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Nucleus 21°

THE FAMILY ACCORDING TO THE HEART OF DON BOSCO

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In this number of Nucleus (21), we continue our reflection on the family, looking again at Don Bosco as Don Gaetano Zito offers it. We thank him again for sharing his acceptance of Don Bosco's thoughts.

Education is in fact for Don Bosco a "**thing of the heart**": this conviction matured in him in the relationship of love with his **mother Margaret**. "In that climate of divine presence, Margaret proved to be a wise shaper of the character and moral rectitude of her three children. With example and words, she taught them the great virtues of humanism of that time: the sense of duty and work, the daily courage of a hard life, frankness and honesty, good humor. They also learned to respect the elders and willingly open themselves to the service of others. On the other hand, she, calm and strong, was not afraid to "tell it as it is" to those whose words or deeds caused scandal. These examples went deeper into the conscience of the three boys." (Don Cereda, family with mother Margherita's heart)

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (...) we find, condensed in the attitudes of the mother, what Don Bosco, since 1844, had written in his books about the mission of the family and the model of the ideal parent:

- the initiation to prayer;
- school education ("*my mother wanted to send me to school*", MO 34);
- the intelligent and prudent freedom of expression granted to her son to bring out his talents ("*I will tell you that my mother loved me very much; and I had unlimited confidence in her, and without her consent I would not have moved a foot. She knew everything, he observed everything and let me do it. On the contrary, when I needed something, she gave it to me very willingly*", MO 42);
- religious instruction and catechism; the formation of conscience and the warning against bad company;
- encouraging the child's education by entrusting him to a teacher;
- vigilance over the crises of the child ("*I cried inconsolably the deceased benefactor; if he was awake he thought of him, if he slept he dreamed of him, things went so far that my mother, fearing my sanity, sent me some time with my grandfather in Capriglio* » MO 52);
- the economic sacrifice to pave the way for the fulfillment of the child's vocation (the division of assets);
- formative intimacy in the important moments of the child's life (First Communion and entry to the seminary).

(Aldo Giraud, Family model in Don Bosco's vision and experience)

Only a "house" in which the family spirit is alive can form "**Good Christians and honest citizens**", Don Bosco's educational program is convinced that the regeneration of society passes through the Christian experience, which then leads and gives quality to cultural and social commitment. He is convinced that human values are assumed and purified by a life of faith, strengthened by grace. He therefore undertakes to value the human in the Christian, to promote all that is positive in creation in order to evangelize society. He sees in a life of grace the full revelation of the dignity of the children of God. Don Bosco's attention is never turned exclusively to the supernatural dimension. He has real young people in front of him whom he takes care of by

providing food, education, work and helping them to integrate into society in an honest and active way. And this is also the spirit of the Gospel!

Aware that life is generated with life and never by being alone, Don Bosco was able to create an environment saturated with educational love where you can breathe *the air of God and the air of family*. For this reason, the affirmation that *education is a thing of the heart* finds its completion in the clarification: *and God alone is its master*. In fact, the young person's heart does not belong to the educator, nor to anyone else, but to God from whom one comes and to whom one returns. The path towards this return is marked by the discovery and realization of each one's specific vocation: a life at the service of the happiness of others. This is the law of the evangelical beatitudes. The force of expansion generated by love makes you joyful, cheerful, renews the inner energies and enables you to reciprocate the good received.

"Education is a thing of the heart and God alone is its master". For Don Bosco the heart embraces the **totality of the person**, it is the biblical heart: the place where the human being decides the direction of his/her life, shapes his/her will and makes concrete choices. Seat of the motivations that move inwardly to act, the heart can reveal the depth of aspirations that only God knows fully. "Man - in fact - looks at the appearance, the Lord looks at the heart"; a heart capable of loving and forgiving, open to compassion and universal communion. (Colombo Antonia, the answer of Don Bosco's educational method)

Don Bosco, in his educational action, starts from an assumption that has repeatedly been stated: *without religion there can be no true education*. Some moments are privileged for spiritual pedagogy of the family, in particular the common prayers and the preparation for first communion.

For Don Bosco, **educating in a Christian way** means forming in faith and prayer, instructing according to the maxims of the Gospel and the Church, communicating a system which contains both ethics and values, catechizing children, exercising them in the moral, cardinal and theological virtues, preserving them from evil by preventing, with love and good advice (reasoning) the dangers, negative experiences, bad company, correcting their defects and shortcomings ...

The Salesian work develops and becomes a substitute family for children without a family; support of the weakest families; coaching and strengthening of the formative work of "normal" and "good" families.

Don Bosco had relationships with many families: of pupils, past pupils, benefactors, public figures; and he often intervened to address educational problems by offering advice, suggesting solutions, calling for responsibility, admonishing about possible dangers, comforting in situations of suffering, always encouraging and stimulating (Don Bosco's immense correspondence attests to this attention of his). And it is curious to note that, in offering food for thought to the parents, he always drew on the Valdocco model; as if to say that he thought of the family as a small oratory. If he had drawn inspiration from his family for his first oratory, now he believed that the oratory could become an inspiration for any family that shared his same passion for life and therefore for education.

Therefore, it is to the oratory that we have to turn to think of a **family according to the heart of Don Bosco**. The measures put in place by Don Bosco to reproduce the relational and affective family climate and the style of coexistence that is closest to the natural environment of the family have become **a system, a formative method** that has had fruitful repercussions on the history of pedagogy and subsequent pastoral care.

Mary, Help of Christians, inspirer of Don Bosco's educational method, always present in his life as a support and guide, help us today to recover the soul of the preventive system to educate our children and young people. May she awaken Don Bosco's passion for education and audacity so that we can help generate life and hope in the hearts of many young people and of the family.

WORKSHEET FOR THE CONFEDERAL, FEDERATION, UNION COUNCILS AND FOR ALL PAST PUPILS OF THE WORLD.

- ✓ Read carefully the text offered to us by Don Gaetano.
- ✓ Describe, in one sentence, the family today.
- ✓ Find a fundamental challenge in forming a family today.
- ✓ Propose a Salesian response to this challenge.

Please send your personal or group response by e-mail to delegatamondialeexallieve@gmail.com or by regular mail to the address:
Via dell'Ateneo Salesiano, 81 - 00139 Rome RM

Pray Together

Lord Jesus,
for thirty years, You wanted to live
in the bosom of the holy family of Nazareth,
and You instituted the sacrament of marriage
so that Christian families
would be founded and united in Your love,
please bless and sanctify my family.

Always remain in the midst of my family
with Your light and Your grace.

Bless our initiatives
and keep us safe from disease and misfortune;
give us courage in the days of trial
and strength to bear all pain we encounter together.

Always accompany us with Your divine help,
So that we can accomplish
our mission in earthly life with fidelity
and then find ourselves united forever
in the joy of Your kingdom.

Amen.