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Education as a Way to Social Progress
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**Don Bosco contributions to the construction of Torino's society,
to solidarity, and to peace
through education**

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Foreword about the historical context

Torino was the capital of a hierarchical society (the Kingdom of Sardegna) in a time of developing industrialization, urbanization, migration, and new social mobility.

The young did not receive any specific attention as a social category – they were viewed as being useful for military service or for learning how to live as adults but did not receive any attention specific to the years of their youth.

What did the Church offer to the young?

- **Faith** as the intrinsic component for personal and social growth and development – and not for the conservation or increase of privileges. The new social-axis: Church – Poor.
- **Formation** to the strict discipline of work. This is not an idea just for Religious, but one capable of being inserted into the social fabric/Religious and the Cooperators

Don Bosco proposed very high standards concerning the media of his time

He proposed ideals and means to put them to use, engaging mind, heart, and hands.

He proposed to his boys to care for others and not be just the *recipients* of others' care (e.g. – his boys and the cholera victims); the advancement and development of solidarity and not of individualistic claims and demands or of a self-absorbed religiosity.

It was in this way that **he contributed to creating a social FABRIC built on community and peace** in the midst of the *Risorgimento* (a period of revolution in Italy marked by three Italian Wars of Independence). *His* society did not foment struggles, violence, antagonisms, and hostility. (Struggles, violence, antagonisms, and hostility caused by the Revolutionaries were not unknown at the Oratory. Don Bosco and a number of his friends were under attack by them.) While some were in the business of destruction, **he was in the business of construction – thinking of the future of the city and of its progress.** (e.g., avant-garde printing presses, Mathi's paper mill)

I - What Don Bosco SAID to the Authorities

Plan of foundation, 1854: The presentation of his works as advantageous also to the city

- The true “capital” of any society are its young people. Enable them to be such with dignity and uprightness and honesty through deeds and actions (a future, trust, commitment). They are also an economic resource to improve life conditions, while never leaving out the Faith. Not by excluding it, or separating the two, as in the process of secularization, with the polarizations that this brings [*aut... aut* (either/or)] But not Don Bosco! He was *et ... et* (both/and)
- Educate them to citizenship through Christian education, joy, and solidarity so as to help them become responsible citizens
- the young are not a problem; they are our priority! The priority for social and ecclesial progress and development.
- the young are not an appendage to families and society but the central core for progress and for change (the rights of minors, we finally reached this much later in time. Don Bosco anticipated the times)
- the young (at the center of society's plans) take form as a body which is the subject of social and then political concern in 1868 – he was so very far ahead of his time! Education is the only possibility for the growth and development of the nations.

What places existed for them? What possibilities were created with foresight?

II – What he DID

- He called the attention of the Institutions (society and the Church) to the education of the young (the Diocesan Youth Pastoral has included this as a major point in their plans only within the past few decades...; Catholic education according to Vatican Council II has not been studied in depth).
- The regeneration of society, working for the good of the poor and disadvantaged classes which have no voice and no rights
- The creation of personal responsibility for themselves, for society, and for Institutions

Don Bosco triggered a progressive PROCESS by means of INDUSTRIOUS CHARITY, one fit for the young and for a better future: preventive and foreseeing

1. With a loose, informal grouping, he entered into those gaps (of poverty) where liberal society expressed no interest

- **A mutual aid society** for the young who were ill or out of work (1850): weekly dues and the possibility of economic aid (*see Braido, Don Bosco, prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà (Don Bosco, Priest for the Young in the Century of Freedoms)*, pp. 238-239)
- **The festive oratory and the playground:** contact with, being involved without the authority for the role, and participation in life in all its immediacy... the first gathering place, of the unruly, literally, so they could be inserted into and aggregated to society (even those coming from the reformatory)
- Cholera, **courageous volunteering with an industrious faith**, not one of spiritualism or pure self-absorption: they did not become ill, they served – by rendering his young boys and men apostles among their companions, he raised up in them attention to the little ones

His boys followed **the path of service to others as the way to joy and to shared happiness - and not selfish or egotistical happiness**. Serving those who are ill is active charity, but so is having the older ones help the smaller ones learn how to read and write

- Don Bosco proposed to his boys what the Religious usually did and got them involved, trusting in them. They were truly important to him; he wasn't faking it.

In order to educate them to open themselves up: **it was (and is) not enough merely to say it or to suggest it**. It took (and takes) getting them involved in an activity, an initiative, or an experience and then helping them understand its meaning.

2. Formation for the world of work: quality work, not demeaning labor done just for survival. Openness to modern times: (Torino's World's Fair/Expo, winning a medal)

- o Whatever is Christian is fully human; it is not an alternative reality.
- o The Rules and Regulations... (see Bairati, p. 150): the rules and schedules, etc., were learned. This equated to educating to **a responsible socialization**

- Directing them to work with pride was educating them to the right and the duty to contribute to the progress of one's own city or town, and of society

- o to insert themselves as persons into society
- o the protection of minors with their rights and duties; an apprentice's contract. The principle of solidarity and of committing oneself to remove obstacles to full participation in civic life.
- o He taught them to earn their living from their work, joyfully (not like today, making money with money through financial investments...)
- o Bosco prepared them to broaden their horizons, all the way to recent globalization, thanks to the missionary thrust that immediately accompanied his educational plan and involved the young in "thinking big"

3. Schooling for common folk: He put marginalized kids on their feet in regards to life so they might become responsible for themselves

- A social elevator... **How? By getting them completely involved - personally - and "infecting" them with his passion and zeal**

- o Through the wise use of all the means of communication available in his day
- o Sensitizing private citizens and the authorities
- o When he had an idea, he promoted it by seeking out every means possible. He did not develop a plan based only on the means of his immediate disposal.
- o His very person was the best resource for the city of Torino and the surrounding area

Assistance and education in the new Congregations were "so to say, institutionalized, in that they were not considered tangential activities that fell apart or disappeared once the emergency/crisis was over." (De Marco)

Thus, industrious charity is not improvised beneficence but an organized and developed experience/reality

He brought them from being "subjects" to "citizens", without entering into the political polemics which were beyond their understanding in their conflict-laden reality

He created relationships between Religions Congregations and industry and city work (then Fiat) as well as between scholastic publishing and the *Salesian Bulletin*

Relationships with Institutions: not humiliating handouts, but using charity as a means or an instrument to raise one up to the level of self-subsistence and participation in society's progress and the common good

The public authorities took upon themselves many tasks but didn't have the means to reach everyone to help them. Don Bosco cooperated in the same goals with specific means, showing that the Church was not a bunch of do-nothing empty talkers or nostalgic old-timers

In order to give such support, he founded two Religions Congregations, including girls, Salesian Cooperators, Past Pupils, and benefactors of whatever political persuasion

As a way to penetrate into society with its modern languages, without demanding, imposing, and no longer submitting to class privileges...

He created bonds and a wide consensus for his cause – Just as the masonry and socialism had become international, so just as quickly did his Religious Order become international via the foreign Missions. One ideal, one trademark, and one goal

Passion for the young, more than for works. Listening... Priorities: affection, familiarity, a positive atmosphere, and preparation for the future rather than immediate satisfaction

Proposals which were as great as the expectations of his times.

Foreseeing.

The farsightedness of love. Education of expectations

Don Bosco was intransigent in his thinking regarding the "Roman Question," (regarding the temporal power of the Pope). However, when putting his position into context within the history of the times, one recognizes that he was a promoter of the true nature of the laity: dignity, responsibility, trust, and RESPECT FOR OTHERS - the true root and essence of the laity. It recognized not only equality but also equal social dignity, allowing for participation and the removal of obstacles. But how could they attain this goal? It was a matter of relating to others with respect (Constitutions, Laws)

He made them understand responsibility and did not impose it. Convincing is far better than conquering!

He was not upset or shocked by **things that popped up all of a sudden**. Faced with them, he developed initiatives, a vision, a planning mentality. He did not begin with himself, but with others (he was used to doing this from the time he was a little boy, having faced many difficulties). He didn't get lost in polemics and in sterile complaints.

He made himself available; thus, problems resolved rather easily

What the others said, yesterday and today

Because he appreciated Don Bosco, Rattazzi gave him the formula to found Religious Orders in a time when he was suppressing others.

Lombroso: No one has contributed more to the advancement of the marginalized than Don Bosco.

In 1800, attention to the young did not keep pace with technology. The society of the "easy life" feared the requests of the young who squashed the little securities won by the adults and upon which they rested.

He invited them to broaden their vision, to create light in themselves, and to remain involved in their history with a sense of responsibility, taking a stance. (An example for today: Society was once functional but it was not just. We lived well in injustice. We must question ourselves, taking on the concerns of the least and the last; accepting inconveniences in life. Yesterday, today...)

See Di Cicco, *L'uomo venuto dal mare (The Man Who Came from the Sea)*, LEV (Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 2017.