialogue are truth and love. One is no good without the other. This is what led him to opening his treatise on the Preventive System by comparing it with the Repressive System. As Padellaro expresses it, "The repressive system is the system in which a law or a command is put into words once and for all, in which any discussion of what is said is rebellion... whereby the personal presence of the one in charge is silent, and any words spoken are enforcements in the form of regulations, injunctions, reprimands." ²⁰

Don Bosco, instead, wrote on several occasions in his little pamphlet addressed to educators: "Speak like loving fathers, and above all let the students speak."

The reason and kindness on which he based his system are not two abstract and impersonal concepts. "Reason is intended as a reason arrived at through shared evaluations, doubts,

¹⁹ SCILLIGO P., in *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova* (Torino-Leumann, LDC, 1974), p. 86.

²⁰ PADELLARO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 29.

questioning, answers suggested by evidence, and personal experience. Kindness is a dialogue of words and acts which balances union and affection. It avoids separation and breaks down defences."²¹

According to Don Bosco's system reason is at the beginning of the educative process. It takes the form of honest enlightenment at the outset. This is one of the most fundamental rules of prevention. The young person must know clearly from the very start what is expected of him and be reminded of it along the way.

Don Bosco, in fact, defines his system thus: "It consists in making the prescriptions and regulations of the institution known to the students and then to supervise in such a way that the assistants and director are always present to speak to them as loving fathers, to guide and counsel them and to correct them kindly."²²

In giving orders not only was Don Bosco reasonable in asking only things that were possible and within the capability of the boys, but he demanded that the reasonableness of what was being asked be explained to the boys. This naturally led to conviction on their part. It was not enough that the warning, the norm, the regulation be intrinsically reasonable. Don Bosco demanded that its reasonableness be seen and agreed upon by the student, to the point that it should become an effective conscience mold of personal responsibility.

Consequently, the Preventive System rejects authoritarianism. It requires that the young person be led to an acceptance of duty, rules, regulations, correction and even chastisement based on motives which he sees as justifying.

This need of justifying the demands that one is making, is rooted in a fundamental need of human reason and on respect for the person as such.

In the field of education it has as its immediate aim the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²² Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, 1st part.

formation of conscience and of a sense of responsibility. The student must keep close to the educator not because he is constrained to do so but because he is inwardly convinced of this and chooses to do so.

Until the educator succeeds in winning over the student to his side and overcoming the latter's natural resistance, opposition and tendency to be on the defensive, he cannot begin any educative action. This point is reached only when the student spontaneously accepts what the educator proposes to him.

The personal living by the educators of the values which he is imparting in theory will make the motivations and incentives proposed more efficacious, because the student will find a credibility bridge between the authority figure and the motivating principles.

Don Bosco not only verbalized the principles but he lived them in his personal life and in his way of conducting his schools.

Mother Emilia noticed this and drew inspiration from it. She set out as a faithful disciple to gather and to put into practice every aspect of the pedagogy of the Saint. When it came to the element of reason this fidelity was in perfect accord with her personal viewpoint, with her natural disposition and with her experience in the field of education. Thus she found it natural to act in accordance with this principle.

It is enough to glance through the diary to which we have referred, to become aware of how she integrated it in education.

At the beginning of each year she had the regulations read aloud in the presence of all the teachers and assistants and of all the Superiors who could have contact with the girls. In this way she wanted the girls to realize the reciprocity of duties and of observance of the regulations. She gave her motive: "Those in charge also have duties which they must fulfill. I want you to know they are Sisters who act according to their duty and not according to arbitrary impulses. To fulfill their duties towards you, they need the help of God,

your co-operation and much virtue. Appreciate the Sisters, obey them lovingly and pray for them.”²³

These words seem an echo of Don Bosco's: “Do you think that things are done according to whim? Before a Superior makes a decision let him place himself in the presence of God, examine his conscience, ask the Lord to enlighten and help him to see if the order which he intends to give is for the good of those in his charge...

Have confidence in your Superiors, trust their advice... They are a little older than you, have more experience and knowledge than you, and they love you.”²⁴

Mother Emilia recommended to the assistants: “It is your duty not to make yourselves burdensome, but to remind those in your care of the different regulations as the occasions present themselves.”²⁵

That “youthful instability” of which Don Bosco spoke, “which leads the young easily to forget disciplinary regulations” should lead the assistant to make himself the “friendly voice”²⁶ which reminds, reproves and warns.

This is just what she did. She was not satisfied by a public reading of the regulations. She reminded the girls of them time and again.

It was the beginning of the year and precisely the first time that the boarders entered the study hall. Mother Emilia smiled at them as they filed past to take their places.

After the short prayer said together, she invited them to sit. Mother opened a friendly discourse in which she offered some guidance to the girls.

“Your eyes ask me: Anything new?... There is, but it is not displeasing. Each one of you has her book of regulations. I want each of you to read the part about evening study now before you begin your first assignment.’

²³ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁴ MB XII, p. 147.

²⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁶ BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo*, 1st part, art. 2.

After five or six minutes of private reading she said, ‘Now let us agree that what you have read there, will be practised to the letter, even if the assistant should not be present.

However, you have a Sister here, not a policeman, not a watchman, but one of the same Sisters who will be with you at recreation, and one of those Sisters who is beginning her experience with you. Your assistant is, therefore, the visible presence of your Guardian Angel, and she will watch you only to see how well you do your duty and to take pleasure in your diligence at work...

She has also read these regulations and knows that there must be silence in the study and that you know your duty to keep it. Begin from the first moment. I shall see you later to congratulate you on your success!’²⁷

Whenever she had to make any change in the school timetable or that of the boarders, she never confronted the girls with the unexpected. She prepared them for the change explaining the reason and always encouraged them to feel co-responsible for the discipline and the good order of the house and of the smooth running of the school.

Here is a typical example drawn from many other similar ones:

“A change! I need to change your dining room assistant and to replace her with a Sister who is doing this work for the first time. I want her to find a model dining room and to see in your behavior the regulations in action. Do you think you can? Do you want to help me in this?

Today in the dining room we shall read both your and her duties. In this way you will know what she has the right to expect from you... I shall introduce her to you at lunch time tomorrow and I shall remain as the first assistant myself for two days.

Do you understand? Now go and take some exercise!”²⁸

²⁷ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

In accordance with the concept of reasonableness, she never expected to be obeyed just because of the position she held. Less still did she make unfair demands which would lead to their rejection. Instead, respectful of the person of the other, she reasoned with her students and offered in addition supernatural motivations, thus raising her girls' obedience on to a higher plane.

She knew how to help others share her thinking because she knew how to bring into play their sense of personal responsibility by using tact and discretion, and this elicited full trust.

A meaningful Good Night which she gave on the vigil of the Novena of the Immaculate Conception in 1892 exemplifies this:

"Tell me the truth. Do you prefer me to trust you or not? I know your answer and so I shall make an act of trust in you...

I trust your common sense, your affection, your conscience. During recreation in these three days of the novena you will have assistants in the linen room, in the dormitories, in the studies... Go and sort your things out... see what you want to destroy or keep. Put things in order. Dispose of anything that you think would make your Superiors blush. Remove it, tear it into shreds and put it anonymously in the place which will be indicated to you by Sister Superior tomorrow. Everything will be burned in your presence and we will all feel the better for the victory which the fire will signify. Do not spare anything: books, notebooks, trinkets, souvenirs, drawing, post-cards and so forth. Our Lady will reward you with special blessings and your Guardian Angel will thank you. If anyone should be tempted to hide anything more safely than it is hidden at present remember the devil makes the pot but forgets the lid. Remember in the house of Our Lady Help of Christians and of Don Bosco evil secrets come to the surface and bring consequences that one has never dreamed of. I am not worried because I can see in your eyes a desire to make a sacrifice for Our Lady.

Go to be happy with the thought of Our Lady in your heart, and... Goodnight!"²⁹

She used the same approach when dealing with the girls during individual encounters: reason, motivation, encouragement to reflect.

Here is one example. During a recreation a rather agitated boarder approached her and confided to her how she considered a remark made to her by a teacher to have been unfair. Mother Emilia let her say all that she wanted to say, then she spoke: "You have presented your point of view well in spite of your tears, smiles and obvious anger. However, it is only just that I also hear the other side of the story, so I want you to come back tomorrow when I shall have had a chance to discuss the matter with your teacher and to hear her side of the story. In the meantime go and say a prayer at the altar of Our Lady. Ask St. Gabriel to accompany you as I suggested at the Good Night last night and ask him to join you in saying a fervent Hail Mary and a Glory Be to the Father in honor of St. Joseph to see if there is a little fault on your side also."

At the teatime break the girl approached Mother Emilia spontaneously, "Oh here you are again! Has something else happened? Don't be afraid to tell me. I am always pleased when you come. Look, there is generally a little wrong on both sides. This becomes apparent when we face facts honestly in order to be just to ourselves and to others. Now, what are you going to do? I know you will do the right thing. However, try to learn this lesson from the happening, too. Everything is useful and must be employed as a preparation for life. In life the hero is the one who knows how to suffer but who never causes suffering to others. Keep cheerful and be of good heart!"³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The most essential element of dialogue is loving kindness. According to Padellaro the great pedagogical discovery of Don Bosco was the intuition that "Loving kindness is essentially dialogue."³¹

This *amorevolezza* is, as we have already said: "a blending of natural love with human reasonableness and understanding... It leads the educator to share the life of his students, and to love not only their souls, but everything that they love."³²

Don Bosco established a perfect harmony, a real spiritual communion, between the educator and the student. This is accomplished by being open to and accepting the young person so that barriers disappear. There is no communication gap and the "educational rapport becomes filial and fraternal."³³

Because of this, the superior in Don Bosco's house is not meant to be a dominator but the father and friend. "I do want you to look upon me less as a superior and more as a friend. Therefore, do not be afraid of me, but have much confidence. This is what I desire from you, what I plead from you, my friends... Let us form one heart! I am ready to help you in everything."³⁴

What is implied here is a true pedagogy of love, or pedagogical charity which has its origin in the gospel. There is nothing artificial about it. It has thousands of almost intangible shades of human attitudes, cordiality, spontaneity, all of which mingle to transmit a truly warm affection which calls for a response.

This *amorevolezza* which wins all hearts is the typical element of the methodological dimension of the Preventive System of Don Bosco. The saint never tired of recommending it to his collaborators. "Let us study how to make ourselves

loved... and we will see how easily the hearts of others will open up to us."³⁵

We should look on "those in our care as so many sons. Let us put ourselves at their service as Christ did with his Apostles. He came to obey and not to command. Let us despise any tendency in us to dominate others."³⁶

Paternity is therefore a professional duty for the Salesian educator. The efficacy of his educational action is commensurate with his paternity. More precisely, it is identical with it. The original contribution of Don Bosco and of his system is to transpose this paternity into *amorevolezza*, thus making it attainable by all, thus enabling them to be able to harmonize completely with the young.

The standard was given to him from on high: "...Let the superior be all things to all those in his care. Let him be always ready to listen to every doubt and complaint which the young person wants to express. Let him be careful to watch as a father how they behave. A father is always concerned about the spiritual and temporal good of those under his care."³⁷

He translated it into these recurring maxims:

"Act in such a way that all those to whom you speak may become your friends."³⁸

"Win the hearts of the young by love."³⁹

"Recommend to all to work on two cardinal points; to make themselves loved and not feared."⁴⁰

In such a state of affairs it was only natural that the educator-student rapport should be a natural, spontaneous dialogue, which encouraged the boys to approach him and which helped to unite them all.

³¹ PADELLARO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 27.

³² MB VIII, p. 504.

³³ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 156.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ MB VIII, p. 503.

³⁶ CERIA, *Epistolario* IV, p. 209.

³⁷ MB XVI, p. 429.

³⁸ BOSCO, *Letter from Rome* 1884.

³⁹ CERIA, *Epistolario* II, p. 434.

⁴⁰ MB XIV, p. 541.

⁴¹ MB X, p. 1039.

By nature Mother Emilia was not sweet and amiable, but she entered into the perspective of Don Bosco and become convinced that the way of love is the sure way to the hearts of the young. She exercised self-vigilance and self-control and made Don Bosco's love for souls her own. She succeeded in imitating and reproducing in herself this difficult aspect of his pedagogy. All those who knew her and who had her as a superior confirm this: "...she always found time to receive all, to listen to all. Everyone left her room radiant with joy. Each one felt she was the favorite.

Mother Assistant always discovered the path to the heart of each of her students."⁴² She succeeded even with the naturally diffident. One of them testifies: "I had an independent character and rebelled against any form of discipline. I gave a hard time to Mother Assistant who was nevertheless always kind to me.

She was big hearted, always ready to pardon me, magnanimous in her patience and tireless in giving me a lot of care and attention which I did not appreciate then."⁴³

She reminded herself and her collaborators: "It is necessary to make oneself loved first and then feared, or better still more loved than feared."⁴⁴

She urged, "Be foreseeing, tolerant, indulgent, patient and kind."

To those who asked for advice she recommended: "Make yourself loved by your students. Take a resolution to be more ready to praise and encourage a good action of the students than to punish or reprimand them for their shortcomings."⁴⁵

Falling back on her earlier experience she emphasized: "Rigidity does little good and does a lot of harm. It closes hearts, generates hate and destroys good... It makes our bene-

ficient actions unwelcome. I have sometimes had to regret impatience, but I never regret having been charitable and good natured."⁴⁶

She frequently returned to the theme of motherliness, in the deepest pedagogical sense of the concept, when talking to her assistants: "You must be mothers to those girls who are so bereft of affection... We need to love them with a firm love which will prepare them gradually for the battle of life, and which will lift them up to God, to heaven where our love has its source."⁴⁷

Her own love was just like this. A deeply human love which was at the same time spiritually elevating and which "improved us even without our noticing it."⁴⁸

She was thus able to demand from her teachers that they be both tender and strong,"⁴⁹ and, above all else, seek the true good of their students by harmony of affection and reason.

She knew how to interpret *amorevolezza* in its truest sense. This implies respecting that balanced equilibrium which renders it an educative love in practice.

As a result she lived for her students and participated in their life by being always in their midst. "Everyday she spent at least a quarter of an hour's recreation with them." She was always able to introduce lively, interesting dialogue which "made us look forward to her coming."⁵⁰

She also took part in the outings. One girl recalled later with nostalgia: "What lovely outings! Mother Emilia was always with us and there was a competition to get near her... Her part in the conversations was the best part of the outing... and we always returned home happier and better."⁵¹

"Nothing escaped her motherly glance which had a way

⁴² BOSCO EULALIA, *A report kept in the Archives.*

⁴³ STELLA TERESINA, *Report kept in the Archives.*

⁴⁴ MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript version).

⁴⁵ BONOMI, *Report kept in the Archives.*

⁴⁶ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴⁷ MOSCA E., *Letter to Sister Orsolina Rinaldi.*

⁴⁸ ROCCA DECIMA, *Report kept in the Archives.*

⁴⁹ MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript version).

⁵⁰ BOSCO EULALIA, *Report kept in the Archives.*

⁵¹ General Archives of the FMA.

of making one feel at ease. This art helped her to gain admittance to the hearts of her students. No matter how fast one moved... or how secretly one tried to do things, nothing went unobserved by her. Even the most resistant ended by yielding to the influence. Her goodness, uprightness and humility always won them over."⁵²

It was the victory of a pedagogy that takes the heart into account. Her approach was open and full of understanding. She evaluated the conduct, including the failures and defects of her students, with an unruffled realism and was able to look on them in a balanced way.

A vivacious and mischievous young student once got hold of a psychology text which gave an analysis of the various temperaments. It seemed to this girl a golden opportunity to use it to identify the psychological make-up of each of the teachers and assistants. She met one and spontaneously let her know her classification:

"You have a nervous temperament."

"How do you know? Who told you?"

"No one, I discovered it from a book..."

When Mother Emilia heard of the event she called the girl and smilingly said:

"Naughty little psychologist, where did you find the book that tells you all about the characters of your teachers?"

"One of the teachers gave it to me."

"Oh, I see. Run and bring the book here. I should love to see it."

The girl was very happy to share her treasure and never even considered erasing the names which she had written beside each description. She knew Mother Emilia encouraged spontaneity, loyalty and forgave everything to those who were sincere.

She asked the girl to find the chapter on temperaments

⁵² BOSCO EULALIA, A report kept in the Archives.

and asked her to read it to her. There was also a classification, to which the student had assigned Mother Emilia. The girl excitedly read it to her as if Mother were discovering something new.

Smiling, Mother Emilia listened to her and at the end said, "You have really classified me correctly. Now, I'd love to keep the book," and she dismissed a very happy student.⁵³

Another educator, lacking the educative tact of Mother Assistant, might have missed the point of the innocence of the girl, and might have scolded her severely. Instead, the episode ended without any traumatic drama.

The most difficult and delicate aspect of education is that of giving corrections and meeting out punishments. In the framework of Don Bosco's system, it is a matter of adhering to the principles basic to his Preventive System which has love as its fundamental element.

The first of these principles is nothing less than the exclusion of punishment: "Whenever possible punishment has to be avoided."⁵⁴

The second is based on love: "Let the educator strive to make himself loved by his students if he wishes to be feared. When one is loved, the withdrawal of affection is a punishment which urges the student to behave and yet never makes him feel belittled or insulted."⁵⁵

Mother Emilia was absolutely convinced of this and insistently reminded the teachers and assistants that goodness overcomes every defense, and that those who rebel against love are few and far between."⁵⁶ She relied a lot on trust. This was a principle which meant so much to her that she entered it in her notebook: "To presuppose the existence of good is sometimes worth more than to suggest it." She al-

⁵³ Cf MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

⁵⁴ BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo* (a word on punishments).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cf MOSCA, *Conference* (Manuscript version).

ways stressed that every strategy inspired by the principle of goodness should be attempted before having recourse to punishments. She warned her teachers against impulsive reactions to breaches of discipline.

"It is natural that the first instinctive reaction of the inexperienced teacher or assistant is to defend herself by punishing. Remember we always rid the soil of weeds, roots and stones before sowing seeds! This is true in the world of agriculture, but the analogy does not hold totally in the field of education. It would not be wise for the farmer to sow his wheat before removing the cockle! The seed of good, however, is sown everywhere and is sown profusely. This is the way God acts. Weeds and stones etc. are removed as they are discovered: In this field we strive to find the roots of evil and to pull them up with an energetic will and persevering constancy."⁵⁷

Whenever a correction has to be given, the time, place, and manner of administering it should be carefully chosen. "Whenever it is necessary to correct, the educator — if she is really acting according to the spirit of St. John Bosco — must always make sure that she is calm before she points things out to those in her charge. She must be careful never to reprimand anyone, especially in public, when she is agitated by wounded self-love... If she does not act according to this maxim she will only feel worse and will make the student feel worse than before... The hearts of children and of teenagers are even more sensitive than ours. Harsh words, rough manners, render them unreceptive, hurt them, and then it is not as easy as some people imagine to remedy the situation later."⁵⁸

Like Don Bosco, she held a pedagogy which was informed by a constructive and uplifting love. Like Don Bosco, she studied the character, temperament, attitudes and inclinations

⁵⁷ MOSCA, *Conference to teachers*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of each of her students. Then, aided by her keen insight, she succeeded in directing them into a life filled with enthusiasm..."

She really worked at making the girls confided to her care open, honest, simple and frank. She wanted them to have an enlightened and convinced piety, and to be genuinely upright.

Also she wanted her students to be always joyful, happy and consistent. She noted the first shadow of sadness on their faces and tried to help each individual concerned. She did this by becoming even more kind and motherly. The girls would spontaneously admit their faults if remorse were the cause of their sadness, or confide other difficulties. She always spoke convincingly and succeeded in restoring peace."⁵⁹

These dialogues, which took the form of mother daughter relationship and which remained sacrosanct secrets between the two parties, were often continued through further correspondence. These letters were overflowing with tenderness. The following is a typical example:

Nizza...

Dear Josephine Bosco,

Your dear letter brought me more joy than I could ever express because of the good news which it contained about you — Well done, Josephine! Keep up your piety, submission, affection and willingness to work and God will bless you and allow you to enjoy the satisfaction of being loved by your parents, superiors and all those who will come in contact with you during life. I had a secret fear that you would not return to me anymore and I was sorry because you are very dear to me and I want you always here. Your letter has lifted this fear, and has given me the consolation of knowing that you will return. I am very happy about this. Right from this moment you are my consolation. I hope you will write again. Your letters always bring me joy especially when

⁵⁹ QUIRINO CLELIA, Report kept in the Archives.

they tell me that you are enjoying the holidays but that, at the same time, you are keeping yourself occupied with work and a little study and that you pray and receive Holy Communion. Goodbye, dear. Greet your parents for me and ask your dear mother to say a prayer for me. I know she prays well. Greet Jesus for me too and be assured that I am,

Yours affectionately,
Sr. Emilia Mosca⁶⁰

This mother-daughter, heart-to-heart communication at once demands and creates an atmosphere impregnated with family spirit.

3. THE ATMOSPHERE OF DIALOGUE

"Loving kindness demands family spirit, joy, spontaneity and cheerfulness. There can be no concrete loving kindness if a family environment and atmosphere is not created. There must be cordial and affectionate interpersonal trust and confidence. The dominant note in this has to be joy which is the enemy of every form of 'being just colleagues', of 'theorizing from an armchair' or of acting officially."⁶¹

There was an atmosphere of "amorevolezza" at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. A person who did not belong there and who could thus speak objectively, testifies. A certain Father Orioli, after visiting Valdocco, published a pamphlet entitled: *The House of Don Bosco in Turin* and writes in it: "In this house the only desire is to find means of doing good. There is a surprising expression of kindness and joy on the face of everyone there. Surprise reaches its maximum when one sees the Superiors mixing with the students and artisans

⁶⁰ MOSCA E., *Letter to Josephine Bosco*.

⁶¹ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 188.

and acting more like friends than Superiors. There is none of that oppressive authoritarianism so characteristic of other boarding schools."⁶²

This was because Don Bosco really believed that the educational environment should reflect as much as possible its archetype, the natural environment of the family with its atmosphere of spontaneous relationships, its warm, trusting, and confidence-filled affection, its free relaxing atmosphere.

This is how the boys experienced and considered the Oratory: "...In the Oratory one lived family life. The love of Don Bosco for us, our desire to please him, his ascendancy which one remembers but is powerless to describe, made virtue flourish among us."

Just as in a normal family, "affection was taken for granted."⁶⁴ This affection produced joy, openness, confidence. Don Bosco himself confirms this fact in his reference to the early days of the Oratory: "...then everything was a joy for me and the boys were all eager to approach me, to speak to me. There was a true anxiety to listen to my counsels and to put them into practice."⁶⁵

In this same letter from Rome in 1884 — a letter that has been aptly termed "A poem of educative love,"⁶⁶ — he reveals the secret of it all to us. "Be friendly with the boys especially during recreation. Without friendliness it is not possible to show affection, and unless affection is shown there will be no confidence. The person who wants to be loved must show that he knows how to love. Jesus became little with the little and bore our infirmities. He is the teacher and exemplar of friendliness! The teacher who is seen only at his desk is nothing more than a teacher, but if he joins the boys at re-

⁶² MB XV, pp. 562-563.

⁶³ MB V, p. 537.

⁶⁴ BOSCO, *Letter from Rome 1884*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ BRAIDO P., *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco* (Torino, SEI, 1968), p. 111.

creations, he is seen as a brother... Anyone who knows that he is loved, loves. The one who is loved can obtain all that he desires especially from young people..."⁶⁷

This form of familiarity does away with interpersonal barriers! It leads the educator to share fully in the life of the young thus actualizing the other essential law of the Preventive System: "It is not enough that the young be loved: they must know that they are loved."⁶⁸

To love them "by loving the things that appeal to them,"⁶⁹ "being joyful," "singing," "music," "freedom in the choice of amusements"⁷⁰ is the secret for creating the family spirit.

Don Bosco was so convinced about this point, that he inserted it as an article in his Preventive System: "Give the boys ample freedom to jump, run, make noise to their hearts content. Gymnastics, music, recitations, plays, outings are all very effective ways of obtaining discipline and they also foster moral and physical health."⁷¹

Caviglia has a solid basis for his comment: "Joy and happiness were normal factors of the greatest importance and were a form of his pedagogy. So much was this a vital requisite that he warned his Salesians to be wary of those who were sly, artful or who sulked a lot... Anyone entering his house could not help being struck by the happiness that reigned there and noticed that the dominant note was joy."⁷²

Mother Emilia Mosca did all in her power to study the houses of Don Bosco in order to model those of the FMA on them. She saw exemplified an atmosphere of love and joy which united students and educators.

A student of those time writes: "One lived family life in all its charm and attractiveness."⁷³

⁶⁷ BOSCO, *Letter from Rome* 1884.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ MB XI, p. 222.

⁷¹ BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo*.

⁷² CAVIGLIA A., *Don Bosco - Profilo storico* (Torino, SEI, 1934), pp. 91-92.

⁷³ ROCCA DECIMA, A report kept in the Archives.

The pivot of this family life was Mother Emilia: "When we least expected it as, for example, when we were at the high point of a lively game, one of the windows overlooking the playground would open quietly, and there she would be smiling lovingly on us.

Then everyone would rush towards that point and call: 'Mother Assistant, come and join us!' We would keep on until, having closed the window she would turn away to come down and join us. We would rush to the foot of the steps to meet her. Our recreation would then become even happier, and more sanctified because Mother Emilia's conversation was always so enriched by interesting anecdotes and so full of lessons. She uplifted the spirit, and transformed the heart."⁷⁴

Among her girls Mother Emilia enacted the role not of Superior but of Mother and sister. She thus modelled in practice the counsel she gave to her collaborators at the beginning of the year; "Be Mothers and sisters... Mothers and sisters urged by foreseeing love:"⁷⁵ She wanted the warmth of family life, so that the students would be filled with confidence, sadness would disappear and difficulties would be eased.

She was a master of this art. The boarders of that time describe her in these words: "The evening recreations were marvelous. As soon as she heard our footsteps on the long, narrow corridor of the old house, the beloved figure of Mother Assistant appeared at the end... She used to reply smilingly to our greeting and urge us to get on with our game. Standing in the frame of the first window she would begin the work of every evening.

What work, you may ask? These were the most precious moments for giving her our most intimate confidences. We went to her spontaneously and quickly so as not to lose our

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

turn. We really went to her with our hearts and souls in our hands..."⁷⁶

The scenes of the Oratory of Valdocco which are recalled in the famous letter of 1884 from Rome, were repeated here every evening.

As the boys said of Don Bosco, so the girls said of Mother Emilia: "We had no secrets from her."⁷⁷ Sorrows, difficulties, fears, joys, mischievous misbehavior... were confided with openness and candor. She knew how to listen, encourage, comfort, give apt advice and left all feeling happy and satisfied.

Her motherliness showed forth especially in a little conference given to us in early boarding school days, "You have left your mothers, however, you are not without a mother here. Our Lady is always with you. She is always trying to help you. Also, believe that your Sister Superior and, for special needs, all the Superiors of the house, even the Mother General, are there for you. You also have your assistants and teachers, the nurse, the Sister in charge of the linen room. All of us are taking the place of your mother.

Go to Our Lady as you would to the most affectionate of mothers. Act as daughters towards all your Superiors and, in particular, towards those directly concerned with you. Be affectionate towards them and give them the little attentions, the expressions of affection and gratitude worthy of open, loyal daughters."⁷⁸

We have already quoted many testimonies proving that the boarders regarded her as a mother. "She loved us with a mother's love."⁷⁹ She, therefore, made the type of house desired by Don Bosco a reality. He wanted a situation where there was a father and not a Superior, where the discipline is not the fruit of the coercive authority of a teacher and

⁷⁶ ROCCA DECIMA, A report kept in the Archives.

⁷⁷ General Archives of the FMA.

⁷⁸ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁹ ROCCA DECIMA, A report kept in the Archives.

maintained by fear of punishment. He wanted love to reign. He wanted the boys to be able to give expression to their overflowing and vital exuberance and to the need of giving themselves fully to their interests. He wanted all to be able to be together and to share their interests with their Superiors.

Mother Emilia understood this and found herself in full agreement with it. She encouraged lively recreations, and favored music, singing, acting and outings.

She exhorted the assistants "to learn how to choose, to vary, to keep the games going because they always renew the spirit, the mind and the body:"⁸⁰ She wanted them to spread joy among the girls. "Be always cheerful and you will make the boarders cheerful. When the heart sings, life keeps in harmony."⁸¹

This harmony embodies the educative value of the spirit of joy demanded by the Preventive System. It is the interior harmony of an individual's personal capacities which, in the outlet of her natural exuberance, find their balance point. It is a harmony of relationship with the environment which the family spirit accepts and makes relaxing. It is a harmony of interpersonal rapport between the educators and students which finds in free and spontaneous dialogue, the possibility of an enriching, mutual blending of mentalities.

⁸⁰ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATIONAL SENSE OF COMPLETENESS

1. PEDAGOGY OF GRACE

Don Bosco's pedagogy "is the most radically religious pedagogy in Catholicism."¹

All the educative action of the saintly educator is inserted in the Redemptive Mystery of Christ. It aims at redepicting in man the image of God, in freeing him from sin, at developing baptismal grace, at increasing his faith, hope and charity — the essence of supernatural life, to the point of transforming him into Christ.

In the simple language of Don Bosco all this is implicit in his ever recurring phrase "to save souls."

Being deeply rooted in Catholic tradition he was able to understand and grasp in its totality the Christian definition of education as it was later to be defined, first by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* and later confirmed and elaborated in detail in the conciliar document, *Gravissimum Educationis*: " All Christians — that is, all those who having

¹ PADELLARO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 39.

been reborn in water and in the Holy Spirit, are called and, in fact, are children of God. They have a right to a Christian education. Such an education not only develops the maturity of the human person in the way we have described, but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received. They should learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth, especially through the liturgy. They should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth. They should come to true manhood, which is proportioned to the completed growth in Christ, and make their contribution to the growth of the Mystical Body."²

Without theorizing on his method, Don Bosco always met the substance of these demands, which are now explained in authoritative formulae. He did verbalize these ideas in simple language, but at the same time in terms that were clear and exact enough to form the foundation of his Preventive System.

He set out to form the Christian personalities of his boys by introducing them to the knowledge of the truth by means of religious instruction. He developed in them a sense of God, an awareness of His presence and of our dependence on Him. He inculcated a reverential fear, and above all a filial love by stressing the Fatherhood of God and our relationship to Him as His children. He offered them the Person of Christ not only as a friend to whom one could turn, but also as a model to be imitated: "The life and actions of Christ Himself must be reflected in the life and actions of every Christian."³

He never ceased to urge them to devote themselves to extending the reign of Jesus Christ in this world, and he succeeded in producing little apostles like Dominic Savio.

He did not get lost in a vague, sentimental, purely psy-

² GE 2.

³ Bosco G., *La chiave del Paradiso in mano al cattolico* (Torino, 1856).

chological religious practice as was common in the 19th century: his source was authentically and deeply theological.

He was not afraid to bring his boys to reflect on the ultimate truths about human destiny. As the fundamentals of true Christian orientation, he offered the eschatological dimension by teaching them about death, judgment, hell and heaven. His *Giovane Provveduto* opens with a meditation on these truths, and places great stress on that important religious educative practice called the Exercise for a Happy Death. He also offered the possibility of an annual retreat.

One can say with truth that there are no Good Nights, talks, sermons, writings of Don Bosco in which reference is not made to these great truths about the next world.

He was aware that Christian education has a responsibility to give the young, through the teaching of these truths, a sound doctrinal foundation, which will, in its turn, guarantee a vigilant and upright conscience. Youth will be capable of facing all the tasks of life serenely and with generous, enthusiastic dedication. This will prevent disillusionment, fanaticism and lack of commitment.

Given his mettle as an educator, he was naturally able to transmit these convictions with an art all of his own. His psychological insight provided the tact necessary to adapt his message to the mentality and sensitivity of his boys.

The day of the Exercise for a Happy Death was a day of grace that filled the house with joy. The recreations were extra lively and there was even extra at dinner because Don Bosco believed that "the whole person must share the joy of a day of grace."⁴

Padellaro summed it up neatly when he said: "Don Bosco fused into one the two seemingly diametrically-opposed concepts, joy and death, and showed that in reality they are interconnected. I do not hesitate to declare Don Bosco's greatest

⁴ MB XI, p. 268.

pedagogical discovery was to have shown the young the joyful aspect of death."⁵

In practice, the pedagogy of Don Bosco is based on grace which by effecting an ontological transformation of human nature, renders the student "a new creature." Therefore it is essentially a sacramental pedagogy, the educative process of which has its own developmental dynamics in view of the supernatural destiny of man.

Don Bosco regarded the sacraments as invaluable means of education, with the potential of being able to transform in depth and permanently. He affirmed, "The fear of God and frequentation of the sacraments can work miracles in youth."⁶

Don Bosco was unable to conceive of an educational establishment without frequent reception of the sacraments and held the conviction, which he often expressed, that all educative action rests in the sacraments.

He would say to the boys: "Keep in mind, my dear boys, that your two surest and strongest supports on the road to sanctity are the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist."⁷

In this sacramental pedagogy Don Bosco saw the psychological and moral factors to stimulate the cooperation of the student by making him aware of his spiritual condition and making him willing to cooperate in the work of his redemption. But above all, for Don Bosco, the chief and educative value of the sacraments was the supernatural efficacy of grace which works on and transforms its recipient.

As a preparation for and aid to the action of the sacraments, Don Bosco wanted prayer. He wanted individual and community prayer, mental and vocal prayers, which are initiated and given direction both by liturgical celebrations and

⁵ PADELLARO, *Il messaggio educativo*, pp. 24-27.

⁶ *MB VI*, p. 146.

⁷ *MB III*, p. 162.

by popular devotions. The forms which he used were, naturally enough, the traditional ones. Don Bosco did not introduce changes of formula or of custom. However, his gift of being able to give a personal touch succeeded in creating such an atmosphere in his houses, that these practices really became an instrument of personal contact, a meeting point with God and with His Saints, an urge to love more deeply and an incentive to imitate.

He deserves the title of innovator in the matter of the liturgy, if we put him in the context of his times. It is enough to recall the decorum with which the liturgical ceremonies were conducted at the Oratory; we can recall the altar boys' society which served the Eucharistic celebrations, the singing which required the participation of all the boys, the continuous instruction in the Good Nights and in the sermons about the origin, significance and value of the various rites, and, above all, the central importance which he gave to the Mass, not only as a practice of piety, but as the supporting column of the Preventive System.

Mother Emilia Mosca comprehended this and introduced into her educational practice this "personal character of the spirituality of her father, Don Bosco." She grasped the transforming and elevating efficacy of a doctrine drawn from an integrated theology, of a piety lived to such an extent that it elevates one to the supernatural plane, and helps one to look at the eternal dimension of every problem, reality and values.

We have already affirmed that she held that the effective result of education is dependent on a solid Christian foundation. She fully believed with Don Bosco that "only religion is capable of beginning and completing the great task of real education."⁸

This religious education, the root and foundation of all education, must begin with knowledge of the truths of religion and continue in an awareness of supernatural reality, through

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

catechetical study. Mother Emilia trained her students to evaluate happenings and situations in the light of faith until they had formed a genuine Christian mentality.

This became the all absorbing and guiding preoccupation of her life's work. She never grew tired of repeating to her collaborators, "Enlighten them by means of the science of religion."⁹

Mother Emilia did not want only intellectual study, even though she also gave great importance to this, and made sure that the scholastic time-table gave the primary place to a deep and serious study of religion. This was integrated by devoting extra time to it, especially on Sundays and in the more intense liturgical seasons. The aim of this was to form a true faith-guided mentality, capable of orienting life and of rendering it normal for the young to turn automatically and wholeheartedly to God.

She did this work without interruption, in school, at the Good Nights, in her private conversations and encounters. This was the natural consequence of the desire and yearning which was behind all her work: to save souls, to lead them to God. As in the case of Don Bosco so in hers: "*Da mihi animas* had become a spirituality."¹⁰

She had no time for religious practices which were not illuminated, not motivated, not consciously carried out. She insisted that her girls should know "the Commandments of God and of the Church and understand their importance." She wanted them to know the sources and "to have clear and exact ideas"¹¹ regarding the Christian demands of life, to have a clear understanding of the theology and implications of their baptism and their confirmation. She wanted them really to

⁹ Mosca, *Conferenza* (manuscript version).

¹⁰ STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* 2 (Zurich, Pas-Verlag, 1965), p. 474.

¹¹ Mosca, *Conferenza* (manuscript version).

enter into the spirit of prayer, of feastdays and of the liturgical seasons.

She introduced the same practices of piety as Don Bosco, and was guided by the same sense of equilibrium with regard to the number of prayers and flexibility in their use.

With psychological insight she was aware of the dominant part which sentimentalism often plays in young girls. She taught her assistants to watch for this in their educative work. She guided them by her example to accentuate the rational and dogmatic aspects of piety.

She began the school year with an opening triduum. She prepared the assistants and boarders for this by helping them to get personally involved in the life of grace within them. This, she knew, was the only sure starting point for the construction of a true Christian life.

In the preceding Good Nights she would speak thus to the boarders. "Let us give great importance to the triduum that opens the school year. Don Bosco has known for a long time that certain confessions made during this triduum have been the secret of a really happy year. We are now experiencing this ourselves."¹²

She was fully convinced that a guilty conscience destroys the effectiveness of even the best education. In fact this can be explained also on the psychological level. To undertake any constructive work in a person, it is necessary to eliminate the causes of insecurity and low morale.

She therefore, gave a detailed description of the work to be done. The three days are to be dedicated to an activity of uprooting and planting.

— Uproot sin if it unfortunately exists. Remove the occasions of sin, negligence, and carelessness in the fulfillment of duty... remove ideas against religion, priests, sisters and the practices of piety.

¹² GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

— Plant grace in your soul, the desire to become authentically Christian. Plant diligence in your duty, love for the little struggles of every day in order to become valiant soldiers in the Christian way of life.

I recommend that you turn to the souls in purgatory. Ask them to help you draw fruit from all that you will hear in these days. On Thursday morning we shall all go together to have a banquet at the table of the angels. Oh! what a beautiful Communion it will be. After dinner we shall go for a lovely walk — together with the angels.”¹³

She presented the retreat as an occasion of extraordinary grace: “They are the harvest of God in souls: They are the times when we get blessings in more abundance than usual, blessings destined only for those of us who have been chosen out of thousands to enjoy these occasions... Everyone in the house will pray for you during these days. All the Superiors will be ready to receive you if you wish to go to speak to them. The silence of these three days is to enable you to communicate with God. Begin by rooting out your sins and defects, and then start cultivating virtues.”¹⁴

We see how, for Mother Emilia, the foundation of educative action was the sacramental life. She let no feast go by without mentioning the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. She would stress their sanctifying power, remind the girls how to prepare themselves to receive them worthily, and increase their desire to purify themselves and to unite themselves to Christ Who is the source of all joy and of all peace... “humiliate yourselves in confession by admitting the sin that costs you most to say. Do your best to rid yourself of all sin and to fight against your predominant passion.

Do all this in order to prepare yourself for Christmas in a Christian way, and you will feel all the joy of true conversion.”¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Her sacramental pedagogy did not admit of impositions or of keeping check. This, she realized, could lead all, but especially the young, to reduce to superficiality, values of the highest order of sacredness. Worse still, there could be the risk of sacrilege. Her reminders on this point were very clear and exact: “On occasions when we have general Communions, we must always pray that there will be no Judas among us... May no one go to the altar to repeat his betrayal. May all approach with the virginal heart of John, and the Immaculate soul of Mary...”¹⁶

She recommended the assistants: “With regard to those who go seldom to Holy Communion, be careful not to reprimand them for this or even to let them know that you notice. Never use their reception of the sacraments as the subject of a scolding. However, instruct them on the sacraments.” She wanted the assistants to stress the sanctity, the peace and joy of which they are the source.¹⁷

The pedagogy of grace is the pedagogy of supreme freedom and of the most radical liberation. God gives it gratuitously, but its operative effectiveness demands correspondence. The one to whom it is offered must cooperate with God by disposing his soul for its reception and by allowing himself to be transformed by its supernatural influence. This has nothing to do with either mechanical or magical action, but with commitment and dynamism. The educator has to enter at this point to enlighten, to help the young person to correspond with the graces available to him in the sacraments.

Even though grace is the basic ingredient in the operation of Christian perfection and that which renews man radically to the extent of making him the “new creature” spoken of by St. Paul, a number of other supernatural elements concur in his development and in the work of his perfection.

First among these is the liturgy which, as *Gravissimum*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁷ Cf *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Educationis reminds us, insists that youth should be trained "to live its own life in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth."¹⁸

At the beginning of each liturgical season, Mother Emilia took care to enable the girls to understand its spirit so that they could live its mystery in order to deepen their interior lives. "It is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent prepares us for Christmas when the Infant Christ will come to us. Let us prepare our home, our heart and soul for His coming. This may require extra work, but if you sing while doing this work and think of Who is coming to visit you, it will not be too heavy."¹⁹ At this point she would suggest a good confession and real concrete efforts at self perfection.

In Holy Week she would hold the "much desired 30 minute explanations of the Mystery of Holy Week, of the ceremonies of the day and of how to participate in them in a really Christian manner both in school and at home, both in public churches and in private chapels."²⁰

On Saturdays and on the vigils of great feasts, she wanted the assistants to enlighten the girls on the liturgy of the following day so that they would be ready to live it in a fully Christian way and realize that the essential does not lie in commemorating a historical event but in renewing it. She was determined that they would not hear Mass only because it was an obligation, but she helped them to be capable of participating in it and living in the knowledge that it is the perennial source of Christian life.

As she would put it, "On the vigil of every holy day of obligation, remind them in short but penetrating words of their obligation to attend Mass, of the fruit which they will derive from going to religious instruction and from participating in the ceremonies of the morrow. Remind them too, of the

¹⁸ GE 2.

¹⁹ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

Christian sentiments inspired by the liturgy and the gospel of the following day."²¹

She was very eager that the mystery of the feasts and the fruits which could be gleaned from them for one's personal spiritual growth in Christian life were understood: "Are you all well prepared for the feast of All Saints which we celebrate tomorrow? Let us really put everything we've got into this solemnity. First of all, let's unite ourselves to the Church which is celebrating all her sanctified members in heaven. Secondly, it is the feast of all our dear deceased relatives who have already reached heaven. Thirdly, it reminds us that one day it will be our feast too. Surely, after all, we are all Christians and there is a place waiting for each one of us in heaven if we wish to have it. Each of us has the vocation and all the grace necessary to become saints in whatever situations life has in store for us... What are you doing to become saints?"²²

The feast of All Souls offered her the stimulus to treat of one of the four last things which, like Don Bosco, Mother Emilia held to be fundamental for a sure life orientation. "Purgatory was created to enable us to get rid of the many little sins which we commit daily...: Therefore, we shall also go there... unless we make reparation for our faults while we are here. Our prayers and good works are more valuable in proportion to the depth of our love for God and neighbor."²³

She used the occasion of the feasts of the different saints to offer concrete models to the girls, to offer examples of ideals that were lived. She wanted these models and examples to arouse emulation and enthusiasm in the girls and to act as live models of an attractive and magnetizing sanctity.

"Veneration of the saints comes from two psychological sources. On the one hand human nature is naturally drawn

²¹ MOSCA, 2^a *Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

²² GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

to admire model persons. We are filled with a sense of wonder at the thought of how wonderful it is that human beings have accomplished such marvels. On the other hand, a sense of our own frailty leads us to seek the help of these intercessors, full of trust that they will listen to us.

The soul of the young person is psychologically drawn to this type of devotion... Modern pedagogy does not utilize this natural inclination enough, and neglects to use the marvellous dedication found in the life of the saints as an inspiration for the young. Their lives, rich in struggles and in self-control, are a school and source of strength."²⁴

Mother Emilia perceived the formidable power of this source and led her students to the school of the saints.

At the beginning of the month of St. Joseph she presented the saint in a way that made him known and approachable, with a spiritual message for each soul. "We must be grateful to St. Joseph who sacrificed himself completely for Jesus and Mary. He is the head of the Holy Family on earth and hence the protector of all the fathers and of all Christian families. Hence we must pray to him for our dear ones.

St. Joseph is the patron of a Happy Death. We all want to die well so we must make friends with him.

St. Joseph is the protector of the Church. We must ask him to increase its members and to defend it from its enemies... He will let you know what he wants you to offer him this month for yourselves, for your families and for the Church."²⁵

The model saint for young girls is Agnes, the Roman virgin. This is how she spoke of her in one Good Night. "St. Agnes is the saint of virginal purity. She had to live this in a pagan and corrupt society and among the splendors and

²⁴ TOTH TIHAMER, *L'educatore spirituale del giovane* (Venezia, Libr. Emiliana Ed., 1936), p. 241.

²⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

riches of her home. She chose to despise all this and renounce her life rather than stain her angelic purity!

St. Agnes is the saint who reminds us of the Guardian Angel. Who does not remember what, according to tradition, the Guardian Angel did for her? Each of you be a St. Agnes and... Good Night!"²⁶

Sometimes she uplifted the girls with a short sentence, but one that was full of the warmth and sense of the feast celebrated. "St. Cecilia must have made you want to pass your life singing. The person who does her duty well is always singing."²⁷

The spiritual world of Mother Emilia was populated by saints and more especially by angels.

Reference to angels occurs many times in her personal notes, in her letters and discourses.

Whenever she encouraged, or consoled anyone, she was wont to recall with joy the thought of the presence of the angels.

She was fully convinced that: "...those intellectual lights try hard to help us to get to know God and His divine secrets. Tireless in their efforts to illumine us, they take advantage of every circumstance... They help us to understand the words we read. They deepen the spirit of faith in us... While enlightening our minds, they do all in their power to root our wills in charity... They incessantly spur us on to good. They stir us up to a sense of fulfilling our duty and they urge us on to become saints."²⁸

They are the effective but invisible educators, who perform the fine art of chiseling. Moment by moment they seek to influence us to act in the best interest of our supernatural formation. Because of this, Mother Emilia made the angels

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁸ *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 1 (Paris Beauchesne, 1937), Cap. 623: J. Dunz, Anges.

her ever-present, even if invisible, collaborators in the work of education. She communicated this faith also to her assistants: "If you succeed in inculcating in the girls a lively faith in the presence of the angels, you will prevent many sins and bring about the practice of many acts of virtue."²⁹

She fulfilled this task in various ways. At one time she went down to recreation and at the opportune moment asked:

"How many are you here?"

When the girls replied, she added quickly:

"Oh, no, you are many, many more than that!... Don't you count your angels?"

Then she went on to speak of their presence, of their influence, of their protecting and sanctifying mission. All listened to her with true joy. Her words had an electrifying effect on the girls.³⁰

She would point out to the new boarders that each one of them was watched by three angels: their Guardian Angel, the devil, and the visible angel — their teacher or assistant.

Once on the eve of the feast of St. Raphael she gave this talk. "Tomorrow is a special day, the feast of St. Raphael the Arcangel. He is not our Guardian Angel, but he is the angel of journeys, the 'medicine of God.' Do you recall the Bible Story? ...Your visible Raphael is your assistant. Apply to her all that is said of the Archangel Raphael in the Bible... 'Be glad that you have her with you on the way, because the friendless are out of luck. If they fall, they have no one to help them up.' Good Night!"³¹

To walk in the presence of the angels means to walk in grace: "May your Guardian Angel crown the month of the angels by telling you very clearly, 'Get rid of that sin, that bad habit; fight that defect, break that friendship, throw that

book in the fire; put aside that idol: postcards, photographs, drawings that do not help you to be serious about life or to be pure..."³²

She recalls the presence of the Guardian Angels when the girls are by themselves, when they hesitate to make a required effort, when they are studying or enjoying themselves. One could say that she envelops them in this invisible person so that they become fully aware of his presence.

To know how to create this consciousness of presence, of fusion of the supernatural realities in education, is the fruit of having grasped the function of piety and acts of devotion in the work of education.

2. CHRISTOCENTRIC, MARIAN, ECCLESIAL ORIENTATION IN CHRISTIAN FORMATION

All Don Bosco's work in the field of education is geared to the salvation and sanctification of the soul of youth. This is operated by grace, which is the development of the life of Christ in us. Consequently, the Christian message, as presented by Don Bosco, consists in placing Christ at the center of our Christianity, so that He may be all for all.

Therefore the pedagogy of Don Bosco is outstandingly Christocentric. In short, it finds "its source and realization in the Living and Immortal Person"³³ of Jesus, the Word Incarnate.

Don Bosco presented Christ to the young as the divine reality in which we are immersed and inserted. "Christ the Savior calls me His brother, and I belong to him as a brother.

²⁹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁰ Cf *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³³ CAMILLERI N., *Principi di pedagogia cristiana* (Torino, Marietti, 1960), p. 117.

I can claim a share in His merits, His passion, His death and His dignity." ³⁴

He presented Him as a real and close person, a friend. "The Friend, to whom I entrust you for this year, is worthy of visits, of love, of reverence. It is a friendship which you must cultivate. This Friend is going to do you a lot of good. By now, you understand that the Friend I am referring to is Jesus. He is the only true Friend." ³⁵

With true pedagogical insight he realized that it is characteristic of the psychology of the young to be attracted, not to an abstract ideal, but to a Real Person, Who responds to the demands of their capacity to love, Who is worthy of their service and even of their life. The friend referred to by Don Bosco was presented in such a way that He could become the ideal of the boys. Don Bosco said, "Every young person must try to imitate Jesus if he really wants to belong to him. This imitation must not be static, but dynamic. It must be capable of becoming the *raison d'être* of one's life, so that one can repeat with St. Paul, 'It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me!'" ³⁶

This is the goal of all Christian education: "...to form the true and perfect Christian, that is to form Christ in everyone who has been regenerated by Baptism to the point that the life of Jesus is manifested in our flesh..." ³⁷ and all "reach the perfect man, the stature of fullness in Christ." ³⁸

This was also the goal of Sister Emilia Mosca. Jesus was at the center of her life as the Teacher Whom she proposed to herself and to her collaborators in their efforts to perform effective work in the education of the young. He is the only Teacher and the Model Whom all real educators are asked

³⁴ Bosco G., *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata* (Torino, rist., 1955), p. 72.

³⁵ MB VI, p. 320.

³⁶ Cf Bosco, *La chiave*, p. 23.

³⁷ PIUS XI, *Divini illius Magistri*, cf GE 2.

³⁸ GE 2.

to mirror in their work. Mother Emilia often suggested this truth as a point of reflection for her collaborators.

She urged them to communicate with Jesus in the tabernacle, especially when they felt bound to point out a defect to someone. They should try to learn what Jesus would say in the same circumstances, how He would act: "Let us learn from the example of Christ in these cases. Would He point the fault out on the spot and in public? Would He threaten and punish? Would He not rather respect the stormy moment in a divine silence? Wait for the time when the guilty one would be calm and able to reflect? Would He not wait hours, days, weeks, months to arouse remorse which, in the last analysis, is also the fruit of His love?" ³⁹

Whenever she had to deal with instances of clashes between students and teacher in which she perceived mutual antipathy, Mother Emilia urged for collaboration. She urged them to turn their gaze to Jesus also in these circumstances, that in looking on Christ they might be moved "to love in Christ those for whom they felt a natural dislike and a desire to keep at a distance!" ⁴⁰

Following her model, Christ the Teacher, Mother Emilia actualized in her work as an educator, the respect, love, understanding, trust and mercy learned from the gospels.

She had a burning love for Jesus. From this love derived her thirst for the Word of God and her constant effort to keep herself united to Him by grace, to share His life in the Holy Eucharist, to possess Him and to allow herself to be possessed by Him. This Christocentric piety radiated through her words, in her encounters, in the Good Nights, in her conferences. All her work in the scholastic field was imbued with it.

Her first guiding objective was to lead souls to Jesus and to bring Jesus to souls. She was always eager to pay visits

³⁹ Mosca, *2nd Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ Cf *Ibid.*

to the Blessed Sacrament, to receive Him in Holy Communion, to listen to His words of life and to live His Mysteries in the liturgy.

At Christmas she urged the boarders to love and imitate the Infant Jesus: "Tell them all", she wrote, "I wish them the ability to imitate the virtues of Baby Jesus. He used no words but put them into practice. May He grant us all perseverance here below and eternal happiness in heaven."⁴¹

In a Good Night, October 21, 1892, she exhorted the girls: "The angel in charge of your piety must be able to rejoice at your fervor before the Blessed Sacrament, and may Our Lady be able to say of you, 'Jesus, just look at how well my children are imitating you.'

"Be good... promise Jesus to be so many angels of a sincere, devout and generous piety."⁴²

She and a group of the older girls made the Stations spontaneously during Holy Week. When they had finished, she called them around her and said: "I was happy to see you make the *Via Crucis*. Has it really been one that will help you in life?... After making an act of contrition did you go from station to station making reflections such as these: 'If I were condemned unjustly, how would I react?... Oh Jesus, Your humility!... If someone placed a cross on me, how would I accept it?... Oh, Jesus, Your love of suffering!... If I committed a humiliating fault and were ridiculed by someone, how would I bear it?... Oh Jesus, Your patience! That is enough for today! Try to work a little on this point!'"⁴³

On the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, she guided them to reflect: "Mary went to offer Jesus in the Temple. Jesus was her All. Therefore she offered her all to God. She offers a potent example to us who never succeed in offering ab-

solutely everything: heart, mind, life, temporal possessions..."⁴⁴

Without their being fully aware of it, Jesus was gradually becoming the center of the girls' life. He became their Friend, their Counselor, their Model who, little by little, transformed their thoughts, affections, desires and conformed them to His. They began their life-task of configuration to Christ, a task assigned at Baptism and the accomplishment of which is the supreme goal of all true Christian education.

Don Bosco was aware that this goal — which he expressed in very simple terminology and in the frame of reference of the theology of the time — could not be reached without the direct and personal intervention of Mary. By associating her with the Mystery of the Incarnation, God entrusted her with a mission of spiritual maternity to the entire Mystical Body of Christ.⁴⁵

Not only sanctifying grace, the basis and beginning of our regeneration, is bound up with the *Fiat* of Mary, but also actual grace. These helps, which we need in our life of spiritual growth, are never dissociated from her maternal love and positive help.⁴⁶

Hence, there is no substitute for Mary in educational development. Any education centered in Christ which leaves Mary out, would be defective.

Thus it is clear that the Marian aspect of Don Bosco's pedagogy has its roots in the Christological sense of his education, which is nothing other than his pedagogy of grace.

Don Bosco first offered Mary to the boys as a "person found in the dogmatic theology of the Church before offering her as a moral teacher or a model."⁴⁷ In fact he wrote: "...if the title of Mother of God is a glory for Mary, it is also a glory for us. Having been redeemed by Christ we have become her children and brothers of her divine Son. On be-

⁴¹ MOSCA E., *Letter to one of the assistants*.

⁴² GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ Cf LG 53.

⁴⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁷ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 271.

coming the Mother of Jesus, true God and true Man, she also became our Mother."⁴⁸

Mary and Christ are indissolubly bound together, one leads us to the other. Don Bosco reminded his boys, "Remember it is almost impossible to go to Jesus without going through Mary."⁴⁹

It therefore becomes very clear that the principal reason for the central position given to Our Lady in Don Bosco's pedagogy is to help the boys reach a vital transformation in Christ.

In the words of Braido, this Marian devotion assumes also "the function of acting as a psychological stimulus to the practice of a personal asceticism,"⁵⁰ and it becomes "wings"⁵¹ to elevate the boys to the supernatural plane. This gives it the status of an ideal, a living presence, which is both efficient and effective.

Don Bosco presented Mary under the titles of Immaculate and Help of Christians. As Immaculate, she personifies the sublime in attractive spiritual beauty which, when grasped by his boys, helps them to make a real decision to progress in "the path where lilies grow."⁵² This is the path to which Mary beckons. This correspondence to grace and practice of purity forms in them a greater sense of Christian commitment.

Devotion to Mary Immaculate has to lead to a break with sin, a participation in divine grace, a growth in personal purity and in genuine holiness. This is in perfect accord with the pedagogy of Don Bosco which is essentially, a pedagogy of grace.⁵³

⁴⁸ BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁹ MB VII, p. 677.

⁵⁰ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 272.

⁵¹ MB VII, p. 680.

⁵² MB XII, p. 577.

⁵³ Cfr DALCERRI L., *La Madonna nella vita e nell'apostolato della religiosa educatrice*, in « La Madonna nella nostra vita » (Roma, Accademia mariana salesiana, S.G.S., 1971), p. 235.

In Mary Help of Christians, the Victorious Woman of the Apocalypse, young people can find the strength and the help necessary to give real witness to their faith and to be faithful to their Christian commitment. She offers help in the fight against the enemies of grace inherent in self — selfishness, hatred, pride, and establishes in and around them the kingdom of God.

As a woman, Mother Emilia was fully conscious of the lack of any substitute of Mary in Christian education. With Edith Stein, who studied problems of femininity at depth, she was convinced that Mary was "at the center of the history of woman" and that "if we must put the study of Christ as an objective of all concrete human education marked by the personal touch, we must also regard Mary as the end of feminine education."⁵⁴

In the words of Stein, Mary is "the prototype of all authentic femininity", the most concrete ideal, "and, in a certain sense, a necessary mediation in the formation of every woman."⁵⁵

Devotion to Mary is, therefore, not empty sentimentalism... but faith"⁵⁶ in her mission and in her power of intercession. Mother Emilia looked on it in this light in regard to the education of girls. She would doubtless have seconded those words written by Edith Stein, "I regard a deep understanding of the virginal maternity of Mary and of her maternal assistance of primary importance for girls in their formation as women capable of playing their feminine role adequately."⁵⁷

Because of this, Mother Emilia tried before all else to bring Our Lady close to the girls and children and to teach them to look up to her as a Mother, a friend, a confidant. She encouraged the teachers and assistants to urge the girls to become accustomed to frequent, spontaneous personal chats with

⁵⁴ STEIN E., *La donna* (Roma, Città Nuova Ed., 1968), p. 216.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, p. 67.

⁵⁷ STEIN, *op. cit.*, pp., 272-273.

Mary. "Never give up the custom of suggesting a short daily visit to Mary... The girl who develops the habit of turning to Mary as to a friend, a Mother, a teacher, is a girl who is ensuring the consecration of her purity and strength to face the future. She will be able to withstand the temptations, seductions and dangers which will certainly come her way sooner or later."⁵⁸

Mother Clelia Genghini notes in her diary: "In your Good Night to the girls stress the motherliness of Mary and of our filial duty not to let a Saturday or feast of Our Lady go by without offering her a spiritual flower."⁵⁹

She wanted the girls to be made aware of Our Lady's continual solicitude for them: "Thank Our Lady who thinks of you with the concern of the tenderest of Mothers. With foresight She has prepared the road of the school year for you so that it may be fruitful for you in every sense."⁶⁰

"The devotion to Our Lady, which she sought to instill, was no mere sentimentalism; she aimed at spurring them on to imitation."⁶¹

On the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple, after having emphasized the importance of the offering made by Mary, she concluded: "You are in the temple, that is house of the Lord. Remember Our Lady's house is also the house of the Lord.

Try then to become another young Mary: pray as the child Mary prayed, obey as she obeyed, rest, play and work as She did.

Remember in the Temple of Jerusalem, too, there were superiors and companions, and it is hardly possible that they were all perfect. How do you think Mary treated them? You do the same and get ready now to present yourself, with Mary,

⁵⁸ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶¹ Rocco DECIMA, Report kept in the Archives.

to the Lord tomorrow. Say with her: "Lord, I am here to please you and to grow in my capacity to serve you."⁶²

She put Mary forward as the personification of the highest and most attractive values held by the young.

On the eve of the feast of the Purity of Mary she related this at the Good Night: "Tomorrow the Church celebrates the purity of Mary. Let each one of you ask during Mass and Communion: "Lord what must I root out, and what must I practise in order to be as pure as Mary wishes me to be?"⁶³

She wanted every feast of Mary to be a new level from which to start a new spiritual ascent. At the Good Night of November 28, 1898, she said, "Tomorrow we begin the novena for the feast of Mary Immaculate. Let us make it the kind of feast Don Bosco would want, a feast of the heart, a feast of candor and of burning love. We must be well prepared. Let us really make the daily spiritual act!

The feast of the Immaculate Conception is almost always decisive for those who are not fervent. Either they put themselves to the task of their sanctification or Our Lady lets the truth be known and they are sent away from the boarding school so that only the wheat remains. Sooner or later the cockle is thrown out. Check what side you're on!"⁶⁴

At the end of the feast, which was passed in extraordinary fervor by all, Mother Emilia showed her pleasure at the Good Night: "You are all still full of the gifts brought to you by Our Lady Immaculate... May purity always shine from your eyes as it does from the eyes of Mary!"⁶⁵

The greatness of Mary, who is so typically feminine, is revealed in a special way in the Annunciation, in which she shows herself totally open to the plan of God so that His de-

⁶² GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 42 .

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

sign may be accomplished in her. Self-sacrificing love is the most essential characteristic of a woman.

Mother Emilia stressed at the end of one of her lessons to the graduating class: "Tomorrow is the feast of the Annunciation; the Christian teacher must celebrate this feast as solemnly as possible. This means she must often address Mary in the words of the *Angelus* to show her love for her Mother. She must reflect on the reply of Mary, "behold, the handmaid of the Lord..." and reecho it in her life and in her mission as a Christian Educator.

We cannot win hearts if pure love does not render us humble servants of the souls God confides to us so that we may lead them to Him. This certainly requires abnegation and moral effort. Only Our Lady can obtain this for us." ⁶⁶

Don Bosco also possessed a very vivid *Sensus Ecclesiae*. This is a characteristic note, an essential factor and an unmistakable sign of integral Christianity.

Don Bosco was firmly convinced that education has to take place in the Church, by the Church and for the Church. The apostolate of education was part of the sacred ministry for him." ⁶⁷ It was the same as a direct mandate from the Church to which he had consecrated his life.

He educated his boys to an awareness of the Church because, as Banfi puts it, he had a deep "conviction that the Catholic Church offers through her dogmatic and moral theology the positive and definitive solution to theoretical, ethical and social problems. It provides the possibility of harmony between the demands made on us by our religion, and by the situations of practical life. The Church is also the mediator of revelation and of divine grace. By the power of its sacraments, it is the only genuine haven of human culture. If left to itself,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 65-66.

⁶⁷ LEMOYNE G.B., *Vita del servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco* (Torino, SEI, 1911), p. 224.

this latter becomes suffocated in the smoke of problems and of insoluble contradictions." ⁶⁸

In Don Bosco the *sensus Ecclesiae* was firmly bound to a *sensus Pontificio*. The Pope was regarded by him as the source of the unity of the Church, the universal Father of the family of Christians, the Vicar of Christ and the continuation of Him in the world.

"He identified the Pope with the Church. Everything made sense with the Pope, nothing without him. Don Bosco could not conceive of the Church without the Pope. Without him, there could be no hierarchy, no magisterium, no pastoral action, no agreement among bishops." ⁶⁹

Don Bosco was so effective in educating to this awareness of the Church and of the Pope that the boys trained by him distinguished themselves in their loyalty to the Pope and to the Church. Pietro Braido affirmed, "His method of educating to the *sensus Ecclesiae* must have been successful if he could have made a fifteen-year-old boy from Mondonio really concerned about the Church in England and genuinely interested in the problem of the Missions." ⁷⁰

His motivation in becoming a priest: "By becoming a priest I have dedicated myself to the good of the Catholic Church." ⁷¹

His pedagogy was rooted in the rock of the Church and the anchor of its cornerstone was Christ.

Mother Emilia was equally convinced that Jesus and Mary meet in the Church. Hence, like that of Don Bosco, her education had not only a Christocentric and Marian orientation, but also an ecclesial one.

⁶⁸ BANFI A., *S. Giovanni Bosco - Scritti sull'Educazione* (Milano, Mondadori, 1936), pp. 7-8.

⁶⁹ MEDICA G., *I Concili generali e la Chiesa Cattolica nel pensiero di Don Bosco*, in « Rivista di Pedagogia e Scienze religiose » (Torino, 1963), pp. 3-28.

⁷⁰ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 148.

⁷¹ MB IV, p. 627.

Without the aid of the explicit formulation given by Pius XII, she believed that souls "Before belonging to the family and to society... belong to God, to Christ and to the Church."⁷²

Christian education belongs, in fact, in an integral way to the Church, which has a right to it, as expressed in the Conciliar Document on Christian Education: "The Church... has the duty of proclaiming the way of salvation to all men, in revealing the life of Christ to those who believe, and of assisting them with unremitting care so that they may be able to attain to the fullness of that life."⁷³

As a consequence, we rightly think of Christian educators as part of the active Church, as its direct cooperators! In addition to this, "The teenager must be helped to view the Church as a great ideal, which urges him on to action destined to bring all men to the Church... and to contribute to the spreading of the kingdom of God."⁷⁴

Mother Emilia continually spurred on her collaborators and students to unite themselves and to identify themselves with the Church. She reminded them to feel part of the Church in their prayer and in their action and to ask the Lord "to make it great and to defend it from its enemies."⁷⁵ She told them to pray the Holy Spirit to assist it and to invest it with a new Pentecost.⁷⁶ She wanted the girls to adorn and honour the Church with their virtues: "All of us have the vocation and the grace to become saints no matter what our state in life or condition in the world."⁷⁷ Through this sanctity, which is a fruit "the Holy Spirit produces in the faithful

⁷² PIUS XII, *Discorso all'Unione Cattolica italiana ins. secondario*, September 4, 1949.

⁷³ GE 3.

⁷⁴ KRIEKEMANS A., *Trattato di Pedagogia generale* (Brescia, La Scuola, 1966), p. 125.

⁷⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁷⁶ Cf *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

through grace,"⁷⁸ the sanctity of the Church can be seen more clearly.

The Church looks on her priests as members qualified to be "living instruments of Christ the Eternal Priest through whom His admirable work is carried on in time."⁷⁹ To sustain the priesthood is to sustain the Church's most vital organ.

Mother Emilia, wishing to form her girls as concerned members of the Church, once said to them on the eve of an Ember Day: "Tomorrow is Ember Day and the first day of the Christmas novena. It will be spoken about in school and at any other opportune moment during the day. I want to remind you of one point only. I'd like to stress that the principal aim of the Church in instituting the Ember Days was to obtain holy priests. It is a Christian duty to pray for priests. To be fully aware of the great importance of Catholic priests is a special grace not bestowed on all. The priest is the person to whom, after God, we owe our reception of baptism and the other sacraments. Poor world and poor us in life, in death and after committing sin if it were not for the Catholic priest. We owe it to the priests that we are able to have the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament reserved in our tabernacles, the truth preached to us and the gospel preached to pagans. Let us pray for priests and let us make many small mortifications known only to Jesus and Mary during these days... for this end."⁸⁰

The Church is the great family of God, and those who belong to it must feel it "a fundamental duty to engage in the work of evangelization,"⁸¹ because "...all the faithful, as members of the living Christ in whom they are incorporated and assimilated... have a strict obligation to cooperate in the spreading of the Church."⁸²

⁷⁸ LG 40.

⁷⁹ PO 12.

⁸⁰ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁸¹ AG 35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 36.

Mother Emilia was very conscious of this "real Catholic spirituality and took advantage of every occasion that presented itself in order to instil it into the Sisters and the girls.

In those times the feast of the patronage of St. Joseph was fixed as the World Day for the Propagation of the Faith. On one such occasion she spoke of it to the girls in these words: "Before we leave Church there will be a collection. This is unusual in a boarding school chapel but enters into the normal way of life in public churches. The little ones among you may ask, 'What is a collection?' It is a monetary offering which good Christians make to the Church to help meet the expenses of worship. It is a duty deriving from the precept, 'Contribute to the support of your Pastors.' Good mothers teach it by the practice of giving money to their little ones to put in the collection plate which is passed around, generally at the end of the function, or else to put in the offering box. Well trained persons, even the young, are ready to give to these collections even at the cost of personal sacrifice — by denying themselves sweets, fruit or little trinkets. Now, regarding ourselves, this evening there will be a collection in our Chapel too, because the Bishop has ordered it in all Churches. It is the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, the day established for the collection of offerings for the Propagation of the Faith. There is no better advocate than St. Joseph to take care of the affairs of the Church in the whole world. The Propagation of the Faith! Let us think of the numerous souls who do not know God or His Law yet. Think of the many who adore serpents and onions and vice, and who still live in a primitive state! Think of the many persons still to be brought to the light of truth and to Catholicism! Saint Joseph, protector of the Catholic Church, grant that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may be known by all soon. Send other Don Boscos, many Don Boscos to this earth, so that many men and women missionaries may be ready to leave their families and fatherland to save the world. Thus you see we are giving in the interests of the Church of God, and perhaps... well who knows? Maybe we

may be chosen to be the one in ten thousand called to go far away to teach catechism and to baptize and make saintly new Christians in the jungles, the deserts, the pagan lands. Meanwhile let us give a little money to help Catholic Missions."⁸³

As in Don Bosco, so in Mother Emilia, the *sensus Ecclesiae* was a characteristic trait. It can be claimed as an essential factor, an unmistakable sign of an integral sense of the supernatural and of authentic Christianity in both of them.

3. LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

"Man is a vocation and a commitment to himself."⁸⁴ This vocation and commitment are realized through his formation whose most important task is, in the words of the same pedagogue "That of translating knowledge into freely willed actions." To achieve this it is not sufficient to have good intentions... one must get to the heart of the matter.

In his regard, it is necessary to react against inconstancy, indolence, unjustified decisions, lack of determination, so that the seed can be developed and cultivated."⁸⁵

Therefore, one is dealing specifically with "a pedagogy of a number of basic natural dispositions which are under the control of one permanent, dominant disposition."⁸⁶

In short, the most important thing is to bring the students to the realization that life is meant to be a commitment, a dedication, a mission. If this becomes a reality they will be led to develop all their spiritual possibilities which, in turn, will lead them to undertake, in a mature way, all their responsibilities in the natural and supernatural order.

⁸³ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

⁸⁴ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Every educative orientation must tend towards the fullest possible realization of the integral human being.

Don Bosco possessed the art of developing in his boys, in the manner most consonant with their natural temperaments, their gifts of nature and of grace. With his insight, he was able to understand at a deep personal level how each one functioned.

The model of sanctity offered by Don Bosco to his boys possessed the attraction of joyous spontaneity. Even though it appears as the fulfillment of a basic need of human nature and as the response to tendencies buried deep within it, it is really the growth of the seed implanted at baptism by grace. Don Bosco succeeded in getting the boys to look upon this latter as the deepest reality of Christian being.

Being geared to making life a lived commitment of integral Christianity, the educative action of Don Bosco embraced all the varied realities of everyday life and all the normal expressions of the young person in his development. He integrated these as intermediate objectives to be directed to the one great objective. Indeed, it would be inaccurate to think that Don Bosco's accent on the transcendental ideal, implied a nonrecognition of human life or a vague kind of commitment... In the educative idea of Don Bosco, duty, work and study are considered as sacred as official acts of worship. He considered time a preparation for eternity. This is the essential motive for all education. ...A life of duty is to be looked upon as one of the cornerstones of the spiritual pedagogy of Don Bosco, for it can be made essentially spiritual and religious."⁸⁷

In the concept of Don Bosco, life is elevated to the dignity of a genuine mission. It is not a gift just to be enjoyed and exploited, but a duty, a commitment, the gospel talent which must be traded for the good of the kingdom. Don Bosco wrote

⁸⁷ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, pp. 138-140.

in *Il Giovane Provveduto*, "Our conviction that we are all created for paradise must urge us to direct all our efforts to this end... Knowing how much God loves the young, you should really decide to respond to His love by doing all in your power to please Him, and by making every effort to avoid what hurts Him."⁸⁸

This is dealing with the sanctity of the everyday occurrences, of duty, lived in concrete situations, environments and personal vocation.

Caviglia wrote: "Don Bosco has always given the faithful and diligent accomplishment of duty its proper perspective in the spiritual order. He made the fulfillment of the duties of one's state and the observance of duties imposed by regulations a matter of conscience. He also regarded the transgression of small duties and of the rules of the house as serious. So much was this the case that he used fidelity to duty, even little duties, as a criterion for evaluating the genuineness and depth of piety."⁸⁹

From Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello's clear and practical teachings, Mother Emilia had learned how to distinguish genuine piety. This, she learned, showed itself in the accomplishment of duty. It is a proof of fidelity to God by docility to His will.

Even the most humdrum and monotonous type of daily life, when animated by this supernatural spirit, elevates one's day to the dignity of a liturgy of life.⁹⁰

One of Mother Emilia's favorite themes was the necessity of educating to a sense of duty.

This task constituted a vital point in her educative intervention with both Sisters and pupils. She never ceased to recommend to the former: "Let us be strict in demanding the fulfillment of duty, but at the same time let us give an example

⁸⁸ Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁹ CAVIGLIA, *Un documento inesplorato*, pp. 658-660.

⁹⁰ MACCONO, *op. cit.*, II, p. 57.

of fulfillment of our own duties... This will help the girls to love their work and do likewise."⁹¹

Her Good Nights to the girls on the sense of one's duty were always set in a practical key, "You must learn a sense of duty."⁹² "We do not want scatterbrains here. Do you understand? The education which we impart here is meant to last you for life."⁹³

Education is largely a matter "of learning the art of making decisions. Man is destined to take an active interest in his own life and to be responsible for its outcome.

Life is always leading us to intersections on the road. On every such occasion man must be able to decide alone which road to take. We expect him to make a right decision on every occasion."⁹⁴

Mother Emilia aimed at this point in her education. As reference, she used the innumerable insignificant happenings of every day. She tried to train the girls to become capable of choices and decisions in what was good, thus translating piety into life.

On the eve of the Epiphany, Mother Emilia, in performing her usual task of preparing the girls for the great feast, stressed the significance of the gifts brought by the three Kings to the Infant Jesus: "I want to give you the gift of a little myrrh and a little gold. I shall leave it to the Lord to give you incense as a reward for the quality of your prayers.

Some of your teachers, in their desire to see you become ever better and better, would like to use other ways to help you in addition to the weekly marks — honor rolls, badges, etc.

Yes, these are means that help. Everything which helps us to be better should not be despised. However, once you leave here you will no longer have these external helps. They

⁹¹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁴ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

are to be recommended only for the little ones who are weaker than you by nature. To those of you who are more mature, who have good sense and will power, I want to offer the myrrh of doing your duty well. (Duty always makes unpleasant demands on our nature: it is bitter like myrrh, but sometimes bitter things are good for us).

I offer you the gold of doing your duty well... for the love of God, for others and for peace of conscience."⁹⁵ Taken in this spirit duty becomes in the words of Pius XII "a proof of suitability to work for what is good... Resolving and determining to accomplish... leads to self-control and mastery of instincts and of events."⁹⁶

On one occasion the boarders were too noisy during an event outside the house. Mother Emilia called them and said "I appreciate your friendliness, but you must learn how to moderate your mode of expression in a public place. Do not raise your voice too much, and you will show that your heart is under the control of your will. This shows that it is governed by the demands of the duty of the moment. There is a right time for everything and a rule for everything."⁹⁷

Education must always lead to spiritual maturity which shows itself in self-control, in control of one's impulses, in a sense of responsibility on the natural plane and in holiness on the supernatural level.

The starting point has to be self-knowledge. We need this to know what we have to fight against and what we have that can be utilized for good. Mother Emilia employed this fact in her work of formation. "If you want a sense of victory at the end of the year, then you have to start now to attack your greatest enemy. Do you know what it is? Yes, you have guessed. Your predominant passion. Some of us tend to keep

⁹⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁹⁶ PIUS XII, *La coscienza cristiana oggetto dell'educazione*, radio message, 23-3-1952

⁹⁷ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

it well hidden and even cherish it. However, bear this in mind; it is a formidable foe. You must discover it and kill it ruthlessly.

If you do not know what it is, ask your assistant, or one of your teachers and then be ready with sword in hand to behead all your passions, but especially your Holofernes."⁹⁸

She insisted that the assistants impart an integral formation which really prepared the girls for life. Basic to this integrity is the formation of conscience "foundation and pivot of an education that calls itself specifically Christian."⁹⁹

To form an upright, sure conscience, geared to good, is to form to a fullness of life because conscience is the guiding principle of life. It presupposes a certain understanding of and the capacity to evaluate the realities and facts of life objectively and then to act in consonance with this enlightened judgement. Pius XII outlined the basic elements of such an education: "Educate the conscience... to fear as well as to love of God... to truth... Impress in the conscience of youth the true concept of authentic freedom, worthy of and proper to a creature made in the image and likeness of God."¹⁰⁰

Mother Emilia brought about this formation like an artist using the chisel of the thousands of little concrete events of life. "You are all more than ten years old. You all have a store of common sense and of good will. You know you have to form your conscience to a sense of duty.. However, you are not alone. Your Guardian Angel and Our Lady — the chief Assistant of the House — and Jesus will never be absent from you."¹⁰¹

Whenever she had to point out any lack of discipline, she did so by confronting the guilty with the voice of conscience. In this way she trained them to consult their conscience for

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁹ PIUS XII, *La coscienza cristiana*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

guidance, so as to act with sincerity and uprightness. That observation was usually sufficient to restore discipline.

At other times she found it necessary to lead them to reflect on their actions, on their motivations and on the consequences. "Have you been good up to now? I know what happened this evening, and I am sorry about it. It is obvious that there are a few thoughtless people among you. People who do not train themselves to reflect give little promise for later life. Sometimes lack of reflection is lack of sensitivity and that worries me. At other times it is caused by lack of will power. Remember it is the will that makes the good, good and evil, evil!

I always insist on duty being accomplished!...

You know how much we love you, and how eager we are for your good. We want you cheerful at recreation, and at table we want you to eat well. We want you to put everything you've go into your studies and in your work around the house."¹⁰²

This habit of reflecting on one's acts gives a guarantee of that rational foundation which leads one to judge objectively, in every situation of life, and forms one in that practical wisdom which leads to the solution of problems and resolution of difficulties. This surely is a fundamental principle of the formation of conscience and of character.

Mother Emilia aimed at this. Hers was a school of enlightenment and of strength which prepared people for life. Once during the Christmas novena she urged the boarders to practise the fioretti which are meant to be an exercise in overcoming oneself. "Among these fioretti I suggest do not complain of the cold. Warm yourselves by being active and cheerful in recreation, by doing your little chores in the house and school. Try to accept the change of weather in a spirit of Christian mortification. Only thus can you grow strong in

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

virtue and prepare to face the realities of life. Remember life is a duty, and duty is accomplished only by the morally strong."¹⁰³

She took advantage of all circumstances, but especially of the liturgical seasons to teach the girls that life is a Christian commitment by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

Once, at the beginning of Lent, she gave this counsel to her collaborators: "What is the best way of transmitting the idea of Lent to the girls? Use the method employed by Christian mothers. Use as penance the fulfillment of a duty that costs, mortification of curiosity, of the palate, etc. For example, on entering the study, the dining room, the recreation hall, make an effort to make up for a sharp word you may have said, for a lack of courtesy, for a careless act...

More attention to the details of our duty, more immediate, spontaneous reparations for our offences and concrete witness of mutual charity for love of God must always be at the heart of Lent for us Sisters and for the girls."¹⁰⁴

This way of acting arouses the sense of responsibility, presents a high ideal of life and shows a spirit of faith. Now, "only these qualities guarantee a religious observance worthy of the person who has reached spiritual maturity."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰⁵ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

chapter five

THE CHILD AND THE ADOLESCENT IN THE REALITY OF HER BEING AND IN HER MISSION

1. THE "EXISTENTIAL NUCLEUS" AS A PRELIMINARY CONDITION OF EDUCATIVE ACTION

"In education one has to draw from the *existential nucleus* of another who is the center of activity totally independent of one's personal plans."¹

It is the plan of God that every human being should interpret the part which God has designed him to play in life. This interpretation is given through the individual's nature, inclinations, talents, and attitudes. The nature received by each one is a "sign" of God's plan for him. This nature should not, therefore, be ignored or, worse still, distorted.

The original structure has to be worked on and perfected until it is brought to its highest possible level of perfection. Perfection of works should coincide with the perfection of nature, perfection of action with perfection of being.

"Consequently the educator is not free to decide on the design of the person he wants to produce in his student. He must follow the design dictated by the nature of the person being educated."²

The task of the educator, as far as it concerns the student, consists mainly in an accurate and careful study of the tem-

¹ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

peraments and inclinations of his individual students to teach them to come to a new self-awareness and a balanced self-appreciation. This helps them to know how to take themselves and how to undertake, with love and enthusiasm, the concrete task of fulfilling their personal and objective values.

This aspect of education certainly did not escape the attention of Don Bosco.

In speaking of education he often used a very expressive analogy: that of the gardener who tries to look after, foster and bring to bloom each single flower in his garden. He takes each one according to its potential for perfection."³

As a result of this conviction, he studied the temperament of each individual boy, as well as his tendencies and possibilities. He looked for the positive and negative points of that particular temperament and strove to win the affection, trust and good will of the person, in order to be able to act as an effective counsellor who will help and direct him to co-operate in the process of his own maturation.

We often find significant references on the interests and inclinations peculiar to young persons, on the best way to direct and provide an outlet for these tendencies. He suggests activities and professions best suited to the various types.

As Caviglia puts it: "Don Bosco had the art of understanding and respecting each individual personality" and of shaping "every life... with a personally designed mold and not trying to produce people *en masse*."⁴

Michael Magone is a typical example. This "general" of the rascals of Carmagnola, confronted Don Bosco with the frankness and naturalness of a leader. He admitted that his life "was one befitting the damned," "was spent on the street corners" and that he would probably "end up in prison" where some of his companions were already. His transformation shows how effectively Don Bosco worked.

³ Cf *MB X*, p. 1102; *XII*, p. 457.

⁴ CAVIGLIA A., *Don Bosco, Opere*, p. 192.

The description given by the co-pastor Father Ariccio completes the portrait of Michael: "He was a very poor boy whose father was dead. He was very intelligent but wayward and thoughtless. He had been expelled from school on several occasions but, in spite of it all, he had a good heart and a basic simplicity. However, he was hard to control."

He went to talk to Don Bosco at the Oratory with "his strong will shining through his eyes and his conditions laid down in concise terms."⁵ The only restriction which Don Bosco imposed on him was "not to turn the house upside down." The Saint then asked him "if he would rather study or learn a trade." Michael chose to study and Don Bosco gave him the opportunity.

In this biography of the boy, Don Bosco, with profound psychological insight, insisted in presenting him to us "A restless, lively nature who really needed an outlet and movement but which would be brought to self-control with the help of will power and time." Naturally, there were moments when his fiery nature erupted, despite his good will, but he would calm down when called to task by the private monitor appointed for him by Don Bosco, "as was the custom in Valdocco". In time, Michael came to an awareness of what was permissible for him and what had to be avoided.⁶

At the beginning Don Bosco left him a whole month without anyone pointing anything out to him. He left him to watch what was happening, and made sure that no one told him and, less still, obliged him to follow suit. No one even tried to instill the fear of God into him. All this was so that he would come to the decision by himself.

And he came. The atmosphere that he experienced made him want to come. Here we find freedom as living in the ideal conditions to choose good of one's own accord. One becomes convinced of its desirability.⁷

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Magone made his own decision as the result of a crisis brought about by the influence of his new environment. It was a crisis that was decisive for him and that led him to an authentic conversion.

On the framework which was built and accepted during that crisis, the whole tenor of the new constructive development of his personality was formed. Magone accepted, with all the fervor of a convinced neophyte, the new hierarchy of values which he found at the Oratory. Don Bosco did not try to regulate "his eager determination and his spontaneous and encouraging progress."⁸ The Saint made no attempt to force him into a structured, preordained pattern but "he permitted that soul now freed from sin and led by grace, to follow his own path"⁹ and to realize his ideal in the way dictated by his own being and religious preferences. Don Bosco intervened only as a moderator when these led him to excesses or errors.

This method of spiritual guidance used with Magone is typical of Don Bosco's normal way of acting. He was not in favor of "uniformity, of stereotyped direction... of standardization."¹⁰ Don Bosco knew how to take each one as he was fashioned by nature and grace, and adapted his guidance, to the individual. He never forced anyone into "a prefabricated mold."¹¹ He developed the art of comprehending the essence of the basic "existential nucleus" of each one, because he knew this was where God had outlined his basic designs on each one and that it is, in the words of Dante: "The foundation laid by nature."¹²

Mother Emilia was also very conscious of and concerned about that "foundation," that "existential nucleus" in her work for girls.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² ALIGHIERI D., *La Divina Commedia* (Milano, Hoepli, 1932), *Paradiso*, Canto VIII, p. 143.

She recommended her teachers and Assistants to study: "characters, temperaments, inclinations, defects." Like Don Bosco, she used the analogy of the gardener: "The gardener who does not know the requirements of the various flowers in terms of soil types is doomed to failure. He should study what favors the growth of each one in order to offer it the very best conditions for development. Putting good seed in the wrong type of soil can kill it."¹³

She was very strong on this point. She really considered it a serious omission to neglect to discover the ways of meeting the needs of each individual's personality. These inclinations she regarded as part of the creative work of God, with a part to play in the personal destiny of the individual. She knew this individual endowment "contained a center of activity which worked independently of our plans."¹⁴

She perceived this so clearly that she wrote in her private notes: "May our proud trust in our personal knowledge not destroy the creative work of God."¹⁵ Inexperienced and self-sufficient educators can easily fall into this trap. They can approach the formation of their students, believing that their mission is to sculpture out the person in conformity with a blueprint of their own making. Obviously, this is a fatal error which either renders education null and void or deforms it at the very roots.

Mother Emilia saw "in every soul... a world to be explored and in which to admire the omnipotence and infinite love of God." She tried to "find the vital spark"¹⁶ in each one. She saw as her task the fanning of this spark so that it might come to its full potential. She feared missing the way pre-ordained for any soul.

She looked on education as a task of orientation and guidance and not as a substitution of the person or as an im-

¹³ MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript version).

¹⁴ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁵ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

position on her. She knew that every form of depersonalization is antagonistic to the creative act of God.

For this reason, she told her collaborators: "The character of each one must be taken into account... the educator must arrive at the point of being able to trace the source of each act of her students. This expertise can be arrived at only by prayer and careful observation.

...The keenly observant teacher or assistant is able to know the place from which a new pupil comes — the country or the city, whether the family is wealthy or not, whether it is morally sound or not. She will also be able to pick up the particular type of temperament of each student — nervous, hypersensitive, given to reflection, optimistic, self-possessed etc. She can gather all this without always having her under her eyes. She gathers sufficient clues at recreation, at table, at work, in chapel, in the dormitory, during walks... From knowledge gathered in this way, the educator is in a position to make the necessary provisions, to give her guidance in keeping with the girl's own make-up. She is able to judge whether particular actions of the girl are to be read as courteous or discourteous, acceptable or unacceptable, deserving of praise or blame in that particular case. When an educator has reached this point, she is in possession of the master key."¹⁷

The educator has to reach this point in order to insert herself into the concrete reality of each subject. She has to be able to adapt herself to the psycho-physical structure of the individual and be able to discern what is in accordance with her nature and what is the result of environment. She must strengthen the innate energies because this enriches and strengthens the personality.

Mother Emilia saw in all this the way towards that freedom which is not only a fundamental requirement of education but the condition for its effectiveness. There is no

¹⁷ Mosca, *Conference* (manuscript edition).

education which is not rooted in freedom and which does not lead to freedom.

She warned her collaborators against forcing young people to conform and asking them to do things beyond their possibilities. "Never ask a child to do what you know she cannot do. This represses her and our aim should be to help her grow in the freedom of the children of God."¹⁸

She herself put into practice what she taught others to do. With her keen and experienced observation, an expression, a word, a glance was enough to give her an insight into what lay beneath the surface. She was thus able to discover in her students that deep level which feminine psychology leads girls to hide from others.

A student of those times attests: "One would have thought she was able to read minds... she was able to grasp that which only the most perceptive can grasp of the intimate feelings of others. She had the great gift of putting what she saw into correct perspective."¹⁹

The perspective was that of never judging others, but of searching well for an accurate form of personal guidance. It enabled her to free her mode of acting from all uniformity and standardization. It enabled her to help people conform themselves to God's designs for them, a design based on the natural dispositions of each one.

Among these natural dispositions she realized that there was one basic one: the fundamental characteristic of femininity.

2. "FEMININITY" IN HER VALUES AND IN HER MISSION

The "foundation which nature gives"²⁰ to woman is primarily her femininity, which must not be misunderstood and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

²⁰ ALIGHIERI, v. quoted.

still less suppressed but which must be respected, valued, and fulfilled in its most specific values.

"It is," says Edith Stein, "very obvious that the body and mind of the woman are constructed for a special end,"²¹ the one that God has designed for her from the moment of creation: to be the helpmate and companion of man and to be a mother.

The basic characteristics of femininity are closely bound to the twofold task of the woman:

a) Her decisive and total inclination toward all that regards life and all that lives and is personal. She is attracted to all that is concrete and living. She knows how to take these things as she finds them and to adapt herself to them. She is prone to give herself in dedication and in love to them and to share in their life to the extent of participating in all their joys, sorrows and efforts. It is the most basic form of what modern psychology terms altruism.

b) The twin tendency towards "fullness and completeness" or the desire "to develop her human qualities to the full" and "to help others to do likewise" in line with their natural dispositions.²²

c) Her specific way of knowing, her intuitive vision of "the object in its details and in its individual value",²³ which leads her to be more of an analyst than the maker of synthesis.

d) The predominance of affectivity, an element which finds its explanation and justification in her attraction towards the personal and which is exercised in a deep willingness to sacrifice herself. This willingness to make an oblation of self is the very essence of maternity, whatever the state of life of the person who exercises it.

²¹ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²² Cf *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

The "ideal type" of authentic femininity is found in Mary the new Woman and the perfect Christian who exemplifies the most characteristic situations of the woman because she was "virgin, spouse, mother" and therefore "is the eminent type of the woman and the classic model of evangelical life."²⁴

In fact, the woman "continues, to a certain degree, the maternity and the married life of the Virgin Mother."²⁵ In this sense of the term she is the highest ecclesial symbol in so far as she mirrors "the bond which Christ has established with His Church."²⁶

These very basic values of femininity reaffirm "the uniqueness of her being, her psychology, her human and Christian vocation... and also the primacy of the woman in that area of human affairs where the problems of life are found — in moments of sorrow, when someone needs care, and mothering."²⁷ They contribute, in short, to the uniqueness which is at the heart of the identity of womanhood. The identity makes her herself, while being, in the words of Scripture, like unto man. This means they are similar but also have differentiating qualities. They possess "an identity in diversity which makes them analogical."²⁸

As Paul VI reminded us recently, "It is this differentiating aspect which the woman must not renounce. Indeed the very image of and likeness to God which makes her one with man and equal to him (Cf *Gen.* 1, 26-27) is effected in her in a very specific and particular way. This way differentiates her from men — in the same measure as man is differentiated from her, not in dignity of nature but in diversity of functions. It is necessary to safeguard the woman from a subtle form of self-depreciation because she is a woman. This form of psy-

²⁴ MC 36.

²⁵ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²⁷ PAUL VI, *Ai giuristi cattolici italiani*, December 7, 1974.

²⁸ GIANNINI G., *Identità della donna*, in "L'Osservatore Romano", November 26, 1975.

chological conditioning is common today when there is a tendency to ignore the diversifying qualities implanted by nature in each of the sexes. It is part of the law of creation that the woman realize herself as a woman, not in a competition of mutual oppression with man, but in a harmonious and fruitful integration based on respectful acknowledgement of their respective roles." ²⁹

If the prime aspect of woman is that mission which is the natural overflow of her very nature in the function of the creative designs of God, her part as spouse and mother must be lived, not only within marriage but also, though in a different way, in the consecrated and single states of life. In these two latter states, being a wife and a mother are in service of purely spiritual values. Nevertheless, they put the woman in the circumstances of complete self-oblation by giving her the opportunity of total self-giving and service and this in as complete a manner as is possible in the married state. It is done with the same possibility of "total offering" and "victory over self." ³⁰ She can insert herself in and with Mary in the same mystery of Christ and of His Church. "In fact, in Mary, all forms of inferior activity and any agitation disappear in this one glorious function of attracting, accepting and letting God pass from self to others." ³¹

As well as this task which constitutes the essence of femininity every woman is also predisposed to a specific vocation and its consequent type of activity which differentiates her from every other woman. This is concretized by her career choice.

"No woman is only woman. Each has her personal inclinations and natural talents just as every man has. These natural

²⁹ PAUL VI, *Discourse to the Centro Italiano Femminile (C.I.F.)*, December 6, 1976.

³⁰ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

³¹ TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *Letter to his cousin Margaret*, December 6, 1916.

gifts render her able for the various professional activities in the fields of the arts, the sciences, technology, etc." ³²

They should, therefore, be recognized and developed, "with respect for her particular physiognomy, in the acknowledgement and exaltation of her activity and personal dignity, though outside the family circle, and in an equality of rights deriving from her ontological, moral, religious, social and juridical identity with man." ³³

For far too long, woman has been kept in a state of inferiority in which all avenues to true development and fulfillment were closed. Only very few succeeded in breaking through the social barriers set up by social prejudice.

"There is no profession which cannot be exercised by a woman. In practice, individual dispositions can orient choice towards any professional field, even to those which are traditionally not for women." ³⁴

It is preferable that the task undertaken be in keeping with the feminine characteristics, as the professions of nursing, medicine, educating, homemaking, and a whole series of modern social services. In the scientific field the most suitable lines seem those branches of culture which deal specifically with the concrete, such as biology, psychology and pedagogy. Nevertheless, "It remains true that those professions, which objectively seem out of harmony with general feminine characteristics and which consequently are the usual domains of man, can in concrete situations be accomplished in a genuinely feminine way." ³⁵ They can be given "that inimitable touch of sensitivity and concern which is characteristic of the woman," ³⁶ a touch that reveals the global and more concrete aspects of the problems presented and of their solution.

³² STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³³ MATTEUCCI B., *Missione della donna*, in "L'Osservatore Romano", February 20, 1976.

³⁴ STEIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁶ PAUL VI, *Discourse to C.I.F.*, quoted.

Today, due to pressure for the equal rights of woman, she holds positions in all social levels. She is also "at the center of a crisis of institutions and traditions... which has strong repercussions in family interpersonal relationships, in schools and in the woman's sense of personal identity."³⁷ However, one hopes that with effort, even if it must be accompanied by anguish and fatigue, we shall regain "those sound principles of universal conscience" and arrive at "the new equilibrium" hoped for by Pope Paul in the already quoted discourse to Catholic Lawyers.³⁸

This picture of the feminine values and mission were not only known and accepted by Mother Emilia, but as far as was permissible by the social structures of the time, she tried to apply them.

It is already symptomatic that her thesis written to obtain her Teaching Certificate in Pedagogy was entitled: "A Historical Review of the Education of Women in Italy from the Origins of Christianity to the End of the 18th Century."

She opened it by declaring her agreement with those who opposed Professor Volpi of the University of Padua who, in a Discourse given in the first half of the 18th century, denied women the right to the study of the sciences and arts.

She then affirmed clearly and decisively: "While I do not deny that the mission of the woman in the family and in society is by its intrinsic nature different from that of the man and that as a logical consequence, her education must prepare her for her mission, I hold that, on the other hand, there is no doubt but that she has the same faculties as man and shares the same origin, nature and end as he. She has the same moral duty and right, to be able to develop endowments of nature and to have all three aspects, physical, intellectual and moral, harmoniously educated."³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Cf *Ibid.*

³⁹ MOSCA E., *Saggio storico sull'educazione della donna in Italia*, manuscript.

She proved her assumption by recalling from historical documentation, examples of women who have emerged through the centuries as very learned in various branches of knowledge. Some obtained University degrees and positions and wrote books recognized for their scientific and artistic value.

Naturally, she did not and could not possess the contemporary socio-cultural view that all professions should be open to women. The drift of thought was not yet in line with the situation described by Paul VI in the already quoted discourse: "...the functional differentiation of the woman from man constitutes the uniqueness of her being, of her psychological make-up, of her human and Christian vocation, as well as her dignity. This demands recognition of and respect for the principles and values which assure her of her authentic, unique and incontestable greatness."⁴⁰

Mother Emilia spent all her life at the service of the education of girls and was consistent in her views of the dignity and rights of the woman. By establishing the Teachers' College at Nizza Monferrato, she aimed at bringing the young girls to the development of their personality and to opening up for them the possibility of channeling their energies in that area which best responds to their innate inclinations: education.

That College, which also took part in the preparation of missionaries, can truly be said to have opened its horizons to form those who would do social work among uncivilized peoples.

Fully aware of the potential of the woman in the academic field, she did not hesitate, as we have seen, to send the Sisters who were capable of it, to attend university. She did this to make sure that the schools of the Institute were giving the best. Means, methods and aims were all geared towards a real formation.

As well as this, all her educative interventions and the

⁴⁰ PAUL VI, *Discourse to C.I.F.*, quoted.

methods employed by her in the education of the young were clear proof that she had grasped the values and mission of the woman. Her open-mindedness led her to see, not only her role as wife and mother symbolized by her guardianship of the family hearth, but also her parental role as "splendor of the Church, honor of her country and savior of society."⁴¹

On this point, too, she took Don Bosco as her teacher. He seemed to have understood the importance of the place of the woman in society when he stated: "The Revolution used women to do a lot of harm, but we shall accomplish much good through them."⁴²

In the mind of Mother Emilia, woman reached the height of prestige, that Paul VI was later to describe, "For us, woman is the mirror of a beauty which transcends her, she is the sign of immeasurable goodness, she is the reflection of the ideal person whom God created in his own image and likeness. For us, the woman is a vision of the human heart; for us she is the one who comes to the fore to relieve the solitude of man. She is capable of the most total dedication of love. She possesses all the resources to collaborate with and take care of others. She has all the fortitude necessary for active fidelity and has the heroism of constant self-sacrifice. She is our mother and we bow before her. She is the source of human life where our nature receives the breath of God, the Creator of the immortal soul...; for us she epitomizes humanity because she has as a natural endowment a very strong attraction to the religious dimension which, when she follows it, elevates her to the sublime form of femininity. Singing, praying, yearning, weeping seem to converge naturally to one unique and sublime, immaculate and suffering figure, Mary, the woman who, privileged and blessed among all women, was destined to become the Virgin Mother of Christ."⁴³

⁴¹ Mosca, *Conference*, (manuscript edition).

⁴² MB X, p. 600.

⁴³ PAUL VI, *Alla Società Italiana di ostetricia e ginecologia*, October 29, 1966, in AAS, 58 (1966) 1168.

This was the ideal of the woman whom Mother Emilia always had in mind and who became the orienting influence behind all her work in education.

3. SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE WOMAN

"The innate nature of the woman has triple demands: the development of her human values, the development of her femininity and, finally, the development of her individuality." These "are never separate goals" but "constituent elements of one goal" — human nature in its specifically feminine and individual character."⁴⁴

The education of the woman has to follow these lines in order to bring her to the point of becoming what she is meant to be, in order to unfold and bring to maturity all the values she bears with their particular characteristics.

Basically, human values are the same in man and in woman if we take into account the difference introduced by specifically feminine traits — her physical energy and fine sensitivity, her intelligence and strength of will and her degree of integration into the supernatural plane to which humanity has been raised.

Consequently educative work must make room for the progressive and gradual development of this human integration while aiming at the complete achievement of the natural and supernatural goal.

This gives the woman a right to the education of her physical, intellectual, moral and religious potentials.

The specific aim of the feminine and individual formation is differentiated on the basis of the natural attributes of the woman and of the single individuals. This poses a

⁴⁴ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

diversity of possibilities with consequent relative tasks to be performed.

We have seen how "at the center of the feminine soul" lies the "affectivity," which is alive with sentiments (such as joy and sorrow) and state of being (such as serenity and melancholy), of personal dispositions (such as enthusiasm and aversion) of affective states (such as hate and love).⁴⁵

It is obvious that a formation of the spirit is vital, for it includes "intellectual charity, operative energy and practical activity" which "make possible an upright interior orientation based on objective values and their acceptance in practical consequences."⁴⁶

This requires, in the first place, a radical religious formation which constitutes the most essential part of all feminine education. The truths of faith must be grasped as the supreme realities which form the essence of life and of being and create a faith-filled mentality which determines actions. This ensures that events and persons will be evaluated in the light of truth, which is deeper than superficial impressions and the emotions.

This clarity of ideas which comes from a mentality of faith must be strengthened by a trained reason which, by motivating and justifying the principles, lays the foundation for a moral life based on objective values and not on feelings alone. It then becomes translated in convictions which operate in a manner that determines the right choice of the life-orientation.

Here it is a matter of enlightening and forming the conscience which constitutes "the most personal and secret nucleus of man. It is where the individual "chooses good or evil" and his formation is "the most important task of education."⁴⁷

A right conscience guides the woman to be capable of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Pius XII, *La coscienza cristiana*.

confronting, evaluating the implications of her decisions in such a way as not to be easily led by a false enthusiasm, by uncontrolled fantasy. She is guided by sound, enlightened judgement.

It is necessary to respond to this need and tendency because "the soul of the woman feels a strong desire for the values which nourish the spirit" and is "receptive of all that is beautiful and open to all that is genuinely noble."⁴⁸ Hence, great ideals, exemplified by and personified in women whom she feels drawn to emulate, must be offered to her.

We have already made it clear that the ideal woman, in whom femininity reaches its highest peak and most perfect expression, is Mary. Consequently "the imitation of Mary must be the goal of feminine education." She has "a special significance for woman. She teaches them to give expression, in a feminine way, to the image of Christ."⁴⁹

There is no lack of young women who can be held up as outstanding models of moral beauty, spiritual nobility, and of those values which fascinate every woman.

Again, considering a realistic and profound reflection of the nature of the woman and of her individual characteristics which are also expressed in her inclination to be creative and practical, "it is of the utmost importance for her future to train her practical intelligence.

This is done by assigning concrete tasks... This is fully in keeping with the nature of woman, because she is more inclined to the concrete than to the abstract. It is also an education of her will, because to carry out these tasks she needs to make acts of choice, decision, renunciation, sacrifice, etc."⁵⁰

However, the special characteristics of the individual must always be borne in mind. The inclinations of the individual, her gifts and capabilities must be taken into account when

⁴⁸ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

preparing her for the profession for which she seems best suited and which is more likely to lead to the fullest development of her personality.

Mother Emilia, who matured as the result of a long and painful experience, was inclined by nature and by the training which she received as an educator, to be able to understand the psychological make-up of others. This gave her a profound and practical understanding of the woman. This knowledge guided her in her work with the young and in the orientation which she gave to her collaborators on how to fulfill their duties in dealing with the young.

No one was more convinced than she of the influence affectivity has on the behavior of the young person, both on the personal and social levels, and on the religious and social planes. She kept this in mind in her formative work. She knew that by correcting defects and developing what is positive, the individual could gain control of this affective domain.

In this aspect of her formative work which involved becoming the master of one's sensitivity and impressionability, she showed a firmness and equilibrium which was an education in itself. She had the art of convincing the girls of its necessity.

Some episodes have been preserved for history in the memoirs of her students. Once, during one of her lessons, a sudden storm arose. An object in the classroom fell and the class went into a noisy panic as they thought it had been struck by lightning. Mother Emilia stopped her lesson and when the class had calmed down, she said quietly, "Tomorrow you will be teachers... and, I apologize for saying it, but you will be childish teachers... Learn to control yourselves by faith and reason if you want to have ascendancy over a class of little ones to be formed. You need to be strong women always!"⁵¹

⁵¹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

On another occasion, early in the scholastic year, a little girl fainted. Everyone got excited, moved about and was obviously agitated. At the Good Night Mother Emilia commented on the happening in this way: "As St. Teresa was the strong woman of the Scriptures (it was during the triduum in preparation for her feast), I want to say something. This morning when one of you fainted in chapel — not a very serious thing — you all panicked. No, this is not good. Learn to be above such things. In a case like this those who are nearest should do what they can to help, without, however, losing their self-control. The others should remain calm and continue the prayers.

Later in life you will learn the value of this self-control. The strong woman is sensitive but not sentimental, and when the occasion demands it, she knows how to be virile."⁵²

She was well aware "that femininity also contains dangerous seeds which are capable of compromising its special values, its development and, consequently, of preventing the accomplishment of its tasks. These dangers can be avoided only by firm self-discipline... by effort and by the liberating force of grace."⁵³

Among these dangers, she earmarked sentimentalism, as number one. Sentimentalism easily degenerates in morbidity. She was consequently against any friendship which was based entirely on sentiment. Such a friendships, by its very nature, empties and pulls down the spirit.

It is worth stressing that here too Mother Emilia was in perfect accord with her master, Don Bosco, who also was an arch-enemy of sentimentalism. Braido describes the Saint's struggle in this field as "the fruit of a very long experience and acute pedagogical insight which taught him that the soul of the young is so sensitive with regard to any demonstrations of sentimentality. Even the most innocent expressions can

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵³ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

produce the most unexpected repercussions." Besides, "in the mind of Don Bosco, these forms of friendship" lead to carnal, sensuous and morbid relationships (at least potentially). Indeed they may be indications of a more or less serious psychopathology." Looked at in this way "they must be regarded as the chief danger to the purity of the young, especially in the boarding school set-up."⁵⁴ Like Don Bosco, Mother Emilia looked on the spiritual affinity of two persons, as a means of reciprocal uplifting and sanctification.

When dealing with the above-mentioned danger which is extremely great in the female sector even if the consequences are not as grave as in the opposite sector, she watched for manifestations of softness, of self-centeredness, languor, caressing, becoming dramatic when things go wrong, of moodiness and hypersensitivity.⁵⁵ With her insight, illumined by psychology, she knew how to recognize the presence of these things and taught her helpers how to recognize the ways in which they expressed themselves in each individual: "The education given at home nowadays is weak and indulgent. Children have become the kings of the home. Everyone is careful to avoid causing them the slightest suffering. They are taught little about God and only very rarely is the topic of Eternity discussed with them in their moral formation. Some of them cannot cope either with duty or sorrow or even with themselves.

This makes it an obligation for us to be equipped to give them that which they do not receive elsewhere."⁵⁶

We have already seen that the heart of her education was the imparting of a solid religious formation based on the eternal Truths, on a religious observance which is the fruit of conviction, on the strength of grace and of the sacraments.

She never omitted that other stronghold of her formative

⁵⁴ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 293.

⁵⁵ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

action: education of the conscience. This, she regarded, as the backbone of all education and "The faithful and clean reflection of the divine norms on human action."⁵⁷ Her view was thus of a true moral conscience and not of a mere psychological one which is based only on personal experience.

Her first concern was "to enlighten the mind regarding the will of Christ, His law, His way" and to operate on the souls of the young by bringing them to the state of conviction in order to enable them to reach "a free and constant carrying out of the Divine will."⁵⁸ This would be shown by fulfilling their duty, by obeying and by reacting in a Christian way in the face of the various situations of life.

This was the school at which she molded her educators: "Let us use every opportunity to form our pupils in uprightness of conscience, in love of duty, of order, of abnegation in little things."⁵⁹ We must work to help them become "active, practical, sincere and filled with fortitude."⁶⁰

Her concrete way of looking at life urged her to say: "In the events of daily life, it is not the intellect that counts as much as strength of character. It is not so much the brain as the heart; not so much brilliance of intelligence as temperance, patience and a discipline controlled by right judgement."⁶¹ She was referring to the moral judgement of an upright and enlightened conscience.

She passed on this weighty concern to her collaborators: "We must form Christian consciences and firm wills to help them face life."⁶²

At the same time, she passed on to her pupils the fundamental principles and motivations which are capable of justifying and guiding their action, and she confronted them with

⁵⁷ PIUS XII, *La coscienza cristiana*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript edition).

⁶⁰ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁶¹ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

⁶² General Archives FMA.

the dictates of conscience. "Let us be careful to listen to our conscience!"⁶³ She did not neglect to make them grasp the beauty and grandeur of a life directed by an upright conscience. "The conscience which habitually accepts the performance of little duties, is the conscience of saints and heroes."⁶⁴

She was fully conscious of the propensity of the young towards great ideals and she utilized this knowledge to "direct and guide them and to fill them with enthusiasm for all that was beautiful, true and good. She did all in her power to bring her girls to openness and candor, to honest simplicity and frankness, to genuine piety, to an uprightness which was both genuine and attractive."⁶⁵

In her practical way, she used as models for her pupils examples of women who had lived these values. Her model here was Mary, that perfect model of all femininity. She held Her up, as the Liturgy does, as the exemplar *par excellence* of a specific virtue which was particularly applicable to their life and which could be imitated by them.

She did not neglect those human virtues, which are particularly important and of value in the woman because of their influence and the consequences which they have.

The outstanding, external characteristic of the woman should be gracefulness and decorum. Because of this, Mother Emilia insisted on training in good manners, in respect, in courtesy, and in that readiness to sacrifice, which is so necessary in establishing family cohesion. This latter is obviously an area in which the correct education of the woman plays a vital part.

She possessed, and knew how to transmit, the awareness of the value of all things in God: nature, art, beauty, youth-

⁶³ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ MOSCA, *Confessione* (manuscript edition).

⁶⁵ QUIRINO CLELIA, *A report in the Archives*.

fulness, joy. She stated, "All that is noble, pure, graceful, automatically ennobles, inspires refinement in the other."⁶⁶

"Fully aware of her high mission which she accomplished, not only because it responded to her natural inclinations and gifts, but above all to please God and lead souls to him, she studied each of her pupils' individual aspect. She knew it was important to know the character, temperament, and natural inclinations of each girl and then, aided by her keen insight, she directed her along the most suitable lines for her,"⁶⁷ because she was fully convinced that "woman can arrive at real maturity only if her strong points are adequately developed."⁶⁸

She was careful to give them training in practical occupations suitable to their age. She gave them chores, even if they seemed insignificant and she demanded that they should fulfill these duties with diligence and dedication.

In a Good Night at the opening of the school year she prepared them in the following way: "Would you like to get ready for practical home life? Good! In order that you may be ready you will be given some practice. Every day you will do a little sweeping and a little scrubbing in order to keep the house clean. You will take care of the school, the refectory, the dormitory, the stairs, the corridors, and also the playground. You will change chores every fortnight so that there is a fair distribution and that you have a varied experience... Then, each one must patch, mend and keep her clothing in order... At the appropriate time, and if you deserve it, you can spend a some time in the orchard gathering the fruit from the trees... In this way you will learn to be good housewives which will make both your mothers and yourselves happy, and it will make us happy too."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

⁶⁷ QUIRINO CLELIA, *A report kept in the Archives*.

⁶⁸ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶⁹ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

She was particularly concerned about the preparation of the future teachers. As the teacher of religion and of pedagogy she was in an ideal position for the accomplishment of this task.

The influence which she had on her girls did not fade with the years. Twenty years after Mother Emilia's death one of her past-pupils remembered her in this way: "Friends, do you remember the power of her approval? The fear we had of displeasing her? She has passed away almost twenty years now and still, whenever I have to deal with a difficult case in school, when I have to come to terms with someone with a difficult character, such that even a small mistake in my way of treating her might be fatal, I ask myself, 'What would Mother Assistant have done in this case?'"⁷⁰

Her education could easily have been hindered by the fact that it was carried out in a boarding school where the danger of losing sight of the individual in the mass is very real. However, Don Bosco had already overcome this obstacle by creating the family spirit which produced "one of the most perfect blends of collective and individual education to the advantage of each person concerned."⁷¹

Mother Emilia had succeeded in becoming a model of an educator-mother, who overcomes the danger of treating the pupils *en masse*: "She was the Superior, but even more than this she was a Mother and she showed a mother's concern for her pupils. They turned to her both in their difficulties with their studies and with any type of problem. They knew from the loving, concerned glance with which she enveloped them that they could trust her to find a way of removing the obstacles that came in their way."⁷²

What Edith Stein affirmed became a reality in her case;

⁷⁰ DOLMETTA, in *Secondo convegno*.

⁷¹ GIANOLA P., *Educazione di massa, d'ambiente, individuale*, in "Don Bosco educatore, oggi" (Zurich, Pas-Verlag, 1963), p. 120.

⁷² ARRIGHI CATERINA, *A report in the Archives*.

"It is possible for boarding schools really to fulfill their task if the person in charge is more a mother than an administrator in dealing with her collaborators and with the pupils, and if the school is based less on the solidarity among the staff, and more on the love of people who are really aware of their responsibility."⁷³

Mother Emilia, who always desired to transmit the true ideal of femininity, possessed just this kind of love. She would most certainly have been in full agreement with Edith Stein's description, "The soul of woman must be wide open to all humanity. It must be peace-filled, because a storm quenches weak flames. It must be warm in order not to freeze the tender seeds; it must be filled with light so that no cockle may thrive in any dark recesses. It must be reserved because eruptions from outside can endanger one's private life. It must be empty of self in order to leave plenty of room for others. Finally, it must be master of itself and its body, so that the entire personality may be available to serve whenever there is a call for help. This is the ideal of the feminine spirit."⁷⁴

It is not an outdated ideal even if social conditions are radically changed today especially in all that pertains to woman. She still is, "...the sign and symbol of a mission... the one who inspires equilibrium, the one who preserves the highest values of culture and civilization, the stimulus behind the efforts of men. In short, she is the instrument through whom the creative will of God reveals itself and continues in the world the mystery of the generation of physical and spiritual life... she is the prophetic bearer of the Marian Mystery."⁷⁵

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the current socio-cultural struggle, Paul VI, when speaking to the commission for the

⁷³ STEIN, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁷⁵ MATTEUCCI, *La missione della donna*.

study of woman and to the group responsible for the International Year of the Woman on January 31, 1976, affirmed: "Today the first thing is to effect a greater, closer collaboration between man and woman both in society and in the Church so that both parties may bring their valid contributions and their dynamism to the construction of a world not leveled down and uniform but harmonized and unified."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ PAUL VI, *Discorso al Comitato Internazionale per l'Anno della Donna*, in "L'Osservatore Romano", February 1, 1976.

THE FORMATION OF EDUCATORS

1. THE EDUCATOR AS AN "EXAMPLE"

Interpersonal relationship between the educator and the student is the axis on which the work of educating rests.

This rapport finds its validity and basis in the intrinsic and recognized value of the person of the educator. This value does not rest as much on ethical-religious principles which the educator proposes, nor on the ideals which he suggests, as on the extent to which the critical eyes of his students find in him a living example of the values he teaches.

The most important factor in the art of education is the moral standing of the educator, his mode of being, which makes him stand out as the concrete symbol of the educative ideal, as the bearer of the values which exercise a magnetic attraction on the young. Youth is always searching for a model who shows that he or she has actualized that completeness and perfection towards which the deepest yearning in his or her nature tends.

The fruit of education is consequently more dependent on what the educator is, than on what he says. He must be able to justify totally his manner of life to the young who are keen observers.

In synthesis, the authority and influence of the educator are not so much linked to his qualifications and diplomas,

which are not taken into much account by the young, as on an effective educative personality.

For this reason, Don Bosco placed all his trust on the educator whom he idealized in his preventive system as the one totally "dedicated to the good of his pupils... ready to face any disturbance, any hardship" for them.¹

Pietro Braido is right when he comments: "The simpler his method, the more demands Don Bosco makes on his educators and the more trust he gives them. It can be said with truth that the method of Don Bosco blends and identifies with the person of the educator... The educator is housed right at the center of Don Bosco's method. This is not to be understood in the sense of his being there as a policeman, but as one in readiness to serve his students.

...Even in the case of the most valid methods, it is the person of the educator who makes them come alive. The educative *style* of Don Bosco is composed more of interior spirit than of external tools. Religion, reason and loving kindness are not things, instruments. Their value in the field of education depends on the educator."²

It is a fact, and Don Bosco does not deny it, that it is a hard task for the educator to become really capable of interpreting the Preventive System correctly and of applying it faithfully and intelligently. "Some may say that this system is difficult to put into practice. I acknowledge that while it is easier, more satisfactory and more advantageous for the pupils, it is difficult for the educator. However, the difficulty is reduced if the educator puts his whole heart into his work."³

It remains self-evident, then, that the key to all Don Bosco's system of education is what Pietro Braido said: "Love is the first and last word of his philosophy of education." This love can transform the educator into the totally consecrated person of which Don Bosco was the living model.

¹ BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo* III.

² BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco* (Brescia, La Scuola, 1969), pp. 144-146.

³ BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo*.

This level of dedication must be remodelled by all those who want to relive and perpetuate his educative style.

Indeed, "more than being a precept, a theory and a system in the usual sense of the term, the pedagogy of Don Bosco is a form of life actually lived, an incarnated ideal."⁴

However, because he had educational institutions to provide for, Don Bosco was very aware of the absolute necessity of forming his collaborators. His first school in this formation was blessed by his personal life-style and enriched by his sanctity and apostolic activity — the example from which everyone of his followers could learn. He does not fail to give them also a theoretical preparation in the form of principles, norms, directives and observations. Don Bosco taught both in planned and in improvised forms when occasions presented themselves, both addressed to individuals and to communities.

The *Memorie Biografiche* bear rich testimony to this, as various conferences note, nor are there lacking some specifically pedagogical writings even if these do not claim to be strictly scientific. Examples of this are *Il sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*, *La lettera da Roma del 1884* and the letter on *I castighi* of 1883. Other writings are of a more educational bent. In this category are the *Lecture Cattoliche* and the biographies of the three model youths: Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco. There are also many of the letters contained in the *Epistolario* as well as the *Regolamento* and the *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* which vividly describe the first educative experiences of the Saint.⁵

As Bartholemew Fascie expresses it, the method of Don Bosco "is valid in proportion to the extent which it is a living thing." Consequently the best way of grasping its content,

⁴ BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 118.

⁵ Cf S.G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù*, a cura di BRAIDO P. (Brescia, La Scuola, 1965).

aspects and configuration is to see it "in action and effectively implemented because, to quote Habrich, it is a living example of educative love."⁶

This example was personified in the person and educative action of the Saint who appears as the *paradigm*, or blueprint of the authentic educator. His collaborators had only to look to him, to feel as he felt, to act as he acted. They had only to be his voice, his reflection, a mirror image of him.⁷

With this end in view he attracted them to himself with his irresistible fatherliness whose love spurred them on to imitate him without ever forcing their freedom or minimizing their personalities.

Mother Emilia's moral and pedagogical preparation led her to the conviction that an intrinsic constituent of Salesian spirituality was a specific formation in the art of educating. This she saw as essential because the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians is a consecrated-apostle by profession and consequently a religious educator.

He turned her attention first to those who like herself had the duty of reproducing in themselves a personification of the educative thought of Don Bosco.

She was convinced that to neglect the perfecting of the instrument is to compromise the outcome of the work. Her biographer attests: "Mother Emilia was a genius in the art of forming religious educators."⁸

Her school was first and foremost one of providing the living model. She made every effort to be the living model for her collaborators and pupils of the ideals of truth and goodness which are the only values that serve to uplift and enoble the person because they make him free in the gospel understanding of freedom.⁹

⁶ FASCIE B., *Del metodo educativo di don Bosco* (Torino, SEI, 1935), p. 33.

⁷ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁸ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁹ Cf *Gv* 8, p. 32.

She was only too aware that the value of an ideal is not measured by its intrinsic beauty, but by its capacity to be internalized and lived.

"More outstanding than that of most people, the educative results which she obtained were due to her personality." In her "everything was present: the gestures, voice... a glance was sufficient for her, as it had been in the case of Don Bosco, to understand a situation and to know how to deal with it."¹⁰

She gave an example by her life of the pedagogical value of the person by modeling in herself that educative personality which is more powerful than words in the task of formation.

She had taken as her own the motto: "One who is not full of light cannot dispel darkness. One who is not ardent cannot spark off others."¹¹

The light that fed her interior flame was her teacher, Don Bosco. In her conferences, Good Nights, private and public guidance, she continually named and cited him as her authority. "...Let us read what Don Bosco wrote and do as Don Bosco would do, and we have found the solution to all our problems."¹² She insisted that the Salesian educator should be "knowledgeable about the spirit of her founder, Don Bosco,"¹³ and again, "as was customary with Don Bosco."¹⁴ "Don Bosco never had recourse to such means to obtain good discipline."¹⁵

She would urge that all her collaborators take as their own "the great secret responsible for the good running of the Oratory at the time of Don Bosco, our father,"¹⁶ and

¹⁰ FASCIE in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹¹ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

¹² MOSCA, *Conference* (manuscript edition).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

try to be "as Don Bosco and Our Lady want us to be."¹⁷ "I must finish as I think Don Bosco would want me to finish."¹⁸

She had clearly understood the concept later to be formulated by a devoted son of the Saint. "No one can prove this statement false: For the Salesian, perfection consists in imitating Don Bosco, in reproducing him as exactly as possible. His criterion must be Don Bosco taught this, Don Bosco required this, Don Bosco acted like this... There is no point in searching elsewhere, in theses and libraries. The only text necessary to study, to internalize, is Don Bosco."¹⁹

Mother Emilia knew the contents of this living, speaking text very well. She was aware of its richness and drew from it abundantly.

She regarded her most important duty and the one worthy of her greatest efforts to be the formation of her collaborators.

Her biographer assures us that to testify this fact "There are letters and reports written by many Sisters and Superiors. There remain her thoughts and some of her conferences which were written by some of her enthusiastic listeners."²⁰ We can also add that there exists the diary of Mother Clelia Genghini who referred to it very often.

From a scientific point of view, this could be considered a poor and scanty documentation and much less important than that of Don Bosco because almost all of it is indirect. However it does have a certain value as an insight into the impression she made on her students as an educator.

We get a glimpse into the fruit of her action from what comes through in the reports. "No one was dearer to Mother Assistant than her teachers. She formed them, she kept close

to them. She was firm with them, but very kind. When she was home, she was always among them. She sent encouraging letters to those who were far away."²¹

She aimed at forming "the educator who was all dignity and purity in each good Religious. She insisted that the assistants and teachers should have a mother's love for their pupils and act as a second Guardian Angel to them. At this point she would urge them to have the thoughts, words and affections of the angels."²² She wanted them to present themselves to the girls as that ideal which all, especially teenagers, need. Kriekemans affirms, "Children need a model with whom they can identify. Later they tend towards hero-worship. Young people need a person who stands out as an ideal for them. It is important, however, to give them an ideal worthy of their aspirations, an ideal who arouses in them what Spranger calls *the higher form of life*."²³

She held as indispensable that each one should try to live the principles, the teachings, the directives which she had to pass on to her pupils. "You teachers and assistants must be outstanding in the community for virtue. Having received more, you also have the obligation to understand even better than the others the straight and narrow way that leads to sanctity."²⁴

"As educators, scientific knowledge must parallel your virtue and your piety."

"Let us not be motivated by self-interest. Lift up your hearts. Let us offer all our fatigues, our studies and our success to God."²⁵

"Try to convince the teachers and assistants that they will reap no lasting fruit from the lessons they give unless they are diligent and love their duty and their assignment.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹ BOQUIER E., *Les pas dans les pas de Don Bosco* (Marseille, St. Léon Impr., 1953), pp. 3-5.

²⁰ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²¹ SORBONE ENRICHETTA, A report in the Archives.

²² ROCCA DECIMA, A report in the Archives.

²³ KRIEKEMANS, *op. cit.*, pp. 378-379

²⁴ BOFFA ANGIOLINA, A report in the Archives.

²⁵ MOSCA, *Conférence* (manuscript edition).

Let them work much but always animated by a religious spirit which will sanctify all their actions.”²⁶

Because she realized the necessity of personally paying a price for the salvation of souls, she recommended the assistants to love the sacrifices inherent in their work. She was a firm believer in the dimension of coredemption for those engaged in the apostolate. She invited them to make mortifications and to pray that their work would be effective.²⁷ The apostle is, in fact, an integrating element in the economy of salvation because he renders its potential actual.

She set high standards for the teachers and assistants. She expected them to give good example in everything. She wanted them to give an education “which was the fruit of patience and virtue.”²⁸ “She was kind but strong and firm in demanding. She succeeded in making herself both loved and feared. I remember that she recommended that we be exact in the fulfillment of our duties, to love sacrifice to the point of self-forgetfulness.”²⁹

“She gathered us once a week and spoke of assistance as it is meant to be according to the educative spirit of Don Bosco. She explained so clearly, with such love and practicality, that we really learned. We felt ready to make all the sacrifices required of a diligent assistant. Gradually she formed us. We became absolutely convinced that we were undertaking a holy mission. The motto of Mother Assistant *Duty before all things* became engraved in our souls.”³⁰

She knew, nevertheless, the limitations of human nature which are present in even the best disposed and well-intentioned person. “...We have tangible proof every day that

we are children of Eve and if the Lord does not keep his hand on our heads, we make serious mistakes everyday.

We must practise a lot of patience with ourselves and with the Sisters. Each one's character must be taken into account. We must be able to give credit to the efforts that each one is making, and we must not expect perfection from anyone because perfection is not found here below.”³¹

It was in this vein that she exhorted her collaborators, “Let us not omit a study of ourselves. We must get to know our defects, our hypersensitivity, the subtle incursions of our self-love. Let us appreciate the means used by our Superiors to help and guide us, to support us in our work and on the path of holiness — conferences, exhortations, Good Nights, Good Mornings, a word of praise, a glance or a meaningful silence when they meet us... Let us be aware of what Christ does to help us rise when we have failed, to instill new courage when we have lost ours, to let us see what we are and what we should be in order to please Him... and so on. Let us do likewise for our pupils both young and old and always be faithful to our principles, animate lively recreations and see that their occupations are well programmed. It may be the case that we should be more demanding of ourselves and less so of the girls when desiring what is right.”³²

The phrase “when desiring what is right” shows her continuous straining towards the authentic values which the educator must realize in herself in order to gain that effective ascendancy as an educator which brings about the harmonious integration of the woman, the Religious, the educator and as a consequence to make her attractive for those whom she has to educate.

Mother Emilia aimed at this in her formation. She knew that coherence of life has influence on the students in the

²⁶ MOSCA E., *Letter to Mother Chiarina Giustiniani* (undated).

²⁷ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁸ General Archives of the FMA.

²⁹ PENTORE TERESA, A report in the Archives.

³⁰ BOSCO EULALIA, A report in the Archives.

³¹ MOSCA E., *Letter to the Superior, Sister Orsolina Rinaldi* (undated).

³² MOSCA, 2^a *Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

measure in which the children and teenagers first of all see the example of the model with whom they want to identify.³³

2. ASSISTANCE: EDUCATIVE PRESENCE

As we have already seen the method of Don Bosco revolves on a hinge which is not identified by either the structures or the norms and directives but with a person who is the living source of a continuous, beneficial and life-giving educative ray. The person is the educator.

The most characteristic and authentic type of this educator in the thought and practice of Don Bosco is the assistant.

In his system of education, the assistant personifies and renders real the constant, living, active presence of the educator in the world of the young. He participates in their life, or rather shares it completely by an expression of that love which inspires and animates the whole of the Preventive System of Don Bosco.

Even before experimental psychology proved it, Don Bosco had grasped the fact that "authentic interpersonal relationship demands that I be totally present to the other, that I be fully with him, that I share in his personal existence, because I am really concerned about him.

The literal meaning of participation is *to take a part of*. Consequently, this relationship presupposes that I take part in the life of the other, in his existence and in his way of being in the world."³⁴

Presence, therefore, has nothing to do with supervision, or checking up on, but comes from a basic need to be close

³³ Cf RONCO A., in *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova* (Torino-Leumann, LDC, 1974), pp. 81-82.

³⁴ VAN KAAM A., *The Art of Existential Counseling* (Wilkes-Barre, Dimension Books, 1966), quoted by DHO in *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova* (Torino-Leumann, LDC, 1974), p. 105.

to the person one loves by a total participation in his life, his interests, his problems in order to share them, to give guidance, support, encouragement and if necessary to set him on the right course.

Don Bosco expressed it in the words: "...you can rely on the fact that all that I am is dedicated to you. I am at your service by day and night, in the morning and in the evening, at any time. My only aim is to procure your moral, intellectual and physical good. However, I need your help to succeed in this. If you give me your help, I assure you that God will give His. With this you can be sure that we shall accomplish great things."³⁵

The *Memorie Biografiche* bring out Don Bosco's continuous presence and total availability in these words: "He was always in the midst of his boys. He walked about here and there, he approached this or that individual and without embarrassing them he questioned them in order to discover their temperament or their needs. He whispered a private word to some, he stooped to console or to cheer up with a joke or encouraging exhortation, those who were depressed. He himself was always happy and smiling. Nothing of what was going on escaped his close observation."³⁶

The spirit of this continuous, loving assistance gives a concrete model of the authentic concept of what Don Bosco meant by *preventive*. He understood it not only as action that merely preserved, but as an effective action of positive orientation, of guidance, of support.

Doubtless, even though he was a great optimist, Don Bosco did not follow Rousseau who held that there was no original sin and no consequences derived from it. Therefore, the Saint did not hide the fact that there are weaknesses in youth, that human nature contains evil tendencies, and that these can be rendered worse by bad environment. In fact he

³⁵ MB VII, p. 503.

³⁶ MB III, p. 119.

affirms: "It is not that we want to fail in charity (when we fear that human beings will do evil), but it is charity which makes us believe that it is possible for them to do evil. Consequently, we must assist in a manner which will make it impossible for them to do wrong."³⁷

He makes it clear in his pamphlet on the Preventive System: "...Keep an eye on things so as to make it impossible for the boys to commit sin." G. Dho points out that this has a solid pedagogical foundation. "His psychological insight made him aware that it is more effective from a pedagogical point of view to prevent a young person from having a negative experience than to try to erase the effects of one."³⁸

However, the action of the assistant does not end here. To this negative aspect there must be added a greater and more positive one.

Don Bosco demanded that continuous assistance be understood as a personal presence which is friendly, stimulating and orientating and which enables the young to mature in an atmosphere of trust and freedom.

He wanted his assistants to be loving, totally committed to the good of their students, ever ready to listen to them: "Let them speak to the young, be their guide in all events, counsel them and correct them kindly."³⁹ He wanted them to guess their needs, to make their problems their own, to share their interests and, with "a vigilant eye"⁴⁰ discover their potential, their talents, their qualities in order to develop them and orient them towards authentic values, thus performing a really constructive work.

Motivated by those two aspects of the educative effectiveness of assistance, Don Bosco made it one of the principle duties of the Salesian. Consequently he dealt with it in con-

³⁷ MB XIV, p. 841.

³⁸ DHO, in *Il sistema educativo*, p. 106.

³⁹ Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

ferences and in community and private conversations. "Never forget that boys fail more often because of their surplus energy than because of ingrained malice, more because they are not helped than because they are evil."⁴¹ "Never leave the boys alone..."⁴² "Keep your eyes open and look around."⁴³ "Spend as much time as possible with the boys and try to say an affectionate, concerned word to individuals. You know they all need this from time to time. This is the great secret of winning hearts."⁴⁴ "Try to make yourself known by your students and get to know them by spending as much time as possible with them."⁴⁵ "Speak, speak! Point things out!"⁴⁶ "Never grow weary of being on your guard, of being observant, of helping, of showing compassion. Always be motivated by reason and never by passion."⁴⁷

The purpose of this continuous vigilance must always be to get to know the students better in order to offer them the opportunity of employing their energies more profitably. As a result, he insisted that the young should never be left with nothing to do. He made this an article of his regulations. "...If because of lack of work or for any other reason anyone should be left with nothing to do, he should be assigned something, either to do or to study, to read or to write. The important thing is that he never remain idle."⁴⁸

The educator, however must be capable of applying this rule with psychological insight and tact to avoid being an inflexible automaton. He must know how to apply it in a context of a trust which is the fruit of authentic human rapport and which transforms the norm into so many expressions of a living and deep love.

⁴¹ MB IV, p. 553.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁴³ MB X, p. 1022.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1043.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ MB IV, p. 567.

⁴⁷ MB X, p. 1022.

⁴⁸ MB IV, p. 738.

This is not an easy art, especially in the feminine sector of education. The woman with her natural tendency to be analytic could be trapped into accepting norms and making herself a code of rigid regulations in order to be bound by them. These prescriptions could easily be regarded by her as a railway line on which to travel securely. She could thus be led into missing the spirit and holding to the letter of mechanical action and authoritarianism. The thing which will prevent her from doing this is a well developed respect for the person of the other. This will lead her to make a genuine, warm interpersonal rapport with each of her students. It will make her presence among the young really formative.

Mother Emilia Mosca succeeded perfectly in this. She grasped the essence of the value of continuous, living, active presence, and really understood its goals.

This is what her students say of her formative and educative presence: "...She followed her boarders as individuals in their studies, in their work, in recreation, in their prayer life, in the fulfillment of their duties... You would see her during recreations, at outings, surrounded by the oldest and by the most troublesome boarders. There was no military discipline, but the passing on of convictions destined to be carried by the girls into their families and into society. All competed to get close to her.

She knew well how to make the conversation pleasant, cheerful, interesting and formative on such occasions! She knew how to introduce vital topics when answering even the most superficial questions of the little ones."⁴⁹

She really shared the life of her students in all its details.

Her presence exercised a powerful influence: "We who were only teenagers at the time, missed many of the finer aspects of Mother Emilia's life whose ideals were so beautiful and sublime. We were fascinated by her, and we felt drawn by her attractiveness. Her example, her warm words so full

⁴⁹ General Archives of the FMA

of concern, produced an atmosphere of faith, of candor and of energetic action. To be sure there were some who lacked docility even in our well cared for group. However, Mother Emilia's special concern was for them, and her prudent, wise, indefatigable zeal showed that she really lived her *Da mihi animas, coetera tolle.*"⁵⁰

This latter group called for her special attention: "...the weakest, the proudest, whose most prone to evil ways were the objects of her best efforts and biggest sacrifices. However, she acted in such a way as to arouse no jealousy or annoyance in others."⁵¹

Everything was for her boarders. She lived for them and in their midst. She gave everything for their good inspired by a sense of consecration desired by Don Bosco in all his co-workers. "Every moment was dedicated by her to the intellectual, moral and spiritual formation of the souls confided to her care... Her most outstanding and most admired quality was the secret of making herself loved ardently and at the same time feared. In short she was the golden model of the Christian educator. She used every means, recreations, outings, work, study, plays and concerts to raise the heart of the girls to love and desire piety, modesty and detachment. She did all this in a natural, seemingly effortless way."⁵²

Mother Eulalia Bosco confirms it in equally convincing terms. "She was a kind and firm, wise and prudent mother to all her students. She followed each one with incomparable patience and constancy, and she succeeded in winning them all over by her refined manner of dealing with them and by her stable sweetness combined with constant firmness.

She worked on them with loving patience and with perseverance."⁵³ This is confirmed by another witness. "Every

⁵⁰ CAIRO SOFIA, A report in the Archives.

⁵¹ QUIRINO CLELIA, A report in the Archives.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ BOSCO EULALIA, A report in the Archives.

boarder rediscovered her mother in Mother Emilia Mosca. She had an affectionate word for every single girl. She always received them with genuine goodness and listened to them with interest. She regarded what they said to her as highly confidential. She had a very keen insight into the natural tendencies of each one and through effort and discernment she cultivated these tendencies."⁵⁴

Her presence was always alert, never tired, never oppressive. "Mother Assistant was everything for her boarders. Her eye and heart reached everywhere — chapel, recreation, dormitory, refectory, confessional, corridors, study. She listened to the Sisters and girls and consoled them. She seemed to be able to multiply herself in order to give herself to all."⁵⁵

This lively and active presence of hers with the girls at all times and in all situations, was designed, above all else, to create that interpersonal rapport which is the point of departure of any formative action and is simultaneously the creator of the atmosphere of moral health and of that family spirit which Don Bosco regarded, guided by his psychological insight, to be if not of a decisive importance, certainly of great weight for education which demands a silent but active interaction.

Mother Emilia exercised her preventive vigilance in this family atmosphere and thus unobtrusively defended her students against harmful influences. At the same time she knew that the atmosphere of mutual trust which existed encouraged openness and hence the constructive aspect of her educative work.

Endowed with unusually keen insight, she realized that the Preventive System is a collection of several tiny expedients and strategies which might seem of no consequence to the one who is uninitiated in it, but which are in reality so many ways to success in the task of educating the young. Her con-

tinuous presence which was born in trust and which was concretized by sharing the lives of her girls, helped her to grow ever more convinced of its efficacy. This conviction stimulated her to share her finding with her collaborators in this field.

Thus she became an unparalleled and practical formation mistress of a very numerous band of educators.

On this point too the extant documentation is far from being as rich as that on Don Bosco, but there is sufficient information to give us at least an outline sketch of how she acted.

Her first concern was to imbue her educators with a deep sense of mission. At the beginning of one scholastic year she called an assistant who was new to the task and in confiding to her the group for which she would be responsible, gave her enlightenment on "the excellence of that mission."⁵⁶

This enlightenment is vital, because anyone who undertakes a task without knowing its importance, will never be conscious of her level of responsibility. She will not be clear on the goals, and will never become master of the art. This is particularly dangerous in the field of education where one is trying not only to develop all the human potential of the person, but also to collaborate with God in bringing into effect His divine plan for every soul.

The task is one of enormous responsibility and of a grandeur which surpasses the human dimension and consequently places the educator in the position of having to deal with a phenomenon in which nature and grace interact. It is a task which involves both the human and the divine. It is a ministerial task which must respect the laws of nature, the personal freedom of the student together with his particular endowment of gifts and talents, and at the same time must

⁵⁴ General Archives of the FMA.

⁵⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

respect the supernatural dimension with the equally free action of God through grace.

Mother Emilia saw it in this full light and saw the mission of the educator as analogous to that of the angels.

She regarded the role of the assistant as that of "the angel who accompanies one on the road of life,"⁵⁷ the Raphael of the Scripture who must walk along the way with the student in order to give her support in difficult moments, to show her the goals to be reached and to teach the route to them. Eventually, the student must be brought to self-fulfillment in both the areas of nature and grace.

The idea of comparing the task of the assistant to the mission of the angels was a dominant thought and guiding principle for Mother Emilia.⁵⁸ "She kept reminding us that we had to be visible Guardian Angels to the girls, that we had to act like mothers towards them. She frequently repeated this idea in her letters because she desired that we should reflect the thoughts, words, affections, works and virtues of the angels for them."⁵⁹

However, to arrive at this point the assistant must accept her mission and all its difficulties, sacrifices and risks with open arms. "Be pious assistants and love your assignment and the sacrifices demanded by your task above everything. Read one article of the Manual and of the Regulations regarding your tasks as educators every day. Show me the book you choose as a guide in this task. You will make many mistakes, but you learn from them. Make up your minds not to talk among yourselves of the failings of your girls. Never discuss the girls with the other Sisters.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁸ This expression is certainly linked to the 19th century spirituality and to the Constitutions of the F.M.A. (1878 edition) which in title III, article 1 describe the mission of the FMA as "like that of the Holy Angels." In using the term, Mother Emilia was not supporting "angelism" which would be in direct contrast with that "realism" which was so much part of her.

⁵⁹ ROCCA DECIMA, A report in the Archives.

Once you have read the Regulations, let me know what difficulties you foresee. We shall overcome and resolve them together!

Therefore be pious, cheerful, committed Sisters, mothers and... Religious according to the spirit of Don Bosco. Be angels always and everywhere. Check up on yourselves often. Use Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco as your blue-prints."⁶⁰

It is essential that an assistant grow in awareness of what Don Bosco requires of those who claim to be consecrated to the good of the young. "We can never allow ourselves to forget that our task is a double one. Hence we can never be satisfied with becoming saints ourselves, without also promoting the moral and general good of the young entrusted to our care."⁶¹

We can promote this good only if we are personally a model of the standards of life we teach. Mother Emilia was more than convinced of the validity of the pedagogical principle that: "...true gentleness of government is the strength of the Holy Spirit. No one can be firm with others who does not know how to impose on himself evenness of humour, continual serenity, courtesy when dealing with others, kindly sentiments, and the use of the word and the glance capable of moving the will and the heart of the other in order to lead her to fulfill her duty. Be firm and kind!"⁶²

"...Let us remember that example is more effective and constructive than words. We should never demand from the girls what we ourselves are not prepared to do. Before giving the girls an order, an obedience or even a simple counsel, let us make a little personal examination of conscience. This will help us to avoid imposing on others what we ourselves do not wish to do."⁶³

⁶⁰ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶³ General Archives of the FMA.

The formative action of Mother Emilia consisted in directives, principles and practical norms. However, she did not close herself up in a cocoon of precepts. Rather, she inserted herself into the life of the playground, the study, the chapel, the dormitory and the refectory. She followed her collaborators step by step in order to guide, support and also to correct when necessary. "...She demanded great vigilance of her teachers and assistants and urged them to watch and listen in order to be on the spot to prevent the enemy from slyly gaining admission. She frequently repeated the motto: 'Be vigilant, very vigilant, over the souls entrusted to you in school or in the Oratory, even in the nursery school! Be on the look out in the study, in the dormitory, in the playground, along the corridors, in chapel, on the stage, in the parlor. Be always vigilant,' she repeated even more energetically another time, 'be vigilant over the books, the newspapers, even the old ones which are used for wrapping. Keep your eyes on the postcards, the covers of the exercise books.' She frequently repeated to keep guard unobtrusively over little groups of three or four who are always together... Try to stop certain squeezing of hands, caresses... little gifts...

'Woe betide us,' she would say, 'if sin is committed as a result of our lack of vigilance.' She never grew tired of warning us against leaving the girls in idleness or of leaving them alone. She eagerly urged us to instill a sense of the presence of God into the hearts of the girls and to inculcate devotion to our Blessed Lady and to the Guardian Angel!"⁶⁴

She was particularly assiduous in helping those who were assistants for the first time. "When, as new assistants we made mistakes, were late, failed to get discipline or were not as successful as others expected us to be in this or that task... she would listen to us, console us, and, help us. Once a week she gathered us together to speak on assistance in the light of the spirit and system of St. John Bosco. She did

⁶⁴ SORBONE CAROLINA, A report in the Archives.

this with such clarity, love and in such a practical a manner, that we grasped the concepts and were utterly convinced of the value of the sacrifices which we were making in order to assist well. Gradually she formed us, she taught us to love our task and to regard it as a mission."⁶⁵

Her watchword was: "Assist, correct, but do it always in state of self-control and calm. Jesus acted in this way with his Apostles, and this is the way Our Lady would act if she were in your place."⁶⁶

Faithful to Don Bosco, she would advise, "Do not talk too much. That Sister obtains the best results who speaks little but who is motivated by a genuine and generous love and is more observant."⁶⁷

She did not let any of her assistants off with even the slightest infraction of the principle of continuous and observant vigilance. "Once Mother Assistant noticed from the dormitory window that one of us remained apart to talk to a girl who was sulking.

At an opportune moment she said to all the assistants, without naming the guilty one, 'No, this must not be done at recreation. At recreation time the assistant must never leave the whole group to deal with one individual apart. If you need to cheer up someone just say something like, *If you behave, I shall tell you something nice.*'"⁶⁸

She stressed insistently: "I would never be at peace if I had left two children alone for a minute;" and "If only every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians would admit it, she could agree that if things have gone wrong in the boarding school, in the hostels, or in the schools, it was because sufficient importance was not given to Don Bosco's Preventive System."⁶⁹

⁶⁵ The General Archives of the FMA.

⁶⁶ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁶⁷ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁹ General Archives of the FMA.

It had to be an uninterrupted vigilance, but a vigilance devoid of rigidity, the characteristic of police-like control. "Be vigilant, watch not like police, detectives or suspicious watchmen, but as loving and concerned mothers and assistants."⁷⁰

"Allow me to insist on the unfairness of obtaining more silence by constraining the girls to wait in line on the corridors, on the stairways or even in the playground. This puts the virtue of the girls in risk, emphasizes lack of expertise in the Sister and the lack of punctuality of the teacher who is not on time to receive her girls. It makes even the best suffer and shows that the person responsible for the line having to wait has not yet formed the two key elements of an educators: the conscience and the will.

"Don Bosco never had to have recourse to this kind of thing in order to obtain discipline. He was never in favor of lines but gained discipline by his personal dignity and virtue. His fatherly love led him to discover new initiatives which appealed to the young and helped even the most lively to want to make acts of virtue. 'Keep cheerful! Don't commit sin! Be faithful to all that your different duties demand and you will all become saints.' This was the guiding principle of the oratory at the time of Don Bosco; this was the source that made all the virtues appealing and often obtained the practice of even heroic virtue by boys whom ordinary educators would regard as poor material.

Let us take advantage of every opportunity to form our pupils in solid virtue, in uprightness of conscience, in love of duty, even when the assistant is not around. Let us train them in order, in mortification even in the little things and to a loving correspondence with God and their superiors. However, let us strive to reach this without scolding them."⁷¹

The Preventive System is based on trust, and it must be so in practice: "Try your best never to humiliate anyone even

⁷⁰ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

by standing up to see what someone is up to, or by telling her in public to keep quiet. Instead try to seat the best students among the doubtful one, and this will prevent the necessity of too many interventions on your part."⁷²

Mother Emilia believed in enlisting helpers from among the students. This had the double scope of training them in a sense of responsibility and in availing of the influence they would have on their companions. "After prayer, one of the most influential mediations is that of the peer group members. A friend will sometimes be listened to more readily than a Sister. Our dear Don Bosco knew this secret well, and we must learn from him. Let us spread the idea among our assistants and pupils as a form of Christian apostolate.

Self-love may suggest that this method could start exclusive friendships and attractions and lead to violations of the regulations. I do not think this will be the case if it is intelligently understood and directed.

This is, indeed, the loving task which the Guardian Angels carry out for God and for those in authority. It is an easy and short task even nursery school children can learn and which often rests in a kind glance, a gentle, *Please keep quiet!* in an unobtrusive pull of the dress, in a little action to distract the offender from that which is annoying others. Let us try it, and we will have to admit its effectiveness."⁷³

The educator must always act as such even when the lack of discipline, pranks and stubbornness of some girls tempt her sorely to act out of character with her profession: "...Let us never let the students find us for days with a long face and a cold tone of voice. They must be able to learn from us the divine command, *Let not the sun set upon your anger.*

"There is no neighbor closer to us than our students and boarders. Was it not for them that we left father and

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷³ MOSCA, *2nd Conference to the teachers*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

mother? Therefore if the guilty party does not ask pardon, we should make the first approach by going out of our way to meet her. We should receive her in a kind fashion, even if we let her know that we have been hurt, should the circumstances require it. Let us allow her to express all her reasons for her way of acting. At times they will be invalid, of course, but, like Don Bosco, let her go away from our presence feeling happy. Never recall offences once we have pardoned them. The only use we will make of them should be for the good of the girl and to increase our personal experience."⁷⁴

There is a lesson of advanced psychology given by Mother Emilia who was very successful in dealing with difficult cases. "Someone might say: 'There are girls who behave well with all except with me. Because they get a good report from all the others they don't bother to notice the report I give them.'

"Let us see why she is good with all the others and not good with me. The cause usually is a natural antipathy or a sense of resentment between the girl and the Sister.

"In the first case the Superior, who should be informed of everything, should call the girl and with all the gentleness with which one treats the sick (and it is a moral sickness!) get her to talk about her feelings. Without being shocked by anything she may bring to light, she should say something like this, 'I think that when you react in this way, it is because you are not well. You can be so good when you are well. Stay away from school for a few lessons. Ask to go to bed early for a few days and get something from the nurse.' This will make the girl feel a bit perplexed. Then she will either obey or offer an explanation. If she agrees to stay away from class or recreation, she will soon spontaneously return and promise to overcome the defect. If she does not accept to stay away from both, it is because she recognizes and acknowledges her defect and implicitly promises to do all

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

in her power to remedy her shortcomings. Either way, even though the first causes more delay than the second, can be used as a means to teach the necessity of self-control in social life.

"In the meantime, the Sister with whom the girl does not get along very well, will do her bit to rectify matters. She will try to win the goodwill of the girl. Even if she does not approach her spontaneously, she will be urged to do so by her local superior. If all this should fail to win over the girl, it might be the case of saying a word to her parents so that they might assist in her education by counseling the girl to be submissive, humble, and docile as becomes a good Christian. Generally, this is a key to success.

"Should it ever happen that the clash between a girl and a Sister is the fault of the latter, the superior should discuss the matter with the Sister and encourage her to overcome herself in order to love Christ also in the person from whom she feels at a distance. For example, she should remind her of the girl's good points. She may suggest that in eight or nine consecutive Holy Communions the Sister should ask the grace to grow to love this soul which has been confided to her. She could offer the Guardian Angel as a model. In spite of all our faults and shortcomings he continues to love and care for the person entrusted to him. She could also encourage her to win the heart of the girl by doing little kindnesses for her during the day. Even if at first the Sister seems not to listen, in a few days or hours she will yield to the internal voice which is persuading her that the girl could be conquered by more kindness, patience, sisterliness and motherliness. Then the problem will be solved.

"Should it happen that one fails in either case, there should be a last resort. Put the girl into another group, with another assistant and with children who are either younger or older than she is. This is generally effective."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98-99.

Mother Emilia always insisted that the chief value and the one which constitutes the essential dimension of educative presence is love: "...Be bighearted. If you notice that someone is keeping her distance from you after having committed a fault, relieve her embarrassment by sending her on a little errand for you. The secret of gaining respect is to respect others!"⁷⁶

"...be good, sacrifice yourself without limit and be all for your boarders."⁷⁷

Try to teach in the most practical and detailed way how to behave in different circumstances. A Sister who was an assistant in the study for the first time, corrected a girl brusquely and with a sharp tone of voice. Mother Emilia called the Sister in the evening "I heard you calling a few individuals in the study. I do not doubt but that this was to get discipline. However, if you want silence you must act in such a way that no one can say the assistant speaks loudly. If you notice whispering, tap on your desk with a pencil. If this is not enough, come and talk to me about it..."⁷⁸

She once discovered a boarder leaning against the wall of the corridor crying. Mother Emilia approached, spoke to her and learned that she was there in punishment. She lovingly made her reflect on what happened and succeeded in getting her to ask pardon of the teacher. However, at the end of the day she called the latter and made this observation, "Never, never send a pupil out of class for any fault whatsoever. This humiliates and places her in the occasion of committing new faults. Who is assisting her while she is there?"⁷⁹

To an assistant of the dining room who as a punishment, imposed complete silence, without even having a book read, Mother Emilia said, "It is not right to give such punishment.

⁷⁶ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁷⁹ General Archives of the FMA.

Never make them observe complete silence in the dining room. Let them either speak or listen to interesting reading. We must keep people content and not oppress them. They must be entertained in the refectory... so either conversation or enjoyable reading!"⁸⁰

Once, on a feast day, when the boarders were more noisy and more undisciplined than usual, an assistant, who had made several attempts to restore order, left the study and went to the superior admitting defeat. Mother Emilia, who already knew what had happened, approached her smilingly and said, "You have lost nine-tenths of the battle! Never let lack of success gain a victory over you! Did you say a prayer to Our Lady before leaving the study? Did you say a word to the Guardian Angels of the girls? Angels are not around for nothing. It is enough to say a word to them. Let us leave things as they are for now. Later we shall fix things up together."⁸¹

Don Bosco, her teacher, also reacted in this way. Whenever an assistant complained to him that he found discipline hard, he would ask him if he had prayed for them.

Mother Emilia's first recommendation to the teachers and assistants at the beginning of every school year was to pray. She was firmly convinced that God is the principal agent in education. He operates through grace: "She used to ask us if we had already recommended to the Lord the girls who would be confided to us. She used to urge us to ask Our Lady and their Guardian Angels to fill them with goodwill and to give us all the qualities and virtues... patience, prudence etc., which we would need to form them according to the expectations of their parents and of Don Bosco."⁸²

As an expert in Don Bosco's system of education, Mother Emilia understood the importance of recreation. Indeed, re-

⁸⁰ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁸¹ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

creation holds a special place in Salesian pedagogy, of which it is one of the keys to success.

Don Bosco regarded the playground "as an essential and indispensable factor in the complete education of the young and as one of the cornerstones of his system."⁸³

Much of the educative process takes place on the playground in the Preventive System. It is a diagnostic tool of primary importance because "one finds a primary source of knowledge of the souls of the young when they are acting in spontaneous joy on the playground. Here also one can approach them, without embarrassment and without anyone taking any notice, to say the required and appropriate word to the individual."⁸⁴

Recreation is also the best time for the educator to get to know how the young are made. This was why Mother Emilia was wont to say to the assistant at the beginning of the year: "Begin to make a realistic assessment of them during recreation" because that is where they give "the clearer indication of their frame of mind, heart and spirit."⁸⁵

However, a recreation that is formative cannot be improvised. It must be prepared. In practice, it is more difficult to organize and keep a recreation lively than to give a lesson in the classroom. All the young have to be involved, their freedom has to be respected and formative guidance given.

As a consequence, recreation implies an active and vigilant presence, a presence totally committed to a service of love.

It is significant that, as a first text to prepare herself for her task, Mother Emilia gave an assistant a book of games, and one of her first conferences was on the topic of recreation. She encouraged them to keep a "kind of diary of recreations..."⁸⁶ to choose, vary, propagate lively games to suit the season, the

⁸³ CAVIGLIA, *Il Magone Michele*, p. 593.

⁸⁴ CAVIGLIA A., *Domenico Savio* - Study (Torino, SEI, 1943), p. 134.

⁸⁵ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

time of day and the age of the girls, "games which were sometimes more intellectual than physical... always uplifting games that renew mind and body."⁸⁷

A good assistant should always be concerned with keeping the girls occupied even out of recreations, work or study.

It was an oft-repeated recommendation of Mother Emilia.⁸⁸ She wanted them to be always occupied but never overwhelmed or suppressed. Her aim was that they should feel as relaxed and serene in their work as if they were doing it in their own home. "Teachers and assistants should make a point of always having the girls usefully occupied but with a holy freedom... They must feel that the boarding school is their second home."⁸⁹

By her vigilant presence, the assistant must reflect the foreseeing love of God. She must keep an eye on everything, know all those she is responsible for and acquire the intuition that can read on a facial expression the attitudes, the unspoken word and the reason for behavior. "Be observant when you are with the girls, know how to see what is going on without fixing your gaze upon them. A mother notices the tone, the glance, the walk, the deportment of her daughter... From all of those things she gleans information on the physical and moral state of her child and acts on the information."⁹⁰

The law of assistance is the law of spiritual maternity which is always present in love to all and for all, in total dedication which comes from consecration of self to the education of others.

3. THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

That human-Christian integrity, at which all true education aims, demands a school where, according to the apt

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 84.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16

declaration of the Conciliar document *Gravissimum Educationis*, "...the special function... is to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the gospel. It enables young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in Baptism. Finally, it so orientates the whole of human culture to the message of salvation that the knowledge which the pupils acquire of the world, of life and of men is illumined by faith."⁹¹

Briefly, the ideal school must be geared towards its principal function. All its organization, discipline, syllabi, culture must be penetrated with genuine Christianity. We must remember what Pius XI stated in his Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*: "The mere fact that religious instruction is given in a school does not guarantee that the school is in keeping with the laws of the Church and with the expectations of the Christian family and worthy of the students who frequent it."⁹² The deciding criterion is how well it conforms to the spirit of the gospel and if religion is really "the foundation and end of all the instruction."⁹³

Don Bosco's school was just this. He saw it as an efficient instrument for imparting an integral human-Christian formation, capable of reaching the end towards which he aimed: the education of honest citizens and good Christians. That is, he wanted youth to go out formed culturally and professionally, ready to take their place in life with dignity and decorum and deeply penetrated by the Christian spirit, which moves them to direct their life towards its ultimate destiny.

Don Bosco regarded the school as "an authentic mission, one of the most powerful means for uplifting the soul."

Don Bosco was no mere intellectual, no mere bearer of

⁹¹ GE 8.

⁹² PIUS XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 79; of S. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *The Catholic School* (Rome, 1977).

⁹³ PIUS XI, *op. cit.*

theoretical and cold thoughts. He was an apostle who always sought only the good."⁹⁴

Don Bosco wanted the school to be active in the salvific mission of the Church. Consequently, he insisted that it should be permeated with the Christian spirit and faithful to cultural requirements. He demanded that the teachers be fully imbued with the Christian spirit and fully prepared professionally for their task.

He states clearly in a letter to Father Belasio, the author of the short work, *Della vera scuola per ravviare la società*. When he declares that he believes in undertaking this work⁹⁵ because it fulfills his ardent desire to try to ensure that, while getting their professional culture "the young should be informed, take inspiration from and learn the sublime Catholic culture." He believed that schools should aim at "instructing in order to educate, and educate in order to direct man to his final end, God."⁹⁶

The discussion which he had at Marseilles in 1885 with the lawyer, Michel, is equally clear on this point. Don Bosco was very concerned about the paganism which was beginning to permeate education and which he referred to as "the pagan education which is generally given in our schools."

This conversation ended with this sincere confession. "I have battled all my life against this perverse system which poisons the minds and hearts of the young. It has always been my dream to reform it at the roots. I base my system on truly Christian principles... Now old and failing I have the sorrow of facing death without having been understood."⁹⁷

In keeping with his aim, Don Bosco dedicated himself

⁹⁴ FASCIE B., *Conferenza alle insegnanti* (Nizza Monferrato, Tip. priv. FMA, 1931), p. 8.

⁹⁵ CERIA, *Epistolario* II, pp. 317-318.

⁹⁶ GELLASIO A.M., *Della vera scuola per ravviare la società* (Torino, Tip. Sales., 1883), pp. 32-33; 41.

⁹⁷ MB XVII, pp. 441-442.

more totally to the religious, moral and educative aspects of the school than to the didactical side. Therefore he did not study new methods or engage in technical research.

His didactics can be reduced to "precepts" and "practical norms" collected in fourteen articles which stress the "punctuality" of the teachers, as required by the "Preventive System," the careful "preparation for the class being taught;" the avoidance of all "partiality" and "animosity," the attention to be given to the less bright students, frequent and detailed questioning, to make sure that assigned tasks have been studied, the avoidance of humiliating punishments and the treatment of the students in a *respectful* fashion, the tidiness of the exercise books, a monthly test to keep them interested, keeping the attendance record up to date, keeping a check on the reading material in circulation and choosing books carefully, training them to read the profane authors critically, to graft school life on the life of the liturgy to prepare well for the various solemnities and, finally, to have a weekly reading from the works of a Christian Latin author.⁹⁸

Don Bosco's main concern surfaces also from these practical norms: to imbue the school with the Christian spirit.

Mother Emilia, too, could not conceive of a school that was not thoroughly Christian. Consequently, the content, methodology and the aims, which she chose, were in perfect accord with Don Bosco's.

Above all, she was concerned that the school should be characterized by a unity of concepts on education. She wanted this unity. She desired the unity of effort, which creates the atmosphere required by a Christian school.

"She insisted on the principle. In order to impart a Christian education we must have recourse to Christian motivations: God sees you; duty is the will of God for us; duty and God are asking you to do this at this moment..."

⁹⁸ Cf *Regolamento*, Part. 1. Chapter VI, art. 1-14.

...Give me an assistant, a teacher, a Superior who is able to form her pupils on these principles, and I can guarantee that tomorrow you will have a band of genuinely Catholic women, who will be the glory of their families, of society and the splendor of the Church."⁹⁹

This is a far cry from a school which is closed in on itself, or closed in on a given radius of theory and culture. Such a school does not prepare for life or aim at producing a Christian, temporal order in the midst of the surrounding materialism.

She was so concerned about this that one witness was able to write, "Mother Assistant has the power of imbuing everyone with the Christian spirit"¹⁰⁰ and of inspiring others to do likewise.

Another past-pupil affirms, "Mother Assistant was our teacher of pedagogy. ...One left her class with a strong desire to be educators after the heart of Don Bosco. Our yearning was to commit ourselves totally to our work for the good of souls and to lead them to God. We appreciated her lessons as powerful aids in helping our future students and in teaching them how to be good Christians."¹⁰¹

Her deep sense of mission made her regard teaching as a sacred action. "I enter the school as a priest enters his pulpit, conscious that his duty is to save souls."¹⁰²

She was in full accord with Pius XII that the school is the temple "where purity and decorum enter, where truth and honesty hold first place, where Religion is evident and honoured and where the spirit of God uplifts and renders sublime."¹⁰³

We are not surprised by the expression already mentioned

⁹⁹ MOSCA E., *3rd Conference to the teachers and assistants*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ General Archives of the FMA.

¹⁰¹ ROCCA DECIMA, A report in the Archives.

¹⁰² FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁰³ PIUS XII, *Discorso ai maestri cattolici*, September 8, 1946.

by a past pupil, "While she taught, she transformed the classroom into the house of God. Science and art served to remind us of His presence, of our duties and of the one thing which is really necessary — to save our own soul and those of others." ¹⁰⁴

Mother Emilia was deeply convinced of what she had noted in her diary. "Religion is the greatest bond of knowledge. It cannot create talents that do not exist, but it lifts them to heights undreamed of when it finds them." ¹⁰⁵

She lived and got others to live this program of Christian education. "No one should finish a lesson without having left a thought designed to lead to true Christian living... This is the perfume of charity; it is the nectar of knowledge that comes from God and leads to God. After serious and enjoyable lessons it is what inspires us to want to enter fully into the *Agimus* and *Ave Maria* of thanks which we say. It makes us conclude today's work, desirous of continuing it again tomorrow." ¹⁰⁶

Many witnesses assert, "How full of wisdom her lessons on pedagogy and morality were! Her depth and clarity were unsurpassable.

In the morality class the syllabus contained the roots and fruits of the cardinal virtues and a study of the opposite vices. Her exposition was so convincing that she made us want to make a serious examination of conscience and, while she enlightened us, she instilled clear and sure principles which were a clue to the uprightness of her soul." ¹⁰⁷

All regarded her as a *Maestra*, that is as the one who was the living example of the perfect educator she taught about. "Her learning and culture won her great prestige as a teacher as did her fluency and diction. Her lessons were so well

¹⁰⁴ SORBONE CAROLINA, a report in the Archives.

¹⁰⁵ MOSCA, *Raccolta*.

¹⁰⁶ MOSCA, *Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁷ AIROLA AMALIA, a report in the Archives.

planned and clear that one could repeat them without recourse to the text book. Her lessons on religion were extremely interesting and were looked forward to and listened to eagerly. Her explanations, clear and within the grasp of all, were enlivened by pleasant and apt episodes.

Her educative method was the best, because she had studied ancient and modern pedagogues and based herself in particular on the Preventive System of St. John Bosco. She gained the esteem and affection of her students, from whom she obtained all that she desired.

She was pleasant in her manner of demanding. She had the art of making herself at once loved and feared. She taught us, as future teachers, the secret of this. Among other things I remember that she often recommended exactitude in the fulfillment of duty and love of sacrifice to the point of self-forgetfulness." ¹⁰⁸

She was consistently a teacher, whether in giving lessons or in judging the individual work of the students. "In exercises in the Italian language, which she checked up on frequently, she looked for simplicity of expression and spontaneity. She did not appreciate fringes or sentimentalism or too much fantasy. She wished such writing to mirror the soul, the feelings and to conform to reality." ¹⁰⁹

She was aware of what Pope Pius XI would later put into words in his important document on education, "Good schools are the result, not so much of good administration, as of good teachers who, each an expert in that which teaching they are and endowed with the intellectual and moral qualities which their delicate task requires, burn with love for the pupils entrusted to them. They are all to love thus, because they first love Jesus Christ and his Church." ¹¹⁰

She was thus able to say to her collaborators: "We must

¹⁰⁸ PENTORE TERESA, a report in the Archives.

¹⁰⁹ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

¹¹⁰ PIUS XI, *Divini illius Magistri*, p. 87.

work with one heart, one soul and one aim. There can be no educative action without unity. We must give up all individualism. Such tendencies are like discordant notes in a harmony."¹¹¹ Without unity, even the greatest educators fail. Even mediocre educators have worked wonders working in unity.

The principle of loving kindness must create in the child that atmosphere prerequisite to all fruitfull rapport between teachers and pupils: "Try to love your pupils. Whether they seem to notice it or not, does not matter. Go on loving them. Take as your motto to be more ready to give praise and encouragement for an action that is good, than to blame or punish for a failing. Then be very diligent in the daily preparation of your classes. This will help your discipline."¹¹²

This was how she acted. "I once experienced personally the effect of the encouragement and praise of Mother Emilia — those little rewards which filled us with joy. When I was in the first year of my teaching course, the mathematics teacher gave me back my exercise book and urged me to open it. Written in red at the end of the work was the phrase, *Well done! perseverance wins the day*. I also found a nice picture of St. Catherine of Siena."¹¹³ Both the encouraging words and the picture were from Mother Emilia.

Her first biographer writes, "She was convinced of the total efficacy of the work of the teacher who shows kindness and respect towards her pupils. The latter valued this so highly that the greatest reward they could receive was a word of approval from her and their greatest suffering was to know that she was displeased with the way they acted. As a result, they really went out of their way to please her."¹¹⁴

She always followed her teachers who were just beginning,

¹¹¹ Cf GENGHINI, *op. cit.*

¹¹² MOSCA E., *Lettera a suor Bonomi*.

¹¹³ MACCHIAVELLO ANNETTA, a report in the Archives.

¹¹⁴ FRANCESIA, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

and she was quite firm with any of them who, when they had discipline problems, used angry or humiliating deeds and words. "Whenever you are in front of a class imagine that the general public is also present to pass judgment on both the teachers and the students. I am sure that in this case certain words would not be used so often, nor would certain actions ever be resorted to because we would realize that they would be considered unbecoming to a Religious.

Acting with this criterion, we would avoid much annoyance to ourselves and many quarrels among our girls. You blame the girls, and they, believing themselves innocent, blame you and condemn you as proud. Also they tend to write home complaining that they are badly treated and ask to leave.

Certain hurts, which we inflict on their feelings because we are over zealous, are misinterpreted. Often they remain as unhealed wounds, which sometimes cause the students to grow to adulthood bearing resentment towards us."¹¹⁵

She admitted of herself, "I have regretted becoming impatient but never of having been kind and gentle."¹¹⁶ So true was this of her that someone remarked to her: "You do not know how to get angry..." "I try not to because what is the fruit of anger? I recall Don Bosco telling me that the impatient accomplish nothing."¹¹⁷

It was not that she adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude or took no interest in the discipline, in the manners or in the order of her students. She refused to tolerate lack of discipline or willful disrespect for those in authority. She firmly believed that, while these latter should strive to make themselves loved by the students rather than just tolerated, they should not allow themselves to pass as though they did not exist."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ MAINETTI, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

She was fully aware that where there is lack of discipline there is no education taking place and no virtue. Consequently she required silence, order and punctuality. She wanted the entrance of the students into the classroom to be as quiet as their entrance into Chapel. She asked for silence and a discipline which, while it could not be termed military, looked and sounded good! "It is not an insignificant thing to train the students to act in given ways on stated occasions. Rather, it is very important because it keeps the potentialities of the students in order and contributes to the formation of their character, if the educator is really out for the good of the students and not for what makes life easier for himself." ¹¹⁹

At the same time she wished the discipline to be moderated by the human touch. "Give a few minutes break at least every hour, so that they may have a little relaxation. However, there should not be too much noise and pandemonium in the corridors. This will give the teacher the opportunity of getting to know her students, among whom she will go, not as a stiff, immobile sentinel but offering a smile to one, saying a little word to the other. She will avoid using this time to preach sermons, though.

Sometimes the giving of these recess periods may seem a waste of time. In reality, however, it is time gained. At the end of it, all, including the teacher, will be more ready to go back to the interrupted work." ¹²⁰

Discipline should not be desired as an end in itself or for personal prestige. According to her these would be "motives which might give a grand appearance but which neither form the conscience nor strengthen the will. They may make the running of the school easier but the only fruits they give are those of hypocrisy." ¹²¹

She never grew tired of affirming the principle that "failings

¹¹⁹ MOSCA, 3^a Conferenza alle insegnanti, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

which undermine discipline and weaken respect for authority must not pass in silence." Attention must be given to remedy them but always however "with justice and goodness." ¹²²

This was also the criterion which she insisted on for the classification of the students. Their weekly and monthly term marks should be a fair average of the efforts over that period and not weighted by a recent impression. The efforts, goodwill and diligence of each individual should be taken into consideration. "In this way not only will we follow the maxim of St. Francis de Sales: *be more merciful than just* but we will avoid falling into what is nothing less than downright injustice. Injustice exists when the deciding factor is the most recent happening, a merely human outlook or passion. This unfortunate way of acting leaves a bad impression on the girls, even when it does not arrive, as it sometimes does, at filling them and their families with rancor and resentment for the rest of their lives." ¹²³

Her maxim was, "The marks to be assigned to the girls must not be inspired by passion but by reason and religion." ¹²⁴

With refined psychological insight she brushed aside the dangers that can easily be created by self-love. "It can happen that sometimes at the very beginning of the week, we threaten a pupil with a bad mark at the end of it. Will the girl really make an effort to avoid getting it? Is there not a danger that the threat is not a calculated strategy or an error of judgment? Might we not discourage the student entirely and make her go from bad to worse? Saturday comes. She gets her bad mark. Sunday comes, and will it be a public declaration of how bad she has been? We never mention the times people omit to receive a sacrament or receive them with but little fervor!... Is the fault all on the part of the girl?... Christ and our Superiors do not treat us like that. On the contrary,

¹²² MOSCA, 1^a Conferenza alle insegnanti, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

they are always ready to hope in the slightest sign of goodwill on our part."¹²⁵

She knew the girls well and realized that there are times when they more restless than ever. She strove to encourage her teachers to acquire this psychological art which is largely a matter of the heart.

She wrote to a young teacher who complained about lack of discipline in her class:

Mers-El-Kebir, December 14, 1897.

Dear Sr. Josephine,

I have not yet managed to answer your welcome letter which I have brought to Africa with me. The only reason I have not replied before now is that I just did not have an available minute. I hope your worries have lessened by now. It is true that the girls are in a holiday spirit, but they are not bad and a little patience is enough to make them want their practices of piety and to be interested in their work once again. Take heart then and be peaceful. May the Infant Savior bless you and each one of your girls. Pray to Him for me too, who also in Africa am,

*Yours affectionately,
Sr. Emilia.*

The truth that must give courage and help animate the educative mission is the presence of God in each of the pupils, and the admiration of the work which the angels are doing for them: "Try to understand the care with which the angels of heaven look after and watch over these poor creatures."¹²⁶

Also her didactical norms contained in various con-

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ MOSCA E., LETTER to Sister Caroline Sorbone.

ferences, and of which three fairly detailed and faithful versions are extant, are permeated with an awareness of her educative mission.

To forestall and avoid faulty attitudes, sentimentalism and romantic melancholy to which teenage girls are prone, and which placed obstacles to the direct and sound formation at which she aimed, she banned all sentimental music and books. She entrusted the choice of books to some of her collaborators and recommended "serious books, which have the power to stir the will and impart the light of faith and the warmth of Christian love. Get rid of light novels and books which are designed only to satisfy morbid curiosity and yearning for soft caresses, even if they deal with spiritual subjects. Give bread to souls hungry for that which cannot be found on earth."¹²⁷

She gave an exact criterion to be followed in making such choices in one of her conferences: "We cannot automatically trust the press, the title of the book, the quality of the binding, etc. It is necessary to check up on the contents. Everything, including any illustration must be suited to the age, preparation and character of the pupil reading it and, if possible, to her social condition. If we want the book to be not only welcome but useful in every way but especially morally, to the recipient and her family, we must follow these norms."¹²⁸

Her choice of end of year prizes was also guided by a formative criterion: "Some of our houses have the custom of giving medals as prizes for conduct and religion and books for study and work. For my part, based on the advice of our Father, Don Bosco, I find it much more logical to give books on asceticism, apologetics, liturgy, moral and cultural formation, and maybe, a picture, or statue as a reward for religion. Keep the medals and diplomas for the rest.

¹²⁷ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹²⁸ MOSCA, *1ª Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

It is natural to choose books as first and second prizes for study, just as we would choose a piece of fine music as a prize for music, or a book on etiquette as a prize for good manners. Everything is relative... the important point is that whatever is chosen helps to reinforce what we have taught and to increase knowledge by the encouragement of further personal perusal by the students." ¹²⁹

Mother Emilia stressed very much the concepts which in today's terminology could be termed, private research, full participation and collaboration. This was brought out clearly in her preparation for the end of year concert which was customary for all schools to give. "On this occasion the Sister should not perform but have the pupils perform. This is in regard to the singing and also the accompaniment to the various songs for the occasion. She should content herself with an overall direction of the event.

The same holds for the oral parts. The students should do the cueing for each other, give the instructions, always, of course, under the direction of a Sister." ¹³⁰

In this way the girls "will be prepared for the life they must live as teachers not only in their respective schools, but also at various parish or civic gatherings, in ordinary and out of the ordinary occasions." ¹³¹

She expected the program of entertainment to be formative and consequently to meet the basic standards: "God, family, country, knowledge and Christian virtue are the pillars on which the Preventive System rests. Therefore these are the points around which the recitation in prose and verse, dialogues, numbers in foreign languages if they have been learned, the interspersed songs and musical pieces should revolve. At most the program should last from an hour to an hour and a half. This is long enough for the performers and for the audience...

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

¹³⁰ Mosca, *2nd Conferenza alle insegnanti*, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Then, as well as variety we shall have unity. The end result will be instilling of a Catholic thought in all concerned, a blessing for the country to which one belongs, a sense of gratitude for the things learned, a desire to be better in order to win in the heavenly prize which is the *raison d'être* of this life." ¹³²

She was worried lest these feasts should cause the introduction of more or less serious deviation into the work of formation. "However, I also want to insure a certain amount of preventions. Never put vanity too much to the test in our concerts. Do not put the girls who have singing parts also in the choral or solo recital parts. Those who play the piano should not be given anything else to do in the program. It is not good to give all the parts to the two or three most brilliant! This is food for their vanity and reduces the number eligible for rewards. Besides it takes too much of their time for practices, distracts them from their study and, in the long run, creates problems for us... It is better to have less splendid results than to compromise our principle of preparing and educating them for life." ¹³³

Simplicity, moral and cultural usefulness must be the outstanding characteristics of these programs. She addressed the following words of praise to the teachers for the celebration on the feast of the Immaculate Conception 1892: "Well done for the program of yesterday. It was simple, rich in content, short, enjoyable and the fruit of the hearts and intellects of the girls rather than of rivalry, and let us say it, of overwork on the part of the Sisters. Do it in that way always! Get the girls to work, help them, guide them... Don Bosco followed this principle and wants it to be followed by us. For our part, we always wish to do things according to his ideas. Choose the items for their usefulness and not to satisfy vanity or to reach personal goals..." ¹³⁴

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

In one of her conferences she discussed the end-of-year prize-giving and her directives are always motivated by reasons based on principle: Give more weight to application and diligence than to success.

— Give more importance to the more useful work and that which is done with more precision, especially when it is within the range of normal feminine occupations, than to work which is showy and which is done well, because the person doing it, enjoys doing it.

“If there was one specially outstanding prize to be awarded, it should be given to the girl who concentrates on and does best in patching, mending, cutting out of various articles of clothing and of household necessities and if a punishment had to be inflicted on a needlework teacher, it should be administered to the one who does not teach, nor wants to teach her students anything except little hobbies, little vanities which are not in keeping with the social conditions of her family and of her environment.”¹³⁵

— Know how to discern when evaluating order and politeness if the behaviour in these spheres “is the fruit of natural predispositions or of family training. Effort is meritorious always, success not always... Order and politeness, which come from nature or from good upbringing are gifts, not virtues... The educator must reach the point of being able to trace the roots of the actions of her students. This point can never be reached without prayer and observation.”¹³⁶

— Do not allow yourself ever to be motivated in the awarding of prizes by antipathy, natural attraction or other unworthy motives.

At the end she stressed, “Even in the awarding of prizes Salesian goodness should never be forgotten. The students should always find in their educators that which we expect

to find in our Superiors and which we find in God — the prevalence of mercy.”¹³⁷

She emphasized the same criteria of fairness and justice in regard to marks given in school, and she added a detail, “Where we have to fall in line with the national regulations regarding school work, let us do so. However, we must always bear in mind that the basic Salesian principle is charity which characterizes the entire regulation for our educational establishments.”¹³⁸

She went into the practical norms and details of method also. Do not neglect “to question the students daily in order to ascertain that they have understood the previous lessons. See if further explanation is required, if they have misunderstood concepts, if your method of teaching leaves something to be desired... Correcting their written work daily is as important as the daily interrogation on the matter studied...”

The patient and regular correcting of written assignments guarantees the progress of the students, and improves our own field of competence in didactical skills. It helps us to know and evaluate the level of intelligence, will and emotional strength of the students, and enables us to straighten their ideas and guide their affections. We can consequently sow the best seeds on the most fruitful soil and have a more abundant harvest for this life and the next.”¹³⁹

“The monthly review test should be given at a fixed time under the supervision of the teacher concerned. This obliges the girl to do the necessary study and research and permits the teacher to judge the effort and keenness of the most gifted students, as well as to understand the problems of the less gifted.”¹⁴⁰

She does not omit giving directives for the presentation of the lesson. “Whenever you are presenting a new topic, do not

¹³⁵ MOSCA, 1ª Conferenza alle insegnanti, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹³⁹ MOSCA, 3ª Conferenza alle insegnanti, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-126.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

use too many words, and do not give too many concepts at a time. Give only a few but give them clearly and suited to the particular group who form the class."¹⁴¹

Hers were not only words but life experiences. In her own teachings she never strove to make an impression by using high-sounding words, but she brought the topic within the reach of all. "I was amazed and edified by her patience in teaching and by her ability to adapt her presentation of the subject matter in order to have it grasped by even the slowest learners. She never tired of repeating concepts as often as was necessary. In these repetitions she never lost her calm."¹⁴²

She esteemed the value of singing as an extremely efficacious means of educating. "It lifts up the heart and soul, refines the speaking voice and the tone used in praying aloud and without the person being aware of it, leads to greater nobility of thought and of sentiment.

Singing makes recreation more alive, increases the attractiveness of piety and prepares people for Christian-social celebrations both for later on and for the here and now of school life."¹⁴³

She also gives her views on rapport with the families. In writing to an elementary school teacher she said: "Always try to find an explanation for the defects in their children which you may have to point out to them. No mother likes to hear the shortcomings of her child spelled out just as they are."¹⁴⁴

She gives guidance also to those new to the field of working in the kindergarten. "It is right to follow the syllabi for kindergartens carefully and not to exaggerate the number of games introduced. Do not overstress the Froebel method because it is no longer the most attractive... This year confine

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁴² FERRARIS CATERINA, a report in the Archives.

¹⁴³ MOSCA, 2^a Conferenza alle insegnanti, in GENGHINI, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁴⁴ MOSCA E., *Letter to Sister Maria Rigoli* (undated).

yourself to the lathes, the cubes, and weaving. However, I am only giving advice, not an order. Feel free to do as you think best."¹⁴⁵

She wrote to another, "The kindergarten is not a place for questions and answers, but for conversations between the teacher and the little ones."¹⁴⁶

In making a parallel between the educative-didactical norms of Mother Emilia Mosca and those of Don Bosco, we find many, many points where they coincide exactly. This is not the consequence of a fawning of principles, but of a personal assimilation transposed into the feminine key.

She does not give us an absolutely original ideal, but her teachings present us with an expression of an indepth orientation which can be equated with a very incisive internalization of the formative value of the school whether in its teachings, its methods, its didactics.

Even if at times her code of norms seems over detailed, it is flexible in admitting anything which renders the school more active and actual. Above all it renders it more influenced by a spirit of Christianity which must animate the educative environment.

As the recent document of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (March 19, 1977) brought out clearly, the educative-Christian sense of the school is polarized "in the synthesis between culture and faith and between faith and life... through the integration of the different contents of human knowledge, specified in the various disciplines, in the light of the gospel message and through the development of the virtues which characterize the Christian."¹⁴⁷ This integration is also facilitated by the *style* and method of bringing about the *synthesis* and of transmitting the *contents* and the *message*.

¹⁴⁵ MOSCA E., *Letter to Sister Luigina Cuchiatti*, November 3, 1895.

¹⁴⁶ MOSCA E., *Letter to Sister Maria Bottiani*, 1900.

¹⁴⁷ Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (Rome, Vatican Polyglot, 1977).

CONCLUSION

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As we draw to a conclusion let us make the following considerations. As Mother Emilia herself foresaw, there is a coming to the fore of new methods, new systems, new schools and new pedagogies. Can Mother Emilia's pedagogical message serve us today? Can we not rightly be induced to think that a similar system of education is completely surpassed, and consequently it is necessary to follow the path traced out for us by modern pedagogical orientations, those above all which are concealed under attractive titles, such as, "pedagogy of the individual," "education for freedom," "pedagogy for liberation?"

Undoubtedly expressions such as these attain their aim and seem to depict new and more valid contents, that are in greater consonance for the education of modern man.

Actually, these names are new but their content, if carefully analyzed are as old as the Gospel, from which and in which the individual and his liberation have drawn validity. It is a fact that not all educators, nor all pedagogics have been able to recognize them or draw inspiration from them. However, those who have made the effort of reconquest have discovered those values even if under other denominations.

This can be said of Don Bosco whose "educative message (...) does not seem to have exhausted the original capacity of inspiration and motivation on an ideal and workable plane. It is a patrimony still greatly shared. For many, it is a school of thought and action. For a far-flung "Family" of spiritual educators, it is a concrete guide and personally experienced method of intervention in the world of youth."¹

¹ BRAIDO, in *Il sistema educativo* 7.

Certainly Don Bosco's thought as well as that of his follower, Mother Emilia Mosca, should be given due consideration as has been already stated, basing ourselves on the authoritative word of the actual Pontiff, "like a fertile seed to be developed", not as "a sound deposit to preserve."²

Going back to our opening question, Mother Emilia's pedagogical message can and must still be for us "a model," provided it is recognized and considered as a "dynamic model" laden with interior vitality that renders it capable of a continued adherence to reality and not as a "static scheme" or a "convenient pattern". (D. Fascie).

Let us not allow ourselves to be easily deceived by the sound of words. Education, as such, always liberates, because its aim is to bring the individual to the full possession of his liberty; be it on a natural or supernatural level. Furthermore, it is a spiritual process within itself that is activated only through liberty and its aims, in as much as it has for its object the integral development of the human being whose most radical need is liberty.

It is not only a question of releasing the individual of all conscious or unconscious inhibition as is upheld by pedagogical psychologism; nor of freeing him from every oppression due to his environment, to social-cultural, economic and political situations as is claimed by pedagogical sociology; but as is firmly affirmed by *Evangelii nuntiandi*, "such liberation must aim at the whole man in his every dimension, including his opening toward the absolute, also the Divine Absolute, and is, therefore, rooted in a certain conception of man, in anthropology that cannot be sacrificed for any strategy whatever, or for a practice with short term efficacy."³

An integral christian education identifies itself fully with true education, because it makes the individual free. It calls for the adaptation of forms and methods which respond always more to its constituent essence.

² PAOLO VI, Motu proprio *Magisterium vitae*.

³ EN 33.

Don Bosco realized the education that liberates in its entirety. He was able to do this through his fundamental conception of the pedagogy of grace, which did not exclude, but rather solicited the aims operative within the temporal sphere; and with his methodology of "preventiveness" based on reason and loving kindness.

His very simple and apparently over simplified educational aim, "to form good christians and honest citizens," contained all the implications of the full liberation of man, as is seen from the following:

— freedom from sin, realized through his sacramental pedagogy;

— freedom from ignorance through human culture;

— freedom from one's own limitations and incapacities, through professional formation and practical formation for life. All this was done with the greatest respect for the individual in his values, needs and rights through the methodology based on reason and loving kindness.

The same must be said of Mother Emilia Mosca who, as Don Rinaldi has said, was an inspired interpreter of Don Bosco's method in the field of feminine education.

The only thing left for us to do is to heed the conclusive statement of that great Servant of God and lover of pedagogical sciences: "Make it live again!"⁴

This "making it live again" must be understood in the same sense that is was said of Don Bosco. His educative message "is a reality which has to be undertaken with renewed awareness and carried on in a spirit of creative and dynamic fidelity."⁵ This is done "as a logical expression of our way of life" without allowing ourselves to be influenced "by mirages that do not bear the trace of God and cannot, therefore, be in line with the Salesian mission."⁶

⁴ GENGHINI, *op. cit.* 10.

⁵ BRAIDO, in *Il sistema educativo* 38.

⁶ RICCERI L., *Ibid.*, p. 313.