



**The Concept of *menein* in the Gospel of John:
A Source of Inspiration for Salesian Youth Ministry**

Kenneth Micallef S.Th.B.

Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
of Master in Theology (Top-up degree)

Faculty of Theology
University of Malta

July 2023



University of Malta Library – Electronic Thesis & Dissertations (ETD) Repository

The copyright of this thesis/dissertation belongs to the author. The author's rights in respect of this work are as defined by the Copyright Act (Chapter 415) of the Laws of Malta or as modified by any successive legislation.

Users may access this full-text thesis/dissertation and can make use of the information contained in accordance with the Copyright Act provided that the author must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

The concept of *menein* in the Gospel of John runs throughout this gospel like a golden thread, and though it presents us with various possible interpretations, it culminates in the love that exists between the Son and the Father, which in turn is shared with the disciples in a relationship of friendship. This friendship has inspired many Christian authors and saints, amongst them St Francis de Sales. This saint made use of the Johannine *menein* concept to present a spirituality based on the loving union of hearts. St John Bosco, commonly known with the familiar name of “Don Bosco,” was intrigued and inspired by this spirituality. It led him to start a Religious Congregation that bears the name of St Francis de Sales, the “Salesian” Congregation. His Preventive System, which serves as basis for all Salesian youth ministry, is rooted in this spirituality.

This study looks at how St John Bosco’s friendship with and abiding in God matured in such a way that he was led to propose this same friendship with God to the young persons he encountered, so that they too could abide in God, in time and in eternity. He achieved this through a pastoral method to which today we refer to as ‘Salesian youth ministry.’ It is a pastoral proposal, a journey that enfolds and embraces various dimensions that can find a central point: *menein* – inhabiting a safe place, a place that favours growth and maturity. It is characterised by four dimensions: 1) education to faith, 2) educational and cultural formation, 3) the communal and social experience, which together ultimately lead to 4) discover God’s call from within the intimate experience of “abiding” with God.

John’s concept of *menein* offers a privileged standpoint to contemplate the charism of St John Bosco. From this contemplative stance one can enter into the depth of the Salesian charism which is entrusted to us today for the benefit of so many young people who are asking the same question that the first disciples in John’s Gospel put to Jesus: “Where do you abide?” The answer to this question expects educators and witnesses to help the young generation and accompany them on this journey of discovery.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to
my Mother and Father
Lucia and John
for thier constant love
and Christian witness
and to the Salesian Congregation
from which I have learnt so much

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
 Introduction	 1
Chapter 1: <i>Menein</i> as Part of John’s Theological Vocabulary	4
1.1 <i>Menein</i> : Physical and Spiritual Meaning in John’s Vocabulary	7
1.2 The Importance and Recurrence of <i>menein</i> in the Johannine Narrative	8
1.3 <i>Menein</i> in Relation to other Johannine Symbolic Terms	11
Conclusion	15
 Chapter 2: <i>Menein</i> as a Medium to the Message	 16
2.1 <i>Menein</i> used in a Physical Sense	16
2.2 <i>Menein</i> used in a Spiritual Sense	18
2.3 The Challenge of Understanding the Intended Meaning of <i>menein</i>	22
2.4 <i>Menein</i> in John 15	22
2.5 The “Abiding” of the Son in the Father: A Model of the Disciples’ “abiding” in Jesus	25
Conclusion	29
 Chapter 3: <i>Menein</i> as a Core Value of Salesian Youth Ministry	 30
3.1 Don Bosco’s Invitation for Youth “to abide”	33
3.2 The Oratorian Idea as an Expression of <i>menein</i>	40
3.3 The Preventive System of Don Bosco: a Means to <i>menein</i>	45
Conclusion	47
 Chapter 4: Salesian Youth Ministry: The Four Basic Principles Enlightened by the Notion of <i>menein</i>	 48
4.1 Education to Faith - the Transcendent Aspect: a Call to <i>ginosko</i> and to <i>menein</i>	49
4.2 Education to Culture - Cultural Aspect: In the World but not of the World	54
4.3 Social Experience - Solidarity/Missionary Experience: Remaining in the Vine to bear Fruit	56
4.4 Vocational Dimension - The Call: The Samaritan Woman as a Model of Evangelisation ..	60
Conclusion	63
 Conclusion	 65
 Bibliography	 68
 Appendix 1: Don Bosco’s Ministry with the Youth: a Historical Background	 78
Appendix 2: The Dream of Nine Years	82
Appendix 3: The Preventive System	83

Acknowledgements

First of all I am grateful to God for giving me the opportunity and grace to be able to present this dissertation. I wish to thank also those who have encouraged and assisted me while I have been working on this study, especially Rev. Dr Fabio Attard SDB, Rev. Robert Falzon SDB, and Rev. Dr Paul Formosa SDB.

A special thanks goes to Rev. Dr Martin Micallef OFMCap., for his constant assistance and expertise during the preparation of this dissertation and for inspiring me to continue to delve deeper into the Fourth Gospel.

Introduction

This work will be dealing with the use and the importance of the verb *menein* (to abide) in the Gospel of John. The use of this verb is not only of great importance for the theology of this gospel, but it is also a source of inspiration for Salesian youth ministry. The aim of this work is therefore to show how biblical concepts can be translated into the Christian daily life, with special reference to youth ministry. In order to do so, we will first study the theme of *menein* in the Gospel of John, and then will try to apply our results to the life and ministry of St John Bosco and, consequently, in Salesian youth ministry today. For the first part of this work, we will be using the historical critical method and the synchronic method. For the second part will be using bibliographical material related to the Salesian spirituality.

The Gospel of John has been called a “maverick gospel”¹ due to the fact that the Fourth Evangelist perceives the life and ministry of Jesus in a very particular way, distinct from the other three canonical Gospels. He does so by means of the narrative expressed through his own point of view. Throughout this narrative, the Fourth Evangelist uses a very limited number of words. Nevertheless, what seems to be a limited number of words on the surface level of the narrative, may easily deceive the readers, because a number of the words he employs have multiple meanings.

Menein is one of these words which John uses in his narrative. Sometimes the Fourth Evangelist uses this notion in a physical sense giving the impression of someone “remaining” with someone/somewhere. In other instances, *menein* is used in a spiritual sense, namely, that of “abiding” in someone. This ambiguity creates a problem not only to translators but also to the interpreters of this gospel. These difficulties will be presented in the first part of this dissertation, when we will study the different uses of *menein* in the Gospel of John. We will be looking at texts which employ this term.

As a matter of fact, the Fourth Evangelist uses *menein* from the very beginning of the narrative, when he speaks about John the Baptist’s witness to Jesus. *Menein* is also found in

1 Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

the episode of the call of the first two disciples and in the episode in which we read the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well. The same verb is also employed with more emphasis in the Bread of Life discourse in Jn 6. It is then repeated for various times in Jn 15, when Jesus speaks about the vine and the branches. The Johannine Jesus reminds the disciples that in order to bear fruit they must “remain/abide” in Him, as He abides in the Father. Moreover, we will argue that *meinein* is a term related to other important terms in John, all expressing the essence of discipleship.

All this will help us to see how this important Johannine term serves as basis for Salesian spirituality. We will argue that although St John Bosco did not write any theological treatise on the Gospel of John, it is clear how much he had been influenced by his theology, especially with the notion of abiding as a means of remaining in Jesus’ love. We will do this in the second part of this work which starts with a biographical note on St John Bosco and his ministry with the youth.

Here we will try to show how the Industrial Revolution was the cause for so many people in Italy to leave the countryside with the hope of finding a better life in the great cities. Turin was the city that mostly experienced this urban development. This was precisely the place where St John Bosco lived and encountered a number of young people who found themselves in great need. It was in this historical context of nineteenth century Italy that Don Bosco performed his ministry. He was inspired to concentrate his priestly ministry on helping these young people. His Preventive System, a synthesis of his style of education, may be considered an original way of how he translated the Johannine notion of “abiding in Jesus” into the daily life of these destitute young people.

Throughout his priestly ministry, St John Bosco helped the young to discover and live an upright ethical Christian life which prevented them from ending up as criminals and allowed them to savour the beauty of upright citizenship and honest Christian living. One way of doing this was by providing them a home in order to help them learn how “to abide” together in the light of the gospel message. An important characteristic in all this work was his proposal of creating an environment with a strong sense of family spirit, which eventually then aided to foster healthy friendships, even spiritual ones.

From an early age, Don Bosco nurtured a deep union with God and was imbued by the Spirit. He felt the call to propose this abiding with God to the young in the form of friendship with Jesus. It was ultimately his abiding in God that led him to propose to the young to abide in God so that their joy may be complete. He managed to do this through pastoral charity and a spirituality based on the union of hearts as developed by St Francis de Sales.

What St John Bosco has proposed and lived with the young ones of his time continued to mature into the Salesian youth ministry of today. Its operative dimensions, upon which the *Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project* for the young is based, involves four basic principles related to the notion of “remaining”/“abiding.” These are education to faith; education to culture; social experience; and the vocational dimension. Combined together, these dimensions offer the young ones of today a holistic education and evangelisation. In return they could discover God’s love and abide in Him through a relationship of friendship while discovering God’s call for them, and in Him find their fulfilment.

Chapter 1

***Menein* as Part of John's Theological Vocabulary**

The Gospel of John is a theological masterpiece that has been for long deeply meditated and thoroughly studied. Although it uses a very simple vocabulary which consists of only around a thousand Greek words, it does make use of it in a surprising way. On the other hand, John's Gospel is very different from the Synoptic Gospels. Certain words such as *pisteuo* (to believe), *kosmos* (world), *agape* (love), *opsesthe* (to see), *zoe* (life), *pater* (father), *menō* (to abide), *ginosko* (to know), *zeteo* (to seek) and others, are used quite often in John's Gospel, but not as much in the Synoptics.¹ John's vocabulary, therefore, already gives a particular theological tone to this gospel.

Our focus in this chapter will be on the use of the verb *menein* in the Gospel of John, by referring to different sources and commentaries. We will explore the meaning of *menein* or rather the root word *menō*. In studying the use of this verb in John's Gospel, one cannot miss the difficulty in translating it from Greek into English. It is translated as "to remain," other times it can also be translated as "to abide" or "to dwell" and as "to endure" or "to stay." This means that it can be used in a physical sense with reference to a particular physical place, usually also in a particular time. Yet, it can also be used in a spiritual sense, where it usually refers to a spiritual union, such as the union between the Father and the Son.

The verb *menein* is found 118 times in the New Testament, with 40 of its occurrences found in the Gospel of John, 27 occurrences in the Johannine Epistles and once in the Book of Revelation.² The frequency of its occurrence indicates the importance of this term to the Johannine literature. On the other hand, when compared to the Synoptic Gospels, we can note that *menein* occurs here only 12 times.³

The root word *menō* can take the following meanings: "to remain, abide." This could be "in reference to place," hence "to sojourn, tarry," "not to depart," "to continue to be

¹ See <https://www.monergism.com/key-words-gospel-john> (accessed on 20 February 2022).

² See https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_3306.htm (accessed on 21 February 2022).

³ See *ibid.*

present,” “to be held, kept, continually.” Its meaning can be also related to “in reference to time,” therefore, “to continue to be, not to perish, to last, endure.” It could also be used with reference to time “of persons,” hence, “to survive, live” or “in reference to state or condition,” therefore, “to remain as one, not to become another or different.” It could also mean “to wait for, await one.”⁴ Other dictionaries define the word *menō* as “to stay, abide, remain.”⁵

Moulton suggests the following meanings: “to stay; to continue; to dwell, lodge, sojourn (John 1:39); to remain (John 9:41); to rest, settle (John 1:32,33; 3:36); to last, endure (John 6:27); to survive, to be existent; to continue unchanged; to be permanent (John 15:16); to persevere, be constant, be steadfast; to abide, to be in close and settled union (John 6:56, 14:10, 15:4); to indwell (John 5:38), to wait for.”⁶ According to Brown it could mean “‘remain,’ ‘abide,’ ‘stay,’ ‘dwell on’.”⁷ According to Bauer *et al.*, it could mean “remain or stay (intransitive); to continue to exist, remain, last, persist, continue to live (intransitive) and wait for or await used transitive.”⁸ Arndt and Gingrich state that it could mean “remain, stay, live, dwell, lodge, continue, abide, and continue to live.”⁹ Louw and Nida “list the verb under the domain of relations and the subdomain of association. John 15:4 is the one verse that is listed as ‘remain in me and I (will remain) in you.’”¹⁰ Schneiders considers *menein* as “a quasi-technical term for union with Jesus.”¹¹

All these dictionary attempts to explain the verb *menein* show that in the Greek version it is easier to note every occurrence of *menein* and the pattern that is being created by the way it is used, since we can always note the root word *meno* being present. This might be more challenging when translated into different words throughout the English version of

⁴ See <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/lexicon.show/ID/g3306/page/1> (accessed on 21 February 2022).

⁵ See <https://biblehub.com/greek/3306.htm> (accessed on 21 February 2022).

⁶ Quoted in Adriaan Johannes and Jacobus Stander, “*Menein* as Key to a Mystical Reading of John 15,” (University of the Free State), 5.

⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, vol. 29 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008a), 510.

⁸ Stander, “*Menein* as Key to a Mystical Reading of John 15,” 5.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written that You may Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 143.

the Gospel. Such different words might be translated as: abiding, staying, dwelling, remaining and other words. This might cause the reader to miss out what the original author intended by the pervasive use of the verb *menein*. “Alter protests that most modern English translations have not been able to appreciate this technique and, therefore, they ‘constantly [translate] the same word with different English equivalents for the sake of fluency and supposed precision.’”¹²

If on the other hand one always translates *menein* as “abiding,” the technique employed by the author throughout this gospel would be more visible to the reader. Different meanings can already be conveyed by the use of *menein* throughout the Gospel of John, even though not every occurrence of *menein* may have exactly the same meaning. However, the links, patterns and rhythm created throughout the gospel by the repetitive use of *menein* and the way it is distributed creates a certain ‘dynamic,’ which is already very rich in conveying a lot of meaning to its readers.¹³

“Heise has observed that *menein* outside of the Johannine literature ‘ist ein Wort der alltaulichen Sprache,’”¹⁴ that is, it is a word of common language. Therefore, we can note that outside the Johannine world it does not seem to have any particular importance. On the other hand, “the repetitious use of *menein* in the gospel may then signify more a strategic use than simply a word choice.”¹⁵ In fact, the identity and mission of Jesus have been revealed via this term. Moreover, it categorizes the different responses of different characters towards Jesus. Ironically, it is also employed for those who respond negatively to Jesus. This “helps distance the reader from Jesus’ opponents on the one hand, and draw him/her to the implied author’s view on the other.”¹⁶

¹² Poling Joe Sun, “*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions: An Integrated Approach to the Motif of Abiding in the Fourth Gospel, I and II John,” *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (1993): 12.

¹³ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

1.1 *Menein*: Physical and Spiritual Meaning in John's Vocabulary

Schneiders defines the Fourth Gospel as “a body of water in which a child can wade and an elephant can swim, that is, that even the simplest reader can understand it at one level whereas its meaning continues to deepen the longer one deals with it.”¹⁷ The way the author of the Gospel of John makes use of his vocabulary does in fact give way to multiple levels of meaning. Therefore, one has the possibility to delve deep into these layers of meaning and continue to discover the richness of the message that John's Gospel conveys to the reader. In this way, the reader may appreciate and contemplate what the author intended by the use of his vocabulary.

At times, certain words employed in the Johannine narrative gain more theological meaning as the narrative unfolds. Initially, some words may appear to be quite ambiguous, as they may have more than one meaning and can even cause misunderstanding. The verb *menein* is one of these words. Many times, though not always, it is the context that helps us to bring out the meaning of this term in John.¹⁸ The reason for this is that while the use of *menein* may carry a physical meaning, in other instances it has a spiritual meaning. The more the evangelist uses this term, the more it takes on a deeper meaning. In spite of this, it is not always easy to determine the exact meaning in its use within the narrative of this gospel. In the words of Bultmann:

Johannine misunderstandings do not arise from a word having two meanings and the respondent choosing the wrong one but from 'concepts and statements, which at first sight refer to earthly matters, but properly refer to divine matters. The misunderstanding comes when someone sees the right meaning of the word but mistakenly imagines that its meaning is exhausted by reference to earthly matters...'¹⁹

Hence, it is recommended that the reader does not simply read the surface meaning of the text, since the text may suggest other meanings of the words being used. One must also be attentive to the style employed by the author. At times, the author makes use of some

¹⁷ Schneiders, *Written that You may Believe*, 28.

¹⁸ See Martin Micallef, “The Fourth Gospel as a Textual Field of Meaning,” *Melita Theologica* 64, no.2 (2014): 5-17.

¹⁹ Quoted in R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 152.

literary devices, such as irony, in a way that the characters involved do not understand the true meaning of Jesus' words.

This is particularly true when "the Jews" are involved, a category which John uses in order to denote unbelief. The Johannine use of this term "has no nationalistic meaning since it distinguishes 'Jews' from others of the same national, religious, cultural group and designates a group with a constant, unchanging hostility toward Jesus."²⁰ For this reason, we may consider the use of "the Jews" in John as a literary category to refer to those who do not believe and thus do not understand the true meaning of Jesus' words. By using this strategy, the author challenges the reader not to fall in the same pitfall of "the Jews." Instead, they are invited to truly believe in the One whom God has sent for the salvation of all.

Lee distinguishes between the literal and symbolic meanings of *menein*. He states that *menein* is frequently found "in the formula 'to abide in/on' (*menein en*), but it is also used in the colloquial sense of 'stay' or 'remain.'" ²¹ He continues to say that "in some instances it is difficult to determine whether the literal or symbolic meaning is required."²² He clarifies how "in its theological sense the word *menein* overlaps with other Johannine conceptions such as unity, oneness, love, and indwelling," and that "in particular, it is related to the Johannine understanding of disciples as 'friends' of Jesus."²³

1.2 The Importance and Recurrence of *menein* in the Johannine Narrative

Although most Johannine scholars highlight the importance of *menein* in John's theology, they usually focus more on its use in Jn 15. This is due to the fact that *menein* is used extensively in the vine and the branches image. Unfortunately, these studies tend to overlook the use of *menein* throughout the rest of this gospel and miss out on what the author wanted to convey by the use of this term.

²⁰ Ibid., 125-126.

²¹ Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 2022), 88-89.

²² Stander, "Menein as Key to a Mystical Reading of John 15," 5.

²³ Ibid., 5-6.

Menein occurs five times in Chapter 1,²⁴ once in Chapter 2,²⁵ once in Chapter 3,²⁶ twice in Chapter 4,²⁷ once in Chapter 5,²⁸ twice in Chapter 6,²⁹ once in Chapter 7,³⁰ three times in Chapter 8,³¹ once in Chapter 9,³² once in Chapter 10,³³ twice in Chapter 11,³⁴ three times in Chapter 12³⁵ and three more times in Chapter 14.³⁶ It occurs in every chapter from Chapter 1 to Chapter 14, with the exception of Chapter 13. It is then used eleven times in Chapter 15³⁷ alone, making up a bit more than a quarter of the total count of the occurrences of *menein* in the Gospel of John. It is then used once in Chapter 19³⁸ and twice in Chapter 21.³⁹ These statistical checks show how the verb *menein* runs like a golden thread throughout this gospel, and thus indicates its importance for John's theology.

We will now look into how *menein* occurs in the major components of the gospel. These are the Prologue (1:1-51), the Book of Signs (Jesus' Ministry) (2:1-12:50), the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31), and the Epilogue (21:1-25). The occurrences of *menein* in the first chapter of John's Gospel, in particular in Jn 1:29-51, are important since they help us to understand who Jesus is in relation to God, the one on whom the Spirit abides; and what his mission is, in relation to his disciples. The fact that the Spirit descends on Jesus and remains on Him as we read in Jn 1:32 shows how *menein* is interwoven with the descent-ascent schema, which is a very important theme throughout the gospel.⁴⁰

The "Book of Signs" makes extensive use of *menein*. Its main importance here is twofold. First and foremost, it continues to describe Jesus' identity and mission in terms of

²⁴ Cfr. Jn 1:32, Jn 1:33, Jn 1:38 and twice in Jn 1:39.

²⁵ Cfr. Jn 2:12.

²⁶ Cfr. Jn 3:36.

²⁷ Cfr. Jn 4:40.

²⁸ Cfr. Jn 5:38.

²⁹ Cfr. Jn 6:27 and Jn 6:56.

³⁰ Cfr. Jn 7:9.

³¹ Cfr. Jn 8:31 and twice in Jn 8:35.

³² Cfr. Jn 9:41.

³³ Cfr. Jn 10:40.

³⁴ Cfr. Jn 11:6 and Jn 11:54.

³⁵ Cfr. Jn 12:24, Jn 12:34 and Jn 12:46.

³⁶ Cfr. Jn 14:10, Jn 14:17 and Jn 14:25.

³⁷ Cfr. three times in Jn 15:4, Jn 15:5, Jn 15:6, twice in Jn 15:7, Jn 15:9, twice in Jn 15:10 and Jn 15:16.

³⁸ Cfr. Jn 19:31.

³⁹ Cfr. Jn 21:22 and Jn 21:23.

⁴⁰ See Sun, "*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions," 19-26.

the descent-ascent schema. In Jn 6:26-58 Jesus declares himself to be the bread from heaven ('from above'), and that anyone who partakes in it abides in Him. In Jn 12:24-26 Jesus speaks about the grain of wheat that dies and bears much fruit. This also refers to Jesus who dies and ascends to the Father to abide with Him, after being raised from the dead.

However, *menein* is also very important in categorizing the various responses towards Jesus, that is, those who abide and respond positively towards Jesus' invitation, and those who do not abide and hence respond negatively to Jesus. We find characters that respond positively to Jesus, such as the Samaritans who believed because of His word (Jn 4:39-42). We also find characters that respond negatively to Jesus, such as the Pharisees in Chapter 9 who refuse to believe in Jesus who has just healed the blind man. Hence, they are the ones who are not seeing the light. "The Jews" who oppose Jesus are said to have God's wrath abiding on them (Jn 3:36). On the other hand, those who believe and abide in Him will have eternal life (Jn 3:15-16). So, the difference between the two groups relies on their response to Jesus and *menein* plays a crucial role in delineating the difference between these two groups.

In "the Book of Glory," *menein* undergoes a certain development. Whilst also continuing on its previous trajectory, it now becomes important to define the application of *menein* to the Johannine Christians. This is very evident in the Farewell Discourse, particularly in Chapter 15. At this point, *menein* takes a more communal perspective as its focus becomes more concerned with the identity of the community and the behaviour of the community members towards each other in terms of love.⁴¹

Hence, we can note that "the *menein* motif is interwoven with other leading themes in the Fourth Gospel and that together they sustain the development of the gospel story."⁴² In fact, *menein* is "carefully worked into the telling of the story."⁴³ It has a "recurrent pattern" and a great "symbolic capacity."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Cfr. Ibid., 37-46.

⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

1.3 *Menein* in Relation to other Johannine Symbolic Terms

Menein is a very important symbolic term that pervades the Gospel of John, reaching its climax in the Farewell Discourse. However, it is not used in a vacuum, without any relation to other symbolic terms that are also found in John's Gospel. We will try to show this by considering other Johannine terms such as: see [*opsesthe*], life [*zoe*], love [*agape*], know [*ginosko*], truth [*aletheia*], light [*phos*], to be in [*einai en*], seeking [*zeteo*], hear [*akouo*], welcome [*lambano*], word [*logos*], Father [*Pater*], sonship [*huios*], glory [*doxa*], keep [*tereo*] and others. We can usually find the opposite of these terms on the other end of the dualistic spectrum which are employed throughout the gospel, such as: 'the world' [*kosmos*], 'the Jews' [*hoi Ioudaioi*], darkness [*skotia*], sin [*hamartia*], blind [*tuphlos*], slave [*doulos*] and others which are used to refer to those who do not abide in Jesus.

Starting with the term *pisteuo* (to believe), we can state that it is one of the most frequent terms in the Gospel of John. In fact, it is found 98 times⁴⁵ since the Gospel of John was mainly written for the readers to believe as one finds in Jn 20:31. Brown makes reference to "the problem about the audience of readers envisioned by the writer: those who already believe or those who do not yet believe."⁴⁶ We find various instances in the Gospel of John where *menein* and *pisteuo* are strongly associated. For example, after Jesus abided with the Samaritans, we read that they believed in Him because of His own Word. Hence, the abiding of Jesus with them led the Samaritans to believe. We can also note the strong link with believing, abiding and the word of Jesus, hence to abide in His word. In fact, we also find an instance which is the opposite to what happened with the Samaritans. In Jn 5:36-40 we read that 'the Jews' did not believe in Jesus because they did not abide in His Word.

In continuity with *menein* and *pisteuo*, we can find the term *lambano*, which essentially means "to welcome" or "to actively receive."⁴⁷ This term as well is used to classify between those who accept to become disciples of Christ and those who reject Him. We can

⁴⁵ <https://www.monergism.com/key-words-gospel-john> (accessed on 20 February 2022).

⁴⁶ Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 1059.

⁴⁷ <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/lexicon.show/ID/g2983/page/3> (accessed on 9 March 2022).

therefore already clearly see the association with the term *menein*, since it classifies those who abide in Christ and those who do not.

For example, in John 14:17 Jesus himself makes the distinction between “the world” which does not receive Him and, on the other hand, the disciples who receive the Spirit of Truth because they know him and receive Him and therefore abides in them. In Jn 17:8 Jesus prays for his disciples, described as the ones who received His words and believed that He was sent by the Father. Therefore, here we can see the link also between receiving and believing, and how believing is the first step leading to abiding.

At this point we can also add the term “to know,” in Greek *ginosko*. In Jn 14:17 we read that “the world” cannot receive Him because it does not know Him, but the disciples know the Spirit of Truth and he abides in them. In Jn 8:31-32 we read that the disciples “will know the truth” and that the truth will set them free.

Another term which is closely related to *menein* is *opsesthe* (seeing). In Jn 1:39 we read how Jesus invites the first two disciples to “come and see,” as an answer to the Baptist’s disciples’ query about the place of Jesus’ abode. After they came and saw where He abided, we read that they abided with Jesus. We come to a fuller understanding when in Jn 1:51 Jesus says: “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Another example of seeing is found in Jn 9:39: “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.” In this verse, Jesus is referring to the Pharisees who become blind (*tuphlos*), hence not seeing, because they refuse to believe in Him. This is in turn associated with sin (*amartia*). In the Gospel of John, sin is unbelief. Since the Pharisees refuse to believe, in Jn 9:41 we read that their sin remains/abides (*menein*) in them. Hence, John connects the concept of sin with symbolic blindness, namely not perceiving the identity of Jesus Christ as Son of God, and thus refusing his salvation.

Those who abide in Him can see him because they live through him. They keep (*terein*) Jesus' commandments of love and hence they can see the Son and the Father as we can see in Jn 14:20-21. The Son will consequently show himself to them. This keeping of commandments implies loving Jesus. In Jn 15:10 we can note that those who keep the commandments will abide in his love. Hence, through these two verses, we note that we can easily equate keeping the commandments with abiding in the love of Jesus and also loving Jesus back, that is, mutual love (*agape*) and mutual abiding (*menein*). On the other hand, those who disobey and do not keep his commandments do not believe, are not born 'from above' (Jn 3:3), do not abide, and will not see life (3:36).

The notion of blindness is in opposition to light. In Jn 8 Jesus declares himself as the light of the world and that whoever follows him as his disciple (or abides in Him) will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. This link between life and light is already present in the Prologue in Jn 1:4, where we read that "the life was the light of all people." In Jn 12:35-36 Jesus invites the crowd to believe in the Light so that they may not walk in darkness, not knowing where they are going, but become children of Light. Also, in Jn 3:19-21 we read that those who sin and "do evil hate the light and do not come to the light." On the other hand, "those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God," since they are the ones who abide in God.

Another important theme related to *menein* is sonship. Here we find the symbolic terms "received" and "believed," and by association also *menein*. Those who abide in God become children of God. On the other hand, in Jn 8:34-36 we read that those who commit sin are slaves to sin and do not abide in the household, but those who have sonship in God abide forever in the household of God and will be free. In Jn 14:2-3 we are further told that Jesus will prepare dwelling places (*monai*) in His Father's house for his disciples to abide with him forever in union with the Father. The disciples will not be left as orphans⁴⁸ and will no longer be called slaves but friends because Jesus had made everything that he had heard from His Father known to them.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cfr. Jn 14:18.

⁴⁹ Cfr. Jn 15:15.

Ultimately, abiding in God is strongly connected with fruit bearing, that is, doing the work of the Father, and by consequence giving glory to God through love. In Jn 14:10-14 we read that the disciples who believe in Jesus will also do the works that Jesus does.⁵⁰ Jn 14:11 “indicates a relation between believing, abiding, and work.”⁵¹ “The triangular relationship among the Father, Jesus, and his disciples logically suggests that the disciples will work (14:14).”⁵² However, in the metaphor of the vine, we find that a branch can bear fruit only if it continues to abide in the vine.

Brown states that *einai en* “is synonymous with *menein en*, except the *menein* has the added note of permanence.”⁵³ However, “*einai en* is occasionally used to construe a negative state of being.”⁵⁴ On the other hand, “*menein* is rarely used negatively.”⁵⁵

One final term that we will look at, as we find it quite often present with *menein*, is the Greek term *zeteo*, which means ‘to seek,’ usually referring to an active sort of seeking. The term *zeteo* is already present in Chapter 1, when Jesus asks those whom he saw following him: “What do you seek?”⁵⁶ They answer by asking him where he is abiding. In turn, Jesus invites them to “Come and see.”⁵⁷ John therefore relates *zeteo* with *menein*, mainly a seeking that leads to abiding with Jesus.⁵⁸

This presentation has revealed how *menein* is closely linked to another set of terms used by John to convey his message. Such terms, together with *menein*, distinguish and clearly categorize those who are true disciples of Jesus and therefore abide in him, and those who are not his disciples and therefore do not abide in him.

⁵⁰ Cfr. Jn 14:12.

⁵¹ Sun, “*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions,” 40.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 510.

⁵⁴ Sun, “*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions,” 147.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jn 1:38.

⁵⁷ Jn 1:39.

⁵⁸ See Micallef, “The Fourth Gospel as a Textual Field of Meaning,” 5-17.

Conclusion

In this first chapter we have presented the use and meaning of the verb *menein* in the Gospel of John. We have seen the difficulty in translating this Greek term into English, due to the fact that there is more than one term that may be used. Moreover, each translation may indicate a difference in the meaning of *menein*, since it may simply be used in a physical sense, or in a spiritual sense. It seems that the more the Fourth Evangelist uses this term, the more *menein* gains a theological meaning.

In the next chapter we will be looking into the physical and the spiritual use of *menein* throughout the Gospel of John. We will argue that at times *menein* carries a physical meaning and at other times it has a deep spiritual meaning. However, there are other instances in John when it is difficult to determine which is the exact meaning of *menein*. In these cases, rather than distinguishing between the physical or the spiritual meaning of this term, the reader may need to rely more on the context in which it is being used or simply hold the two meanings “together in an inseparable unity.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Robert Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, Third ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 162.

Chapter 2

Menein as a Medium to the Message

This chapter aims to look at the different uses of *menein* in the Gospel of John. We will give examples from the text how this verb is used by the Fourth Evangelist both in a physical sense and in a spiritual sense.¹ At the same time, we will argue that there are instances when it is not easy to distinguish between the two senses. To deduce the meaning of such instances, one must take into consideration the context in which *menein* is used. This may also result in one having to keep both senses together rather making a clear-cut distinction. This exercise will help us to show how the more the Fourth Evangelist uses *menein*, the more this verb takes on theological nuances, especially when it is used in relation with the theme of discipleship.

2.1 *Menein* used in a Physical Sense

A number of instances where *menein* is used throughout the Fourth Gospel indicate that it should be understood in a physical sense, that is, Jesus staying with someone else, or vice-versa. Thus, for example, at the end of the episode of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman we read: “So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.”² What the people of this village are asking from Jesus here is to stay with them physically, a request that Jesus accedes to by “staying” with them for two days, which indicates a short period of time.³

The physical aspect of *menein* here can be inferred from the reference of time, namely “two days,” and the reference to the territory involved, namely “Samaria.” However, this does not exclude that the author had other intentions for the use of *menein* at this point of the narrative. One may also say that as a result of “their acceptance of the abiding presence of

¹ It is not the purpose of this Chapter to go through all the instances of *menein* in the Gospel of John. Rather some examples will be provided to highlight the different nuances of *menein* in this gospel.

² Jn 4:40.

³ On this point see, Rudolf Schnakenberg, *The Gospel according to St John* (New York; Crossroad, 1982), 1:455-456.

Jesus” the Samaritans were brought to “a new level of believing.”⁴ If so, John has used *menein* here both in a physical sense and also with a deeper implication.

D. A. Carson highlights the role of the Samaritan woman’s testimony as a bridging point between Jesus and the village people, which ultimately led to the point where the Samaritans themselves become first-hand witnesses. They trusted Jesus and asked him to stay with them so that they themselves became witnesses, and indeed the harvest yield grew because “many more believed because of his word.”⁵ By Jesus staying with them, they came to “know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”⁶ Hence, Jesus’ abiding with them led them to discover for themselves His true identity.⁷

The episode of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is another instance where the Fourth Evangelist seems to be using *menein* in a physical sense. Here we read that when Martha and Mary send a message to Jesus to inform him about Lazarus’ illness, Jesus responded by “staying” where he was, instead of leaving for Bethany.⁸ In this way we may interpret *menein* here in connection with a particular physical location.

Menein is used also in the Passion Narratives. In Jn 19:31, the narrator informs the reader that: “Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath.”⁹ It is clear, that here, John is using this verb in a physical sense, that is, “the Jews” wanted to dispose of the body of Jesus due to the laws which regulated the feast they were celebrating.¹⁰

⁴ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 225.

⁵ Jn 4:41.

⁶ Jn 4:42.

⁷ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 231.

⁸ See Jn 11:6.

⁹ “The Mosaic law insisted that anyone hanged on a gibbet (usually after execution) should not remain there overnight (Dt. 21:22, 23). Such a person was under God’s curse, and to leave him exposed would be to ‘desecrate the land.’ Presumably this would be viewed as doubly offensive if the day on which the desecration took place was a ‘special Sabbath.’ So the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1991), 489.

¹⁰ One cannot miss here the ironic note employed by the author in stating that it was “the Jews” themselves who asked Pilate for Jesus’ body not to remain on the cross. (On the point see, Sun, “*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions: An Integrated Approach to the Motif of Abiding in the Fourth Gospel, I and II John,” 47.

At the end of this gospel, then, we encounter the use of *menein* for the very last time. In Jn 21:22 we read about the Beloved Disciple's destiny as explained by Jesus himself in terms of the duration of his physical life. Brown interprets *menein* here as one that "can mean 'to stay alive' as in I Cor xv 6, and that is the idea here."¹¹ This means that *menein* here is related to space and time, that is, the Beloved Disciple's life was to remain/endure until Jesus comes again.

The above texts are some examples among many others that furnish concrete examples of how the use of the verb *menein* is used and interpreted in a physical sense in the Gospel of John. We have argued that in these instances, *menein* is rather bound to a place or a certain physical space, where someone is staying/remaining. It also involves the time concept; a particular time period.

2.2 *Menein* used in a Spiritual Sense

John, however uses this term also with a spiritual sense. This may be seen already in the first use of *menein* in this gospel, namely in Jn 1:32. Here we read: "John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him'." Rudolf Schnackenburg affirms that the "full and permanent possession of the Spirit is the distinctive characteristic of the Messiah" and that "John the Baptist is the witness of this." This will allow Jesus to baptize with the Spirit as stated by the Baptist himself in Jn 1:33.¹² The use of *menein* here is best referred to in terms of the spiritual union between Jesus and the Holy Spirit: Jesus is the one on whom the Spirit descended and remained (*menein*). *Menein* is used here to define the identity of Jesus as the one who is "from above," that is, coming from heaven. He is the one in whom the Spirit abides, and consequently, He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.¹³ In fact, we should notice how, whereas the Synoptic Gospels describe the descent of the Spirit, it is only the Fourth Gospel that notes that the Spirit "remained" on Jesus.

¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, vol. 29A (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008b), 579.

¹² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 1:303-304.

¹³ Johannes Beutler states that the phrase used in 1:32, namely that the Spirit remained on Him, implies that he is the Son of God. He adds that the comment by the Evangelist, namely, that John the Baptist saw this, implies that this abiding of the Spirit on Jesus is visible through faith. See Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Tait Michael (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017), 60-61.

Brown comments about the fact that the Spirit “came to rest” on Jesus. He illustrates how Jesus “possesses the Spirit” in a permanent way. This implies that “he will dispense the Spirit to others in Baptism.”¹⁴ Carson points out the fact that since the Spirit remains on Jesus this means that God gives to Jesus the Spirit without limit. This means that the notion of “abiding” is not something temporary or something that is measurable but something that has no limits and endures forever.¹⁵

Jn 1:32 is not the only use of *menein* in the first chapter of this gospel. The Fourth Evangelist employs this verb once again as part of the first two disciples’ call. Brodie rightly notes that when “abiding” is used just a few verses later in Jn 1:38-39, there is certainly a continuity in evoking the presence of the Spirit. Hence, when the first two disciples ask Jesus where he was staying, we do not receive a direct answer in terms of any particular physical place. This implies that Jesus’ primary place of abiding is “Spirit-related.”

The Baptist’s declaration about Jesus as the “Lamb of God” implies that there is a mutual abiding between Himself and the Spirit, which serves as a build-up to the whole theme of *menein* which will become even more explicit later on in the gospel. Thus, the focus is already on Jesus himself rather than on the place where he abides, as He is Himself the place where the Spirit abides. Jesus “embodies the Spirit and God.”¹⁶

What is more interesting is how the Fourth Evangelist here uses *menein* in relation to *zeteo*, seeking. In Jn 1:38 we read that when Jesus saw the disciples following Him, he asked

¹⁴ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, I-XII, 66. Here Brown continues to argue that the dispensation of the Spirit continues to recur throughout this gospel, even after the death and resurrection of Jesus. See for example, Jn 3:5,34, Jn 7:38-39, Jn 14 – Jn 16 and Jn 20:22. C. K. Barrett, “The Parallels between Acts and John,” draws a parallelism between Jn 1:32 and Acts 10:38: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.” He argues that in Jn 1:32 John refers to the baptism of Jesus, even though there is no direct mention of it as there is in the Synoptic Gospels. This is plainly implied in Acts 10:37. Culpepper also draws a parallelism, this time between Jn 1:33 and Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16. He here refers to baptism by the Holy Spirit. This type of baptism is possible by Jesus because of the Spirit that remains and abides in Him. See Culpepper, R. Alan and Black, C. Clifton, ed., *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 170.

¹⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 151-152. Other Johannine scholars who reach a similar conclusion include Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 76; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. World Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 25; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 157.

¹⁶ See Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 158-159.

them: “What do you seek?” Brodie considers this question as “a far-ranging question of universal application: ‘What is it that you want out of life?’”¹⁷ It is this seeking that will eventually lead the disciples to abide with Jesus.¹⁸ “The richness of the word ‘abide’ has passed from the Spirit (1:32-33), to Jesus (1:38-39), to the disciples (1:39): ‘they abode.’”¹⁹ Brodie concludes by saying that “this episode (vv. 35-39) provides an initial synthesis of what is meant by discipleship; it is an attentive journey which culminates “in abiding with God.”²⁰ Abiding in Jesus is more about the intimate relationship of the disciples with Jesus.²¹

The quest of the disciples is therefore much more than a mere looking for Jesus’ physical location of where he abides. According to Brown, the disciples’ quest for Jesus’ abode seeks to satisfy one of man’s deepest longings, namely, the search for God which endures forever.²² Bultmann reaches similar conclusions when he states that it is important for the disciple to know where Jesus lives or abides, since where Jesus is, so also the disciples will find their ultimate dwelling place. For this reason, Bultmann links Jn 1:38-39 with Jn 14:2 - “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”²³

All these comments reveal that *menein* here is not simply used in a physical sense, that is, the disciples dwelling in a certain physical place. Instead, *menein* here indicates that discipleship starts by learning where Jesus dwells. According to the Prologue, Jesus dwells in the bosom of the Father (see Jn 1:18). This is the first step towards true discipleship that will continue to develop throughout the entire gospel in the way the disciples are portrayed in relation to Jesus.

¹⁷ Ibid., 160.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 161.

²¹ Similarly, Carson also states that the evangelist’s note about the disciples abiding in Jesus on that day, that happened at the tenth hour, recalls that it was indeed the hour of fulfilment. This hour was “the beginning of their intimate relationship with Jesus.” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 155-157.

²² See Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, 79.

²³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 100.

Menein understood in a spiritual sense, starts to reach a new phase in the Johannine narrative in the bread of life discourse. In Jn 6:56 Jesus declares that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood remain in him and him in them. These words, understood by many – though not all – Johannine scholars as a reference to the Eucharist,²⁴ show how the notion of “abiding” here goes far beyond a physical abiding. In the words of Schnackenburg: “Receiving the Eucharist ... brings about an intimate connection with Jesus ... it is not the eating and drinking itself which is important, but the personal union with Jesus which it brings about.”²⁵

Beutler notes how this theme of abiding in Jn 6 anticipates what will be further developed in the Farewell Discourse, particularly in chapters 15 to 17. “Just as in the Farewell Discourse the basis of the unity of the disciples with Jesus is Jesus’s own union with the Father, the same goes for John 6,57.”²⁶

Fabris also highlights the triangular relationship between the Father, Jesus and the disciples and states that as Jesus abides in the Father, so the disciples must learn how to abide in Jesus. In other words, the mutual abiding between Jesus and his disciples is based on the mutual abiding between Jesus and His Father. This is totally necessary if the disciples are to be fruitful. However, the fullness of life for the disciples is achieved through the Eucharist as we read in Jn 6:57. Hence, whilst the Father is the source of life for Jesus, Jesus is the source of life for His disciples.²⁷

Within this perspective, we can understand why in the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus continues to challenge those present: Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that remains for eternal life.”²⁸ Jn 6:57 may therefore be rightly considered as “a most forceful expression of the tremendous claim that Jesus gives man a share in God's own life,”²⁹ and

²⁴ Bultmann was ready to state that these words were added later by an “ecclesiastical redactor.” (See Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 229.

²⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 2:63.

²⁶ Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 190.

²⁷ See Fabris, *Giovanni*, 326-328.

²⁸ Jn 6:27.

²⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 292.

that remaining in Jesus through the Eucharist is “not a one-time event but a repeated activity of faith.”³⁰

2.3 The Challenge of Understanding the Intended Meaning of *menein*

So far we have seen some examples of the use of *menein* in a physical and in a spiritual sense. Yet, there are other instances where it is not clear whether *menein* should be interpreted in a physical or in a spiritual sense. In such cases, one needs to look at the context in which this Johannine term is being used in order to bring out its true intended meaning. Having said this, it also seems that at times *menein* is used both in a physical sense and in a spiritual sense.

2.4 *Menein* in John 15

The notion of *menein* in John’s Gospel reaches its climax in Jn 15 with the use of the vine imagery. In Jn 15:1-10 *menein* is used ten times, “a frequency not matched elsewhere in the NT.”³¹ Johannine scholars are fascinated by how John uses the vine imagery to continue to develop the theological meaning of this term. Here *menein* may be considered as a central piece of the whole Farewell Discourse, and it is crucial to deeply understand the notion of discipleship in this gospel.³² This is due to the fact that the image of the vine and its branches is used to show the bond between Jesus and his disciples.

Brodie divides this text into two main parts: verses 1-17 deal with the positive side of this image, while verses 18-16:4a deal with the negative side of this image.³³ We may consider this as part of the dualistic language that pervades the Gospel of John, that is, the dichotomy between those who abide in Jesus and those who do not, between the disciples and the “world.”

³⁰ Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John*, 243.

³¹ Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 479.

³² See Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, 417-418.

³³ See Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 475.

Ridderbos considers vss. 1-8 as “a framework” which is then “filled in” in vss. 9-17.³⁴ “This is immediately clear in vs. 9, where the theme “remain in me” from vss. 1-8 becomes ‘remain in my love.’ The fellowship described in vss. 1-8 is thus further defined as a fellowship of love.”³⁵ Moloney argues that it is the verb *menein* itself that makes Jn 15:1-11 a literary unit, rather than the image of the vine.³⁶ He therefore divides Jn 15:1-11 in the three subsections: “abiding in Jesus (vv. 1-5a),” “the results of abiding and not abiding in Jesus (vv. 5b-8),” and “abiding in the love of Jesus (vv. 9-11).”³⁷

Although the image of the vine is related to Israel in the Old Testament,³⁸ the Johannine image of the vine in Jn 15, presents Jesus as “the true vine.” In the *ego eimi* saying in Jn 15:1, Jesus is not just saying that he is the vine, but that he is the “true vine.” This true vine can be understood as the one that is replacing the old people of Israel, as Jesus becomes the true vine, in which the Father does his works. “Just as Jesus is the source of living water and is the bread from heaven that gives life, so is he the life-giving vine.”³⁹

In the image of the vine, the Father is portrayed as the vinedresser who prunes those who abide in Jesus, so that they may bear more fruit, whilst removing the branches which have been withered. Abiding in the vine also involves the cleansing process which is part of the meaning of discipleship. “Just as the branches bear fruit only if they abide in the vine, so the disciples can produce fruit only if they remain linked to Jesus.”⁴⁰ Only by constantly remaining part of the vine can the branches produce fruit. For this reason, Jesus declares: “apart from me you can do nothing.”⁴¹ “Bearing fruit is symbolic of possessing divine life.”⁴² Thus, “in bearing fruit they show they are disciples.”⁴³

³⁴ Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John*, 518-519.

³⁵ Ibid., 519.

³⁶ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 419.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Ezek 17; Jer 2:21; Isa 5:1-7.

³⁹ Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 672.

⁴⁰ Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 400.

⁴¹ Jn 15:5.

⁴² Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 676.

⁴³ Ibid., 662-663.

For John, discipleship ultimately is about the love of God (mutual abiding in God), which is then manifested in the love that the disciples are asked to show for one another (mutual abiding in each other),⁴⁴ so that the fruit of God's love is made manifest. The result of this mutual abiding and obeying of the commandment of love is the complete joy that Jesus promises to his disciples.⁴⁵ As the Father glorifies his Son, so will he glorify the disciples and they will share in God's glory because they will become his friends.⁴⁶ Hence, abiding also means being Jesus' friends and attaining complete joy.

The fruit that is to be produced is fruit that remains.⁴⁷ Some scholars relate the notion of fruit bearing to what we read in Jn 12:24 where Jesus links fruit bearing to 'sacrificial death' leading to new life. By 'sacrificial death' we do not necessarily mean a physical death, although it can even be so. Rather it is dying to oneself to totally identify oneself with Jesus, to continue His mission in "gathering fruit for eternal life."⁴⁸

The true vine metaphor implies not only the indwelling of the disciples in Jesus, but also mutual indwelling among the disciples themselves.⁴⁹ "Such a community of Christly love will be a revelation to the world of the reality of Christ's redemption, a witness to the presence and power of the kingdom of God in the midst of the world (v 35, cf. 17:21, 23)."⁵⁰ In this way, "the community of believers is to exemplify the kind of love that exists between God and God's unique Son."⁵¹

In contrast to the branches that remain/*abide* in the vine, Jesus speaks also of those branches that are broken off from the vine. This theme had already been announced in the Fourth Gospel by the way the Evangelist speaks about "the world" that hates the disciples and therefore their master. The disciples will be hated and persecuted by "the world" because they are not of this "world" – *kosmos* – a term that John uses to denote the realm of unbelief

⁴⁴ See Jn 15:17.

⁴⁵ See Jn 15:11.

⁴⁶ See Jn 15:15.

⁴⁷ See Jn 15:16.

⁴⁸ Jn 4:36.

⁴⁹ See Jn 15:17.

⁵⁰ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 248.

⁵¹ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 135.

and the rejection of the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ.⁵² This theme is already announced in the Prologue.⁵³ Those who do not abide in Jesus do not know the One who sent Him.

Our examination of the use of *menein* in Jn 15, helps us to strengthen our understanding of the way John uses this term in a theological way. Through Christ, all those united with Him can receive the divine life, through which they can continue to abide in God and bear much fruit. On the other hand, we also learn that as the “world” rejected and hated Jesus, it will also do the same to his disciples. However, this would not deprive the disciples of the complete joy that Jesus promises to all those who abide in Him.

2.5 The “Abiding” of the Son in the Father: A Model of the Disciples’ “abiding” in Jesus

A very important message that *menein* carries with it is the relationship between Jesus and His Father,⁵⁴ which eventually will serve as a model for Jesus’ relationship with his disciples. There is, however, a difference between the first and the second notion. According to Beasley-Murray “there exists a *koinonia*, a ‘fellowship,’ between the Father and the Son that is beyond all compare, a unity whereby the speech and action of the Son are that of the Father in him, and the Father’s speech and action come to finality in him.”⁵⁵ The disciples are invited by Jesus so that through Him they may enter into this *koinonia* to share in God’s love and mission for the salvation of all the world.

Jesus only conveys the love that He receives from his Father to his disciples, therefore making it possible for them to also receive the Father’s love and for them to abide in the Father through Himself (Jesus). So, we can state that a triangular relationship is formed between the Father, Jesus, and His disciples, in which Jesus acts as the mediator between the

⁵² Martin Micallef, “‘The World’ in the Gospel of John: A Message through a Prism,” *Melita Theologica* 72, no.2 (2022): 203-215.

⁵³ “The Fourth Gospel announces its dualism clearly and unequivocally from the very first page.” John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 408.

⁵⁴ See for example, Jn 10:30, Jn 10:37-38, Jn 14:8-11.

⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 254.

disciples and His Father. Once Jesus ascends to the Father, this relationship will continue through the Holy Spirit who abides in the disciples.⁵⁶

In Jn 10:30 Jesus declares his oneness with the Father. This does not mean that they are one and the same person. “The Father and Son are represented as one, yet with distinct individuality.”⁵⁷ However, their oneness implies “a community of life between Father and Son, which exhibits itself in that He (the Son) speaks the Father’s word and does His works.”⁵⁸ Kysar describes this by stating that “the functions of the Son are the functions of God.”⁵⁹ This type of oneness is illustrated in Jn 14:10-11. The works of Jesus testify that His works are all about the works of the Father because they abide in each other. In these two verses, twice we find Jesus saying: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” Through this unity, the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son.

The Son is obedient to the Father because of the love the Father has for His Son, and since Jesus also loves His Father, Jesus unites His human will with the will of the Father. Brown refers to this oneness as “a unity of power and operation.”⁶⁰ This type of “relation of Father and Son is expressly treated as archetype of the relation of Christ and His disciples.”⁶¹ In Jn 14:12 Jesus declares that the disciples will perform greater works after he ascends to the Father and sends the Spirit.

The disciples are called to believe and abide in Jesus’ word and love so that through God they can bring about “the renewal of the world and, indeed, of creation.”⁶² It is only through their abiding in God that the disciples can give true testimony of the love of God to others, as “it is precisely this degree of unity that ensures Jesus reveals God to us.”⁶³ Hence, the disciples are called to abide in a deep intimacy with God, so as to be able to say His words and do His deeds, as Jesus did. The unity that is in God also applies to the unity that needs to

⁵⁶ See Jn 14:17.

⁵⁷ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 54.

⁵⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 195.

⁵⁹ Kysar, *John: The Maverick Gospel*, 54.

⁶⁰ Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, 407.

⁶¹ Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 195.

⁶² Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 465.

⁶³ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 494.

be present amongst Jesus' disciples: "For just as the Father and Son are one, so they bind men to themselves as one—that they may be one, even as we."⁶⁴

Referring to Jn 14:1-11, Brodie argues that Jesus' abiding in the Father is not only a model for the disciples to imitate, but Jesus is also the way for the disciples to abide in God.⁶⁵ In Jn 14:6 Jesus states that He is "the way and the truth and the life." He also says: "no one comes to the Father except through me." In 14:9 he adds: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Therefore, while Jesus continues to affirm the unity that exists between Himself and the Father (their mutual abiding in each other), the invitation is also for the disciples to abide in God through Jesus.⁶⁶

This is also confirmed when Jesus prays for his disciples "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."⁶⁷ The abiding of Jesus in the Father is being therefore extended to the disciples, so that they "may be with me where I am, to see my glory."⁶⁸ Jesus wants to share everything with His disciples, including his true abode with the Father which he has prepared for the disciples so that when he comes again he will take them with him.⁶⁹ Hence, those who abide in Jesus will also abide with the Father forever as adopted sons and daughters.⁷⁰ The ultimate destination for the disciples is "life with the Father; this life the Father has given to the Son (v 26), and the Son alone can give it to men who believe in him (x 28)."⁷¹

This abiding with Jesus should not be considered only as if it was a future promise. In Jn 14:23 we read: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." Hence, *menein* is portraying the strong relationship of friendship that God wants to extend to the disciples of Jesus through his Son, by sharing with them the Divine love and life. This is achieved by the disciples if they obey

⁶⁴ Jn 17:11.

⁶⁵ Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 458-459.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Jn 17:21.

⁶⁸ Jn 17:24.

⁶⁹ See Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 460.

⁷⁰ Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 627.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 630-631.

Jesus' command of love, and in so doing, the Father is glorified as they would also be doing the works Jesus does.⁷²

Ultimately, this abiding in Jesus leads the disciples to get closer to Jesus so that "what the believer asks is in union with Jesus ('in my name')," and "Jesus does it."⁷³ This shows how the prayer of Jesus for the disciples is intended to bring them to the point of praying to God what God wills. In abiding in God, the disciples, like Jesus, will also unite their human will to God. Jesus will do what they will and fulfil their prayers. The disciples are called to have the same mind of Christ so that they can ask what he wills. This is a gift that the Holy Spirit grants to the believers. The Spirit-led disciples who are open to receive the Spirit are brought into union with Jesus through whom they are brought in union with the Father.⁷⁴ It is the Spirit, the advocate, that keeps the disciples in union with God and protects them from the evil one, so that in union with God they can also do the works of the Father as Jesus did. The Paraclete reminds the disciples about the words of Jesus (Jn 14:26) and makes the works of the Father possible also through them. The Paraclete will also guide the disciples into all the truth that he heard (Jn 16:13), as Jesus declared what he had seen in the presence of the Father (Jn 8:38).

In this section we have seen that with the help of the Holy Spirit the disciples are called into union with the living Christ so that their joy may be to the full and so that his life may be in them. The disciples are called to be mutually abiding in Christ as Christ and the Father are mutually abiding in each other. The disciples are to continue the mission of Jesus, the salvation of all the world, through the love with which Jesus has loved them. All may know that they were sent by Christ as Jesus was sent by the Father, so that all the world, as adopted sons and daughters, will follow Jesus in going to the dwelling places that Jesus prepared for each one in the house of the Father and to abide with Him forever.

⁷² Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 195.

⁷³ Brodie, *The Gospel according to John*, 465.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the use of *menein* in its physical and spiritual senses. We have also presented instances where the meaning of *menein* remains a challenge. We have argued that the more the Fourth Evangelist uses this term, the more *menein* gets a theological meaning. The disciples are invited to remain in Jesus, just as Jesus abides in the Father.

Chapter 3

***Menein* as a Core Value of Salesian Youth Ministry**

In the previous two chapters we explored the concept of *menein* in the Gospel of John. We saw how *menein* is a theme related to other important Johannine themes developed throughout the narrative of this gospel, such as oneness, love, and indwelling. In particular, it is related to the Johannine understanding of disciples as ‘friends of Jesus.’ This theme of *menein* does not end with the gospel narrative. It is a theme that is related also to the lives of those who wish to follow Jesus as his disciples in today’s world. As a matter of fact, *menein* is a theme that defines the essence of discipleship, and therefore an invitation to a more committed Christian life expressed by different types of spirituality inspired by the gospel. Salesian spirituality is one of these branches. It is a spirituality that enlightens the meaning of youth ministry as lived by St John Bosco, highlighting spiritual depth as strength and light within the human experience.

This chapter aims to explore how the concept of *menein* is a source of inspiration for Salesian youth ministry, since this Johannine theme was very much at the core of Don Bosco’s pastoral ministry to youth. Although he himself did not write any particular work on the Gospel of John, he was nonetheless inspired by the concept of *menein* as portrayed in John’s Gospel, especially as it was understood by St Francis de Sales. The latter understands the notion of “abiding” as spiritual union and spiritual friendship, using words like “loving union of hearts,”¹ when he refers to the spiritual union and friendship with God and between persons. He states that such spiritual union “mirrors the heart of God which is community.”² By this he meant a “communitarian life of love between persons who communicate to each other all their perfection.”³ This “union of hearts” implies the mutual abiding of one heart in another, as explained by some in terms of the Holy Trinity. It is a deep spiritual union that unites the hearts with each other.

¹ Eunan McDonnell, *Live Jesus with St Francis De Sales and St John Bosco* (Sliema, Malta: Salesians of Don Bosco Publications Malta, 2022), 243.

² Ibid., 244.

³ Ibid.

Similar to what we find in Jn 6:56, St Francis de Sales also speaks about the Eucharist using the notion of abiding. For him “the Eucharist is the great sacrament of unity, leading to a communion of hearts and oneness in Christ.”⁴ In one of his sermons during Lent, St Francis de Sales quotes from Jn 6:57 and states that Jesus “bestowed on us the means to reach the supreme degree of union which He desired for us, namely, to be made one with Him as He and His Father are One, that is, one same reality.”⁵ It is “the Spirit of Love, uniter of hearts”⁶ that unites us with God and with each other.

When speaking of the human heart, Francis de Sales states that “God made [the human] heart for his paradise.”⁷ He continues to say that God “dwells not apart from or beyond us, but within our very being” and that “we were made to be ‘the dwelling place of God.’”⁸ This space can be nurtured through prayer which he describes as “friendship with Christ” and in terms of “God as the friend of the human heart.”⁹ Similar to St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco also used to dedicate time in each day for prayer.¹⁰ Imitating the Beloved Disciple (Jn 13:23-24), Don Bosco “repose(d) with complete confidence on the lovable breast, actually in the loving heart, of the Loving Saviour,” in order to learn how to “listen to the heartbeat of God ... and discover that Christ is already praying within us.”¹¹ This is none other than a union of hearts, a deep mutual abiding in God as portrayed in John’s Gospel.

Although St John Bosco did not live in the same time of St Francis de Sales, he was nonetheless inspired by his spirituality. A key characteristic of St Francis de Sales which characterises the love of mutual abiding is his gentleness and loving-kindness.¹² He affirms

⁴ Ibid., 310.

⁵ Francis de Sales, “Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent,” in *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Evêque de Genève et Docteur de l’Eglise, Edition Complète*, d’après les autographes et les éditions originales [...], publiée par les soins des Religieuses de la Visitation, du 1er Monastère d’Annecy, 27 vols. (Annecy: J. Niérat et al., 1892–1964), Vol. X, 278. Henceforth, texts from the *Oeuvres* will be designated by OEA, followed by volume and pages.

⁶ Jeanne Françoise Freymont de Chantal, “Entretiens,” in *Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, Vol. II, 478, quoted in W.M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal and François de Sales* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), 140-41.

⁷ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 228.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰ “His activity would never be divorced from prayer.” Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco with God* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 44.

¹¹ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 75.

¹² Ibid., 72. Referring to Don Bosco and St Francis of Sales: “the loving kindness and gentleness that draws others to our two saints does not depend on personality but is of divine origin.”

that love has the power to entice our heart.¹³ When we therefore speak of Salesian gentleness “we understand it as being intrinsically related to love.”¹⁴ St Francis de Sales also speaks of the self-emptying love or *kenosis* as a ‘descending charity,’ a love that enters into the humility of Christ by lowering oneself to become little with the little ones.¹⁵

These characteristics of St Francis de Sales’ spirituality were adopted by St John Bosco who made them his own in responding to God’s call to serve Him in the young, in a way that “there is a spiritual resonance with St Francis de Sales that reverberates through the life and mission of Don Bosco.”¹⁶

Don Bosco wished that his followers adopt the spirituality of St Francis of Sales at the service of the young, and thus will be called Salesians.¹⁷ In light of all this, he also wanted the Salesians to study the maxims of St Francis de Sales. All this is recorded in his words uttered during a conference held in 1884: “By the name Salesian I intend to mean all those who were educated with the maxims of the great saint.”¹⁸ In his own pre-ordination resolutions, then he adds: “May the charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales guide me in everything.”¹⁹

At the heart of all this, there is the notion of abiding (*menein*) as presented in John’s Gospel and as explained by Eugenio Ceria, in his publication: *Don Bosco with God*.²⁰ Ceria recalls some of the testimonies in the process for canonization of John Bosco, which include

¹³ OEA, IV, 126.

¹⁴ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22. “Saint Francis de Sales was Don Bosco’s model: gentleness of heart, love for God and for souls, self-control in every situation, the admirable composure of the person, the sociable, benign, patient life, everything to everyone, without the shadow of austerity that would be a burden to others, he made the virtues amiable to anyone who approached him, he had imitated everything from de Sales.” “S. Francesco di Sales e D. Bosco,” *Bolletino Salesiano*, 14th March 1890, 29, quoted in McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 21. McDonnell’s translation.

¹⁷ “It was proposed that with the help of the Lord and St Francis de Sales, we first undertake a practical exercise of charity towards neighbour, then bind ourselves by a promise, and later, if possible and desirable, make a formal vow to the Lord. From that evening, the name Salesian was given to those who undertook or would undertake such an exercise.” Giuseppe Buccellatto, *Notes for a ‘Spiritual History’ of Father John Bosco*, trans. Ivo Coelho (Turin: ElleDiCi, 2008), 62.

¹⁸ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, Eugenio Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco* (New Rochelle: Salesian Publishers, 1965-2002), vol. XIV, 176. The *Biographical Memoirs* will henceforth be designated as ‘BM’ followed by volume and page.

¹⁹ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei and Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, 19 Vols (Turin: Tipografia Salesiana SAID/SEI, 1897-1917, 1930-1938, 1948), vol. 1, 518.

²⁰ Ceria, *Don Bosco with God*. Another important book which also highlights Don Bosco’s abiding in God is the one written by Pietro Brocardo: *Don Bosco Profondamente Uomo Profondamente Santo* (Rome: LAS, 2001).

that of his first successor, Blessed Fr Michael Rua: “What I noticed repeatedly was his constant union with God ... these sentiments of love of God appeared with such spontaneity that it was clear that they came from a mind and heart always immersed in contemplation of God and his attributes.”²¹

Don Bosco’s second successor, Fr Paul Albera also gives evidence, stating that: “Such was Don Bosco’s union with God that it seemed that he received from God the advice and encouragement he gave to his sons.”²² Don Bosco’s third successor, Fr Philip Rinaldi, continues to testify: “It is my firm conviction that Don Bosco was truly a man of God, continuously united with God in prayer.”²³ Throughout his life, Don Bosco really sought “to abide” with God. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, we read how Don Bosco was continuously accompanied and guided by his spiritual directors to help him grow in his union and friendship with God. This mutual abiding between Don Bosco and God is reflected also in the Salesian Constitutions, article 21, which describes Don Bosco as “The man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living ‘as seeing him who is invisible.’”²⁴ In addition, the twentieth century mystic Adrienne Von Speyr, describes Bosco’s prayers as “essentially Johannine, full of love, affection, and astonishment for God.”²⁵ She also states that “with respect to God and to the faith of the other and to his own faith,” Don Bosco lacks distance, and therefore he was able to live “an immediacy, which is personally very beautiful and is of a Johannine purity; he desires nothing else than to be allowed to love and to marvel, and the fact that he and others are allowed to do so is a cause of his childlike joy.”²⁶

3.1 Don Bosco’s Invitation for Youth “to abide”

In trying to understand the educational and the spiritual heritage left by Don Bosco, it is indispensable to look at his biography. A brief outline of the biographical elements that are

²¹ Ibid., 177.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, (Bengaluru, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2015), 29.

²⁵ Adrienne von Speyr, *The Book of All Saints*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), PDF e-book.

²⁶ Ibid.

more pertinent to this study is provided in Appendix 1. Don Bosco himself interpreted his life in the light of his vocation, calling his autobiography of the first four decades of his life (1815-1855): *Memoirs of the Oratory*. For Don Bosco, one's vocation is not parallel to one's life. One's vocation is rather what gives form to one's life. Hence, it is of vital importance to look into what Don Bosco lived out himself, because it is only through his mutual abiding in God that he was able to receive a youth mission, which was entrusted to him by God himself, which became known as the Salesian charism. Don Bosco introduced a new approach within the Church, which is referred to as "the Salesian Spirit,"²⁷ and its embodiment which we call "the Preventive System."²⁸

A profound experience that St John Bosco lived annually at the Santuario di Sant'Ignazio were the Spiritual Exercises.²⁹ He experienced them as a series of meditations and instructions that brought him into God's friendship.³⁰ Through these experiences, he continued to "make his home in God and God in him,"³¹ which eventually helped him to inculcate such values among the young.³²

Don Bosco wanted to offer the young the fullness of salvation, rather than just help them on a temporal level. Thus, he used to tell his youth: "I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next."³³ In all this Don Bosco seems to be influenced by the call to intimacy as recorded in Jn 15 by the vine and the branches imagery and by Jesus' wish for his disciples to experience the fullness of joy.³⁴ In the words of Michael T. Winstanley,

²⁷ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2014), 87. This text is the key text needed to understand Salesian Youth Ministry today.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Giuseppe Buccellato, *San Giuseppe Cafasso: Il Direttore Spirituale di Don Bosco* (Rome: LAS, 2007), 28.

³⁰ Giuseppe Buccellato, *The Roots of the Spirituality of Saint John Bosco* (Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2019), 11.

³¹ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 76.

³² Ibid.

³³ John Bosco, "Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin - Rome, 10 May 1884," in *Salesian Sources Vol.1 Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 501. We also find a similar concept in other letters, for example: "I will never cease praying for you too and will do everything I can to make you happy now and in eternity." John Bosco, "Letter to cleric Giovanni Bonetti - Sant'Ignazio, 20 July 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 961.

³⁴ See Jn 15:11.

“The imagery in Jn 15 draws us into the heart of Jesus and tells us a great deal about the heart of Don Bosco. It therefore takes us right to the heart of Salesian Spirituality.”³⁵

The historical, social, cultural and religious circumstances in which Don Bosco lived led him to bring together several destitute young people as he invited them to embrace a journey of integral growth. He loved the youth at the Oratory as his sons,³⁶ inspired by God’s love for them as his sons and daughters.³⁷ He was for them like a father who guided them in whatever they needed. They could concretely feel the sonship, since the Oratory was for them their home, inspired by what we read in Jn 8:35 “The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.” They could truly abide with each other and with God. It was a concrete lived experience that was truly filled with the hope of the everlasting dwelling place in heaven.

In the Oratory there was truly a welcoming family spirit where everybody felt his freedom as a true son, in a similar way to what we read in Jn 8:36 “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Don Bosco welcomed all the youth and started accompanying them in their own context.³⁸ His foundation was Christian humanism, that is, the basis is the human experience, which when interrogated to its deeper spiritual roots, would open the door for him to journey with them and lead them to friendship with God. It is in this sense that the theme of “abiding” was incarnated within this historical context in the life of this saint, up to the point of saying to them: “Here with you I feel at home: to stay with you is my very life.”³⁹ These words were inspired by Jesus who pitched his tent among us (abided with us) to bring us back to the heart of the Father, as we read in Jn 1:14-18. So did Don Bosco among the young. Through his love he helped them to discover God’s love for them. Through him they could come to know God who was dwelling in their hearts.

³⁵ Michael T. Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality: An Exploration* (Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2020), 182.

³⁶ Don Bosco always addressed the youth as his sons and showed them his affection. For example, in one letter he wrote: “My dear sons in Jesus Christ, whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you.” John Bosco, “Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin - Rome, 10 May 1884,| in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 501.

³⁷ See Jn 1:12.

³⁸ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 46. In article 41 we find: “The education and evangelization of many young people, especially among the very poor, means that we have to go to them where they are to be found, and provide adequate forms of service in the context of their own life-style.”

³⁹ BM, IV, 155.

The Salesian approach is based on this theology which is typically Johannine. Don Bosco descended to the level of the youth, got involved in their games and the things they liked, so that he could raise them to God. Based on the descending charity of St Francis de Sales, which we previously referred to, he would enter “the movement of love that knows how to lower itself in order to be on the same level as those who are in need. However, it lowers so as to raise up.”⁴⁰

In his famous letter from Rome which he wrote in 1884, referred to by Pascual Chávez Villanueva, the 9th successor of Don Bosco, as “The Gospel of Don Bosco,”⁴¹ he states that if the young are:

loved in the things they like, through taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to see love in those things which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial, and so learn to do these things too with love.⁴²

As soon as Don Bosco opened the heart of his youth to be receptive for his love, he would propose to them the love of God. It was through Don Bosco’s love and friendship, that these young children could recognize that they are invited to mutually abide in God. In other words, knowing that God is inviting them to build a relationship of friendship with Him, they would in turn respond to His friendship and abide in Him. To show them this friendship of God in a very tangible manner, Don Bosco was a priest who became “Father, Teacher and Friend of Youth,”⁴³ as proclaimed by Pope John Paul II in 1988 on the centenary celebration of his death.

Based on this spirituality, Don Bosco proposed to the youth that which he himself believed and lived out throughout his entire life, that is, his mutual abiding with God, which

⁴⁰ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 64.

⁴¹ Pascual Chávez Villanueva, “*Letter from Rome 1884: The Gospel of Don Bosco*,” conference given on 26th February 2020, https://www.sdb.org/en/GC28/Documents/Homilies_Addresses/Letter_from_Rome_1884__The_gospel_of_Don_Bosco (accessed 4 June 2023)

⁴² John Bosco, “Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin - Rome, 10 May 1884,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 504.

⁴³ See John Paul II, *Iuvenum Patris*, Letter to Egidio Vigano (Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation) on the centenary of the death of St John Bosco, 31st January 1988. <https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/IUVENUM-PATRIS-English.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2023).

demonstrated itself as pastoral charity towards his neighbour, especially the young. This was an original and particular way of expressing the commandment of love which characterises the “abiding” notion as portrayed in John’s Gospel. He proposed this form of discipleship in an environment of familiarity with God, summed up in his friendship with God, and proposed this same friendship with God to the young.

On the pattern of the mutual indwelling between Jesus and his Father, and that of Jesus with his disciples, Don Bosco mutually abided both with God and with the young so as to help them abide and grow in their relationship with God. He himself being a disciple of Christ, which he understood as a deep friendship, modeled on the union of hearts as expounded upon by St Francis de Sales, proposed to the youth the idea of abiding in Christ by showing them how Jesus can be their friend. He did so, basing on St Francis de Sales’ idea of prayer, described as friendship with God. Don Bosco’s aim was to foster a community of believers centered around prayer, the Word of God, the sacraments, and above all, love in the form of pastoral charity.

Similar to what Francis de Sales writes to Jane de Chantal: "I shall never stop praying God to perfect His work in you, that is, to further your excellent desire and plan to attain the fullness of Christian life,"⁴⁴ Don Bosco also ardently did for his boys. As a matter of fact, he managed to allure so many souls to God through the gentleness and loving-kindness which he learnt from St Francis de Sales, but above all, because of Jesus living in him.⁴⁵ He knew very well that few are those who do not respond to gentleness, which is equivalent to love. Hence, due to his openness to the Spirit of God, we can see in Don Bosco’s life “the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus: 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (Jn 14:23).”⁴⁶

Don Bosco was like a magnet to the young due to God abiding in him, and because his heart was filled by His love. We can relate this to what John expounds upon in Jn 15. What Don Bosco proposed to the young was to draw them into the heart of Christ “to elicit a

⁴⁴ Francis de Sales to Jane Frances de Chantal, 3 May 1604, in OEA XII: 263-64.

⁴⁵ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 72. Referring to Don Bosco and St Francis de Sales: “It is the Holy Spirit operative in them, allowing Jesus to live in them.”

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself"⁴⁷ so that they can enjoy the relationship Jesus enjoys with the Father.

This union with God, his spiritual accompaniment, his dream at nine years of age⁴⁸ (which is also characterised by gentleness), together with the reading of the reality of the youth in the city of Turin at his time, helped him to discern what God was calling him for in his ministry. Don Bosco wrote in his Memoirs:

If these youngsters had a friend outside [of prison] who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?' I talked this idea over with Fr Cafasso. With his encouragement and inspiration, I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain.⁴⁹

The latter words immediately call to mind Jn 15:5, "apart from me you can do nothing." Don Bosco was constantly moved by God's Spirit and sought to respond to His call by accompanying these youth to prevent them from ending up in ruin, both physically and spiritually. Whilst tending to the needs of the youth on a human and social level, he also wanted to share his friendship with God with the youth whom God put under his care by being their guide.

Inspired by St Francis de Sales, the notion of "abiding in Jesus," is manifested also in Don Bosco's life through the sacraments, especially that of confession and the Eucharist.⁵⁰ The Gospel of John presents the Eucharist as a deep mutual abiding with Jesus.⁵¹ This was of great inspiration for Don Bosco who tried to discover the will of God through his deep friendship with Him. At the same time, he was very much aware that this intimate friendship with God could not be possible apart from the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist.⁵²

⁴⁷ Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (Vatican City: LEV, 2013), par. 27.

⁴⁸ See Appendix 2.

⁴⁹ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, trans. Daniel Lyons (New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 182.

⁵⁰ John Bosco, "To the pupils at Mirabello, Turin - 30 December 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 771. Don Bosco says to the boys in the Oratory of Mirabello: "To my real satisfaction I observed more people frequenting the holy sacraments of confession and communion."

⁵¹ See Jn 5:56.

⁵² Aldo Giraudo, "Presentation of: 'The Companion of Youth,'" in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1 *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 695. In this presentation, Giraudo affirms: "the strategic

All of this was then transferred to his pastoral ministry with the youth as he used to call the young to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. In order to appreciate all this, one should keep in mind that in those days, the Eucharist was not received frequently due to the influence of Jansenism.⁵³ Nonetheless, Don Bosco encouraged frequent communion so that the young can truly abide in Christ and be filled by his grace.

Similar to the vinedresser's work in Jn 15, Don Bosco also took care to prune (*kathairein*) the young through charitable correction, aimed for their own growth and to result in more fruitfulness.⁵⁴ This was for sure not an easy task as Don Bosco suffered (*thlipsis*) a lot for the youth. He spent his entire life for them and did all he could for the benefit of their souls, especially by spending countless hours in the confessional and he also offered them spiritual direction.⁵⁵

Those who wrote Don Bosco's life attribute all this "fruit" to his interior life of prayer and his abiding in God. Unlike the branch that is cut off from the vine and withers, Don Bosco was a lively branch which "abides" in the vine through love and prayer. This was the secret behind "the fruit" manifested in his ministry with the youth. He gave all his life for them to help them become holy and abide in God. It is through his union with God that "the Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: 'I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys.'"⁵⁶

He made from his life a "total self-giving to others, holding nothing back,"⁵⁷ in a way that he may be truly considered as the grain that dies and bears much fruit.⁵⁸ Inspired by what we read in Jn 15:12, he truly loved as Jesus loved in his mission with the young, while he "laid his life" for his friends as instructed by Jesus himself in Jn 15:13. This is clearly manifested in

centrality of the sacraments of confession and communion which are the pillars of the formation approach Don Bosco used."

⁵³ Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit (Vol. 1)*, (Rome: LAS, 2007), 400. Referring to Jansenism: "It called for supreme reverence for the sacrament of the altar, which was to be received only on rare occasions (contrary to the Jesuit recommendation of frequent Communion)."

⁵⁴ Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality*, 182.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 283.

⁵⁶ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 17. Article 1.

⁵⁷ Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality*, 140.

⁵⁸ See Jn 12:24.

what he used to say to the young: “For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready to give my life.”⁵⁹ In all this, Don Bosco imitated the good shepherd who ‘laid down his life’ for his sheep.⁶⁰ His heart was moved by compassion for the young, who were like sheep without a shepherd, lost and abandoned.

Don Bosco proposed holiness⁶¹ as a life project to the young people to whom he ministered, inviting them to become “good Christians and honest citizens.”⁶² Basing himself on the Johannine pattern where we read that Jesus shared all he had heard from his Father with his disciples whom he also called his friends,⁶³ Don Bosco shared with the Salesians and the young people as his friends⁶⁴ what God revealed to him, particularly through his dreams. Since “every boy was convinced that he was Don Bosco’s favourite,” their friendship with him “led them to make their own the values which they saw in him.”⁶⁵ “Friendship was at the heart of his educational and evangelizing style.”⁶⁶

3.2 The Oratorian Idea as an Expression of *menein*

Don Bosco’s initial response to God’s call eventually matured to become what we now refer to as the Valdocco Oratory model. This first Oratory which Don Bosco opened in Turin was inspired by the Johannine notion of “abiding,” both on a physical level and a spiritual level.

“The Valdocco Oratory brings us back to the original experience of the Salesian mission.”⁶⁷ It may be considered as the first pastoral work established by Don Bosco in Turin. In the Salesian Constitutions, article 40, we find that “Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience

⁵⁹ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 25. Article 14.

⁶⁰ See Jn 10:1-18.

⁶¹ “The age of youth, according to Don Bosco, is the ‘key to one’s whole earthly existence,’ a responsible and constructive age, a happy occasion for entering into a special relationship with God and for undertaking a virtuous and happy journey to holiness (Servite Domino in laetitia).” Giraudo, “Presentation of: ‘The Companion of Youth,’” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 694.

⁶² Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 190.

⁶³ See Jn 15:15.

⁶⁴ Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality*, 181.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 134.

in his first Oratory which serves as a model.”⁶⁸ Hence, the Valdocco experience is still considered as “the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.”⁶⁹ Don Bosco proposed a family environment to the youth at the Oratory. His pedagogy was essentially based on a family spirit, without which there is no loving-kindness. This family atmosphere meant “affectionate confidence between pupils and ‘superiors,’ friendship among the boys, sincere solidarity among all.”⁷⁰ As a matter of fact, Salesian Spirituality is always relational and communitarian.⁷¹

Don Bosco knew that it is difficult to journey alone. Isolation leads to vulnerability and thus to the devil’s temptation as happened to Eve when she was not with Adam.⁷² The Oratory prevented the youth from any form of harm while it empowered them through healthy relationships that helped them flourish. In a communitarian environment, where they mutually abided with each other and with God, they were happily united, as we read in Jn 17:21 where Jesus prayed for his disciples to be one. In such a setup, the devil, the one who divides, would find it harder to allure someone to evil.

The sense of belonging and the love that the young people experienced at the Oratory opened them up “to the deeper reality of God’s abiding love for them.”⁷³ The Oratory fosters a loving union of hearts (a mutual abiding), where Jesus can live in between that space created through healthy relationships. It is “the Salesian understanding of spiritual friendship where Jesus lives between friends.”⁷⁴

One hardly misses here how in this project Don Bosco was inspired by the notion of “abiding” as developed in the Gospel of John. “Such spiritual friendships that bring Jesus to birth in the lives of others is particularly evident in the ministry of St Francis de Sales and in the mission of St John Bosco among the young, especially those most in need.”⁷⁵ Hence, the

⁶⁸ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 45. Article 40.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 46. Article 40.

⁷⁰ Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco’s Pedagogical Experience* (Roma: LAS, 1989), 143.

⁷¹ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 243.

⁷² See Gen 3.

⁷³ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 125.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 242.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 256.

Oratory became a place where spiritual friendships are fostered. In the case of Don Bosco and the educators, their spiritual friendship with the young is not based on equality but assumes more the role of paternity. This is similar to the Johannine concept of Jesus' mutual abiding with his disciples. He is the one who is the mediator between them and the Father. Something very similar can be seen in the life of Don Bosco. "The fatherliness of Don Bosco, manifested in his 'pedagogy of love' and 'loving kindness,'"⁷⁶ is in fact a central theme to the Salesian Spirit.

The Oratory stands for the "abiding" notion between God and the youths. It created a positive influence on any one present there, since through the love they lived between themselves, others would recognize them as true disciples of Jesus.⁷⁷ In fact, the Oratory "was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelised, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves."⁷⁸ Home, Church (Parish), School and Playground "are images that do not indicate determined environments, spaces and places, but rather a series of experiences that are offered to the young."⁷⁹ At the Oratory in Valdocco, a balance between all these was achieved and no part was sacrificed for another. They all had the same importance as they were all necessary for the holistic development of the young. According to David O'Malley we can translate "Home" into "Belonging," "School" into "Learning," "Church" into "Meaning" and "Playground" into "Celebrating."⁸⁰

A "Home" that welcomes is mainly the experience of family spirit where "an environment of confidence and familiarity" is fostered and where the young are accompanied by "educators who love and are loved."⁸¹ "Love becomes, in the two directions, encounter,

⁷⁶ Egidio Viganò, "Saint John Bosco: *'Iuventutis Pater Et Magister,'*" Letter of the Rector Major, *Acts of the General Council* 329 (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 1989).

⁷⁷ See Jn 13:35.

⁷⁸ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 45. Article 40.

⁷⁹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 137.

⁸⁰ David O'Malley, "A Salesian Window," <https://www.salesianschools.com/post/a-salesian-window> (accessed 20 May 2023).

⁸¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 137.

trust, active and cordial collaboration.”⁸² The young are welcomed and loved as children of God, and receive an “unconditional welcome,” so they can truly feel at home.⁸³

In Salesian youth ministry, all those who in some way or another are involved in the work for the good of the young are referred to as the *Educative Pastoral Community (EPC)*. The only desire of the *EPC* should be to “bring young people to Christ and a willingness to meet their concerns.”⁸⁴ This is achieved through creating meaningful and loving relationships, where the young can feel at ease to explore who they are and become open to share values. This environment of genuine friendships helps the young to grow and mature in a safe and secure space. Don Bosco so much believed in this notion of friendship that he used to say: “Act in such a way that everyone you talk to becomes your friend.”⁸⁵

A “Church” that evangelises is essential to fulfill the desire for God in each young person and to help them discover their vocation. When words fail and only questions remain, young people need a “good listening to” and not answers. They can then invite educators into their questions and ask them to share some of their own faith and struggles. In that moment, the educators have entered a church built out of the relationships they have formed with the young people, a cathedral built on kindness and respect where mystery is touched and where the gospel is shared with sensitivity.⁸⁶ The Oratory is an environment where lived faith is created,⁸⁷ so that the young can make an experience of a Church in all its different aspects: *koinonia* (communion), liturgy and sacramental life: especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist, *Diakonia* (service) and *Martyria* (Christian witness).⁸⁸

A “School” that prepares the youth for life is important for the holistic development of the young. This is achieved through education so that “every young person develops the

⁸² Chávez Villanueva, “*The Gospel of Don Bosco*,”

https://www.sdb.org/en/GC28/Documents/Homilies_Addresses/Letter_from_Rome_1884__The_gospel_of_Don_Bosco (accessed 4 June 2023)

⁸³ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ BM, XX, Chapter 8.

⁸⁶ Paraphrased from O’Malley, “A Salesian Window.”

⁸⁷ “Even in the midst of the beehive of games and activities in the oratory, Don Bosco privileged moments of silence. Such silence afforded the young with the opportunity to withdraw into their hearts in order to encounter God already dwelling there.” McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 181.

⁸⁸ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 138.

skills and attitudes essential for life in society.”⁸⁹ The educators accompany the young to help them become responsible for their own formation and develop their potential and talents so that they may reach maturity and live life to the full.⁹⁰

Finally, a “Playground” for the young “to meet up with friends and be happy.”⁹¹ This is based on “the pedagogy of joy and of feast”⁹² where life is celebrated. It is the most natural environment where youth can foster friendships. Such environment fosters confidence and trust where healthy relationships can be built. The educators are called to accompany the young in this informal setup to overcome any barriers that the formal setups might present. Here the young can be met wherever they are at. It is a great opportunity for one-to-one relationships to be fostered so that educators can also find an informal space where to speak that little word in the ear (“parola nell’orecchio”),⁹³ which might be so beneficial for the young. Pascual Chávez Villanueva affirms that for Salesians and educators to be “with the young people in the middle of the playground is the great secret, because the boy will forget everything: the school, the explanations, but he will not forget what he said and did in the playground, the goodness, the brotherhood, that heart to heart.”⁹⁴

In the light of all these notions, we can truly state that Don Bosco’s Oratory is a saving home for the children of God, a place where the youth can truly dwell. Don Bosco managed to create a space for the youth in which they could experience the reality of the love of God as a tangible reality, in the same way Jesus, the good shepherd, has enfleshed the saving God in the reality of his sheepfold, offering life and communion.⁹⁵ In other words, the Oratory experience serves the youth as a stepping stone for their belonging to God and to abide in His love. The question of St Francis de Sales “Who has your heart?” could be posed to the youth

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ O’Malley, “A Salesian Window.”

⁹¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 139.

⁹² Braido, *Don Bosco’s Pedagogical Experience*, 149.

⁹³ “Literally, con una parola nell’orecchio, a favorite little device of Don Bosco to catch a boy at ease and give him an encouraging word, or a conscience-stirring one, as the situation required.” Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 273. Note 11.

⁹⁴ Chávez Villanueva, “*The Gospel of Don Bosco*.”

https://www.sdb.org/en/GC28/Documents/Homilies_Addresses/Letter_from_Rome_1884__The_gospel_of_Don_Bosco (accessed 6 June 2023)

⁹⁵ Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality*, 164-166.

to reflect upon where their heart lies.⁹⁶ This is what the Oratory experience ultimately aims to achieve. Through this experience, Don Bosco, a man of the Spirit, “gave a lasting response to the situation of young people.”⁹⁷ “It is the starting point from which Salesian Youth Ministry seeks to formulate an appropriate response to today’s challenges.”⁹⁸

3.3 The Preventive System of Don Bosco: A Means to *menein*

Don Bosco truly believed that education is a matter of the heart,⁹⁹ a divine call. Educating the young is certainly not easy, but he deeply believed that love overcomes all the difficulties. Don Bosco called his educational approach “the Preventive System” in a way that the Preventive System converge with Don Bosco’s personal spirituality. The Preventive System is based entirely on reason and religion and above all, on loving-kindness (“*amorevolezza*” in Italian).¹⁰⁰

This takes us directly to the heart of the Johannine concept of *menein*, abiding in God. It is an abiding in love that leads the educator to speak to the young using the language of the heart.¹⁰¹ Once an educator wins the pupil through love, then that educator can exercise a really positive influence on that pupil's life. The whole system can be considered as an original effort to synthesize the various elements in order to reach a holistic development of the person. Reason, religion and loving-kindness are the three important elements which are all present and reacting to each other.

In his letter from Rome in 1884, Don Bosco makes a later interpretation of preventive experience drawn up around the key concepts of loving-kindness or “*amorevolezza*”: love perceivable and perceived. Don Bosco says: “That the youngsters should not only be loved,

⁹⁶ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 224.

⁹⁷ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 136.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Pascual Chávez Villanueva, Letter of the Rector Major, *Acts of the General Council* 415 (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Braidó, Don Bosco’s Pedagogical Experience, 136.

¹⁰¹ “The Preventive System offers the student previous warning, in a way that the educator can still speak to him in the language of the heart, whether during the time of his education, or later.” John Bosco, “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young – Turin, 1877,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 491.

but that they themselves should know that they are loved."¹⁰² In a moment of correction or preventive suggestion, the educator might gain a child's heart. It is by showing love, and when this same love is perceived by the recipient, that education can really take place. "If one knows that one is loved, one loves and who loves obtains anything, especially from youth."¹⁰³ Hence, as Don Bosco writes: "Learn how to make yourself loved rather than feared."¹⁰⁴ It is not an education based on fear, where the pupil only does what the educator asks of him because he is afraid of him. Instead, it becomes a conviction of the heart which is based on true benevolence and love, a true mutual abiding that leads to a transformation of the heart. All this is based on the love of Jesus who transforms the hearts of his disciples through his friendship.

Another important aspect in the Preventive System is "*Salesian Presence*." It consists of the educators watching carefully over the children they are taking care of and who, like loving fathers, can converse with them, take the lead in every moment, and in a kindly way give advice and correction, in order to guide them in the right path. Thus, the educators and the pupils will become friends for life where they both become benefactors of each other.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the role of the educator with the young, the only reason for his mutual abiding with them, is to lead them to a salvific mutual abiding relationship with Jesus. This way of education and evangelisation through friendship puts into practice the Johannine concept of *menein* through loving relationships where the hearts are all united with each other in God, that is the union of hearts as expounded upon by St Francis de Sales.

The Preventive System is also a pedagogy based on joy, the joy John refers to in his gospel.¹⁰⁶ When Dominic Savio met Camillo Gavio he told him: "For us here it means making holiness consist in being happy ... serve the Lord in gladness."¹⁰⁷ This explains the spirit Don

¹⁰² John Bosco, "Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin - Rome, 10 May 1884," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 504.

¹⁰³ Braidò, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ John Bosco, "Confidential reminders for the director at the house of – Turin, 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 478.

¹⁰⁵ Braidò, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ See Jn 15:11.

¹⁰⁷ John Bosco, "Life of the young Dominic Savio, pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales – 5th Edition, Turin, 1878," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 1208.

"I will tell you in a few words. For us here it means making holiness consist in being happy. We hate and detest sin as something that robs us of God's grace and makes us very unhappy inside; we try to be very faithful to all

Bosco fostered amongst his pupils, “he made joyful charity a *sine qua non* of his whole educational method.”¹⁰⁸ “Joy is the noblest expression of happiness and, together with celebration and hope, is characteristic of Salesian spirituality.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, “Salesian Youth Ministry proposes a path of holiness that is simple, cheerful and serene.”¹¹⁰

Salesian youth ministry is, for all the educators, based on “an apostolic spirituality because, led by the Spirit, we are sent to collaborate in the mission of the Father who gives redeeming efficacy to our educational and evangelising activity among the young.”¹¹¹ Therefore, educators can only bear fruit if they mutually abide in the Father through His Son. It is also “a spirituality that makes young people the evangelisers of other young people.”¹¹² In Don Bosco's experiences, leaders used to emerge from the same boys he educated. These boys inherited his system and practised it with others.¹¹³

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we saw how Don Bosco sought to abide in God and always dreamed of helping others to abide in God. Through his union with God, he was guided to develop the Salesian youth ministry as a proposal for the young to abide in God. This is what he lived through a family spirit with so many young people in the Oratory experience. This came to maturity in what we call the “Preventive System,” an approach where educators seek to befriend the youth to lead them to a friendship with God.

our duties and to be foremost in taking an active part in all exercises of piety. Try taking for your own special motto: *Servite Domino in laetitia* - Serve the Lord in gladness.”

¹⁰⁸ Ceria, *Don Bosco with God*, 147.

¹⁰⁹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 103.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 98.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ More information on the Preventive System can be found in Appendix 3.

Chapter 4

Salesian Youth Ministry:

The Four Basic Principles Enlightened by the Notion of *menein*

The pastoral heritage of Don Bosco has been transmitted through the years and has reached a mature point in what is today called the *Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project (SEPP)*.¹ It consists in four basic dimensions: education to faith; education to culture; social experience and the vocational dimension.² In this chapter we will see how these four dimensions of Salesian youth ministry can be interpreted and enlightened by the notion of “abiding.” The holistic approach they contain in favour of the evangelisation of the young can be further enriched through the reading of these same dimensions against the background that the notion of “remaining”/“abiding” can provide.

The four dimensions of the *SEPP* are like interconnected vessels that provide support to each other, while each one is enriched by the others.³ We can detect these four dimensions present in the Salesian Constitutions. In articles 32-37 we read the following article titles: “Personal development,”⁴ “Social and collective development,”⁵ “Evangelisation and catechesis,”⁶ “Introduction to ecclesial life,”⁷ “Introduction to liturgical life,”⁸ and “Vocational guidance.”⁹ These articles, to be found right after the articles of the Salesian spirit and identity, are the foundation stones of Salesian youth ministry. Each of these four dimensions contains specific aims and objectives that while it can be explained on its own merits, its true value and depth can only be achieved in its indispensable relationship with the rest.¹⁰ In fact “the logic behind them is that of a system, where the dynamics of one element provoke

¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2014), 145.

² Ibid., 149.

³ See Ibid.

⁴ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations* (Bengaluru, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2015), 40. Article 32.

⁵ Ibid., 41. Article 33.

⁶ Ibid., 42. Article 34.

⁷ Ibid. Article 35.

⁸ Ibid., 43. Article 36.

⁹ Ibid. Article 37.

¹⁰ Cfr. Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 148.

adaptation in all the others.”¹¹ Altogether they give “Salesian youth ministry its specific character,”¹² while creating a dynamic movement that gives soul to the youth ministry.

There is an essential aspect which needs to be highlighted at this point: the aspect of a “system” needs to be understood not so much as a function of actions and proposals, but rather as an “environment”, or a “systematic experience” where each dimension’s value and worth emerge in its relationship with the rest. In the context of this reflection, the “abiding” together of these dimensions is already a condition of the positive outcome of ministry as a “family” experience. As a matter of fact, through these four dimensions it is ensured that no aspect in the formation of the young is neglected.

The proposal that is offered to the young becomes one which is deeply rooted in God, complete in all the important human aspects, while assuring a space where “abiding” is not simply “occupying” a space, but rather an experience of welcome leading to the emergence of the spiritual in a community context where the call of each one is discovered and pursued. The aim in all this is that while responding to the different needs of the young in the concrete realities of their lives, it provides a holistic plan that serves for their maturity and growth, and their joy may be complete¹³ in discovering God’s call for them. In what follows, we will explore further how each of these four dimensions is inspired by the notion of ‘abiding’ as portrayed in the Gospel of John.

4.1 Education to Faith – the Transcendent Aspect:

A Call to *ginosko* and to *menein*

Many youths today are searching for meaning in life. They are trying to discover who they are and who God is.¹⁴ Hence, education to faith is key in Salesian youth ministry. In the *Frame of Reference*, we read that: “Evangelising the young is the first and fundamental purpose of our

¹¹ Ibid., 149.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cfr. Jn 15:11.

¹⁴ Carlo Maria Martini, *Loved for Who I Am* (England: A Redemptorist Publication, 2000), 9-11.

mission.”¹⁵ Evangelisation is meant primarily here as that action that is called to deal with the deepest longings in the human heart. We can observe such longings in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Here the Fourth Evangelist narrates the call of the first disciples presented as a search for the Messiah.¹⁶ Thus, in Jn 1:39 we read that after Jesus’ invitation to the first two disciples to “come and see,” they went, saw, and remained with Him that day, since “it was something extremely beautiful that they experienced.”¹⁷

We may consider that these two verses also represent the quest of so many youths who are searching for meaning in life. Through Salesian youth ministry the youth, who in the depths of their hearts yearn to encounter God, are invited to come and see for themselves, and discover the beauty of encountering the Risen Lord. Going back to the roots of the Salesian charism, we should recall Don Bosco who continuously sought to connect and respond to the needs of the youth, who were seeking to abide with God. There is a primordial call in every human being to be in God, as Saint Augustine writes in his Confessions: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”¹⁸

In all this, Jn 1:38-39 presents the first steps of the journey of the Christian vocation: an initial meeting with the Lord that is called to mature to a personal friendly relationship (a mutual abiding), “which fills the heart and changes one’s life.”¹⁹ “This transforming meeting is the faith, which animated by love, makes believers and the Christian communities into those who spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus.”²⁰ It is within this dimension that we can detect a first step, incomplete but still indispensable, to ensure an environment and a journey where young people are accompanied to reach “full maturity in Christ and their growth in the Church, (being convinced that) education of the religious dimension is central to personal development.”²¹

¹⁵ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 150.

¹⁶ See Jn 1:38-39.

¹⁷ Pascual Chávez Villanueva, “Come and see” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry. Acts of the General Council 409* (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2011), 8.

¹⁸ Saint Augustine of Hippo, Confessions (Conf. Book 1, Chapter 1).

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm> (accessed 13 June 2023).

¹⁹ Chávez Villanueva, “Come and see” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry, Acts of the General Council 409*, 9.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 150.

Within this understanding of faith as an invitation and journey, it is essential for all those ministering to the young that they are encouraged “to be for young people real spiritual guides, like John the Baptist who pointed out Jesus to his disciples telling them: ‘Look there is the Lamb of God!’ (Jn 1,36).”²² Hence, at this juncture, in the crucial accompaniment of the young, all educators are called to be pointers to Jesus so that “they may acquire ‘a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel’ (Porta Fidei 8) and discover the intrinsic joy of faith.”²³ Youth can and need to be accompanied to see beyond themselves and open up to the reality of the transcendent.

Two very important moments that gradually mature in this process are the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. “Fully convinced of the priestly power he had received to forgive sin,” Don Bosco “invited all to avail of the sacrament of confession.”²⁴ Similarly, he encouraged “regular participation in the eucharist so that it may lead to our transformation where Jesus lives in and through us.”²⁵ “Transformation” is one of those key words that denote the character of the spiritual journey in the light of the Salesian charism. There is no sudden change, but a gradual journey towards change. In the light of what we read in Jn 6:56, the Eucharist within the dynamic of youth ministry becomes an experience that can give the youth the great gift of mutually abiding in Jesus. That is why the youth are to be accompanied by the educators in a friendly manner so that they can open their hearts and see “that celebrations lead to a real personal relationship with Christ.”²⁶

Truly going through the process of a faith journey, the youth are helped to translate into their real-life experiences what they celebrate in the sacraments. They too can become gifts to others by helping and animating others, becoming themselves evangelisers and witnesses to their companions and others.²⁷ Through the same sharing in the Eucharist the youth become also more united among themselves, with their educators, and with Christ,

²² Chávez Villanueva, “Come and see” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry, Acts of the General Council* 409, 8.

²³ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 151.

²⁴ Eugenio Ceria, *Don Bosco with God* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 136.

²⁵ Eunan McDonnell, *Live Jesus with St Francis De Sales and St John Bosco* (Sliema, Malta: Salesians of Don Bosco Publications Malta, 2022), 317.

²⁶ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 152.

²⁷ Ibid.

since “the Eucharist is the great sacrament of unity, leading to a communion of hearts and oneness in Christ.”²⁸ Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual “abiding” of Christ and each of his followers: “Abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4).²⁹ Hence, we may consider Salesian spirituality as a Eucharistic spirituality based on Johannine spirituality with special reference to the *menein* motif, that is, mutual abiding in Christ. This is the main pillar of an “education to faith.”

Another essential element in the education to faith is the Word of God. The encounter with the Word of God and sharing can also take place amongst the young in the form of *Lectio Divina*.³⁰ The Word of God and prayer is something that is intimately connected with the Johannine motif of *menein* (abiding), as we can see in Jn 15:3 and Jn 15:7. It is through abiding in the Word of Jesus that his disciples are cleansed, that is, formed. The maturity in faith, being a gradual journey, is without any doubt aided by prayer in the light of the Word of God. This will help those who are in a formative journey to see where they stand, and in what aspects they are challenged to continue to grow.

At times the Word of God leads us to the process of pruning, in a way that discipleship and friendship with Christ can be strengthened. Jn 15:2 states that pruning is an important process, a necessity that leads one to bear more fruit. Hence, through Salesian youth ministry, the youth are invited to enter in a deeper way into their inner life to lead a life in tune with the Spirit that lives in them.³¹

Abiding in Jesus also means sharing in his mission, working for social justice, and instilling moral values to construct a society that is imbued by Christian values for the flourishing of all mankind. Don Bosco used to emphasize this important aspect with his

²⁸ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 310.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter (Vatican City: LEV 2003) par. 22.

³⁰ “Young people are always more sensitive to a prayerful reading of the Word of God in the form of *Lectio divina* when the biblical text is broken down into appropriate language strictly connected with their life and by talking about who God is so that who they are can also be revealed.” Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 153.

³¹ See 1 Cor 6:19.

famous dictum “good Christians and upright citizens,”³² because one’s faith cannot fail to speak to one’s daily life. In the *Frame of Reference*, we read that:

Proposing and witnessing to solidarity gives credibility to Gospel proclamation because it is an expression of human potential; this is already proclaiming the new life in Christ, and showing that the Gospel is meant for human beings, that the Church has something crucial to say about life, dignity, hope and the future of mankind.³³

The ultimate aim for all of this “education to faith” is to receive the joy that Christ bestows on those who abide in Him,³⁴ and share it and proclaim it to one and all. The call is not an individual one. It is the call to the whole community which educates with the heart of the good shepherd. Thus, this community, the *Educative Pastoral Community (EPC)*, can only present such a journey of faith to the youth if first and foremost the educators themselves are abiding in God, and if they are themselves experiencing a journey of faith.

Just as Jesus who calls all to abide in Him, which ultimately leads to abiding in the Father, all educators need to abide in Jesus, in the same way that the branches abide in the vine, if they are to participate in His mission and bear fruit.³⁵ As Jesus was sent by the Father, so are the disciples sent by Christ.³⁶ Jesus, abiding in the Father and in the Spirit, is the model for any educator who wants to bear any fruit in his apostolic work of transmitting the faith to the young.³⁷ The motto “give me souls, take away the rest” (*da mihi animas, coetera tolle*) is the fundamental calling of Salesians, but we need to ensure that this is not interpreted solely within a human or horizontal framework.”³⁸ This temptation will only displace God as the author of all the Salesian work with the youth, with the sole result of proposing a ministry which has no transcendental vision.

³² John Bosco, “Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for non-residents – Turin. 1877,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1 *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 607.

³³ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 153.

³⁴ See Jn 15:11.

³⁵ See Jn 15:4.

³⁶ See Jn 20:21.

³⁷ See Jn 15:5.

³⁸ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 152.

4.2 Education to Culture - Cultural Aspect: In the World but not of the World

Salesian youth ministry must be practical and applicable to today's reality, otherwise it would be out of touch and becomes irrelevant to the youth of today's society. Whilst discerning the signs of the times and remembering that all Salesian educators are sent by Jesus on a mission to the world,³⁹ they are called to incarnate the mission of educating and evangelising the young in today's reality and in its cultural trends, in different contexts around the globe. As we find in one of Don Bosco's famous quotes: "walk with your feet on earth but in your heart be in heaven."⁴⁰ Whilst living it himself with his continuous abiding in God, Don Bosco sought to respond to the needs of the youth in the society he was living in, with its values and challenges. As much as the branch needs to be continually connected to the vine to bear fruit, so it was for Don Bosco and thus it is for all Salesian educators, if they want to respond in a truly charismatic way to the needs of the youth in an efficacious manner.

All this cannot be done without relating it to the previous dimension. Therefore, "education is the place and also the means for offering the Good News of the Gospel, the message which takes flesh in real culture."⁴¹ In the Salesian Constitutions, article 31, we read: "Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order."⁴² The *EPC* operates within the current reality in which humanity finds itself. The 7th successor of Don Bosco, Don Egidio Viganò, reminded Salesian educators to be: "With Don Bosco and the times, and not with the times of Don Bosco!"⁴³ Therefore, it is vital for Salesian youth ministry to read the current times and needs, while seeking ways and means so as to remain evermore relevant for the youth of today, rather than just blindly perpetuating what Don Bosco used to do. Whilst keeping and

³⁹ See Jn 17:18.

⁴⁰ This famous quote reflects Don Bosco's writing in his biography of Francis Besucco: "Besucco's heart seemed no longer of this world but of someone who though walking with feet on the earth has his soul already with God whom he wants to constantly speak and write about." John Bosco, "The Young Shepherd Boy from the Alps, or the Life of Young Francis Besucco from Argentera – Turin 1878," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 1307-1308.

⁴¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 153.

⁴² Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 40. Article 31.

⁴³ Egidio Viganò, "Reading the Founder's Charism again at the Present Day," Letter of the Rector Major, *Acts of the General Council* 352 (Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 1995).

evolving the richness inherited from Don Bosco, the *EPC* applies it to the current situations in which the youth find themselves. This includes the digital continent and the reality of social media, which was not present in the time of Don Bosco.

Education is not solely about passing on information. A very crucial and important aspect in Salesian youth ministry is to accompany the youth in their emotional and affective world.⁴⁴ This is of utmost importance for them to be able to build healthy relationships, to grow and mature in an environment based on love. “Young people are looking for genuine relationships in their families, with their teachers, friends, workmates: relationships that can help them feel at ease and calmly proceed with life.”⁴⁵ Relationships need not be based on egoism and exploitation of the other but rather in being a gift to each other, as Don Bosco was for so many young people.⁴⁶

Within this context, attention is given to the family. In fact, Salesian youth ministry is very much aware and engaged in helping the families of the young. The aim is to create a culture of love and respect where the affective dimension leads to service, serving one another as we read in Jn 13 in the episode of the washing of the feet during the last supper. Don Bosco strove for the well-being of the youth in all aspects of life, be it in their relationships, in their work, and in all the activities they would be involved in.

Concluding this section, we can state that the primacy of God did not lead Don Bosco “to any diminution of the significance of the earthly reality.”⁴⁷ On the contrary, the real understanding that Don Bosco had of faith, as enlightened by the person of Jesus and portrayed in the gospel story, is one that necessarily leads to the growth of the human experience in its wholeness. Education and faith call one another. True knowledge, intellectual or otherwise, is never shy of true wisdom, gospel wisdom. Don Bosco’s first pastoral choices were very much in the light of discovering and favouring the emergence of a

⁴⁴ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 154.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁶ “I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys.” Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 17. Article 1.

⁴⁷ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 213.

wholeness that was in dialogue with space and time, while at the same time firmly rooted in the gospel story. The following phrase by one of Don Bosco's esteemed readers is a summary of this unity, which in Salesian terms is called "the grace of unity": "His conviction of the fleeting character of the world and of history, did not hinder him from his commitment to make the universe more habitable for young people and to do all he could for the benefit of human society in general."⁴⁸

We can make our own the affirmation that "in Salesian spirituality, there is no detachment from this world, but a practical engagement in it."⁴⁹ And as much as there is no "detachment" between Salesian spirituality and the world, we can say that there is a profound "connectedness" between education understood in intellectual and academic terms and education in affective terms. The latter enriches the former, while education to faith gives depth and meaningfulness to both.

4.3 Social Experience - Solidarity/Missionary Experience: Remaining in the Vine to bear Fruit

The social dimension "is a fundamental feature of Salesian education and Evangelisation."⁵⁰ Jn 15 presents us with the importance of the community aspect,⁵¹ and how mutually abiding in each other in the love of God is of great support for one another to live out the Christian life, even amidst a hostile world. Don Bosco was inspired to create the Oratory experience as a social experience, because his aim was to foster an environment that helps each member of the Oratory to journey on in the life of faith. He tried to implement all this within the reality of society and amidst all the challenges which one might encounter along the way. Being part of the Oratory and living the proposal of Don Bosco, the young were invited to be like

⁴⁸ Francesco Motto, *Start Afresh from Don Bosco: Meditations for a Spiritual Retreat* (Rome: Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana (ACSSA), 2006), 40.

⁴⁹ McDonnell, *Live Jesus*, 213.

⁵⁰ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 157.

⁵¹ "The presence of many branches on the vine indicates a community dimension as well, 'the renewed people of God centred in Jesus.' There are both vertical and horizontal dimensions." Michael T. Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality: An Exploration* (Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2020), 52-53.

branches which are well attached to the vine. The life in the Oratory was nurtured by Jesus and it is this experience that poured life into its branches. The emphasis was always to abide in God, but Don Bosco knew very well that Christian life is not something to be lived out alone in a secluded and protected environment. Rather it is only in the context of a group, a community of believers, that such an intense experience of Christian life can be truly lived. Thus, we can agree with those who argued that “Don Bosco saw the group as an educational presence capable of increasing the range of things we can do.”⁵²

His pedagogical experience, the synthetic core of which can be found in what is known as the “Preventive System,” “demands an intense and lively setting of participation and friendly relationships enlivened by the animating presence of the educators.”⁵³ In the Salesian Constitutions, article 35, we read: “We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it.”⁵⁴ Within this community the youth are initiated into a process of continual growth through the various experiences they are involved in. These experiences aid the holistic development of each person within the group. As the growth process matures, more responsibility is shared with the young so that they can also, in their own unique way, contribute to the Salesian mission and to society. Making young people primary agents of initiatives that lead to change is a natural outcome of a faith-based experience in dialogue with culture, time and space. The absence of the qualitative pastoral leap risks bringing young people to be inward-looking persons where the personal good is the only criterion of action. All this changes where within an environment of holistic growth personal growth is perceived as part of the common good.

All this entails a serene family environment⁵⁵ in the Oratory, which is essential for Salesian youth ministry, since it is a pedagogy based on relationships which are experienced in an immediate manner. The underlying model of the day-to-day relationships remains the communal love that exists in the relationships between the Trinity. As Jesus abides in the Father so are the disciples to abide in Jesus in order to participate in this communal love,

⁵² Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 157.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 42. Article 35.

⁵⁵ Luciano Pazzaglia, *Don Bosco's Option For Youth And His Educational Approach* (Rome: LAS, 1993), 289.

which they are also called to have for one another in the same way Jesus has for each and every one of them. Similarly, in a family environment, all members of the group can feel, first of all, loved and appreciated for who they are.⁵⁶ This provides a secure base from which they can express their qualities and be able to flourish, knowing they will be supported and encouraged to develop the potential which God has sowed in them.

Creating an atmosphere of confidence and familiarity, education and evangelisation can happen in a very natural way by abiding together in love and affection. The joy that is created in such a context is already a testimony in itself that can and will flourish in a healthy way when it reaches out to others. Once the Oratory experience is built on authentic relationships that have as a priority none other than the wellbeing and true good of each and every member, then such a community attracts others to join this beautiful experience. In such an environment of mutual love and solidarity, the Christian life can be experienced first hand and at the same time proclaimed to anyone who becomes part of this holistic experience.

Yet, this communal reality is not there to construct a parallel world with society or to create some safe haven that leads one to some form of escapism. Rather, it is a community in touch with the reality outside of it and even prepares the young people to be able to face any challenges that lie ahead. Forming Salesian animators from among the youth themselves is an important factor in Don Bosco's system. This role empowers them to become protagonists of their own journey, and involves them in reaching out towards others, also sharing in the mission of evangelisation. To live their call of evangelizing others they themselves are required to go deeper in their faith journey and discern God's will, as they too share in the mission of bearing God's love to the young. This is an invitation for them to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus to be able to facilitate the encounter with Jesus for other youth and children whom they encounter in their apostolate.

⁵⁶ "When one examines the method Don Bosco used in his educational work, one clearly notices an approach grounded in the building of supportive relationships rather than on educational achievement. The type of presence that Don Bosco embodied was essentially relational, a relationship based on the awareness of the young person as he or she is in the present moment and creating a safe space for growth." Paul Formosa, *A Journey to the Soul: Exploring Presence at the Heart of Gestalt Therapy and Salesian Education* (Sliema, Malta: Pubblikazzjoni Salesjana, 2023), 43.

The *EPC* that accompanies these youth is invited to also reflect on their own journey and to discern the signs of the times to respond to the needs of the youth in their care in the respective cultural context. In this way everyone is encouraged to work together for the salvation of souls and for the greater glory of God, participating directly in the mission the Father entrusted to the Son, so that all are gathered and united in Him.

All of this takes us back to the Gospel of John when, during the Last Supper, Jesus tells the disciples that “the world” will hate them.⁵⁷ By these words, Jesus was reminding the disciples that their mission will be fulfilled amidst challenging situations. Because of this, the mutual support of the community of believers is essential. Just as the members of the Johannine community were of support to each other in the face of adversity, so all the disciples are called to be in union with each other (mutually abide in each other), and in union with God (mutually abiding in God), so that united together they can overcome the power of the evil one. The climax of the spiritual union (spiritual abiding) is reached in the communal celebration of the Eucharist, where all become one in Christ, as Jesus is one with the Father. This abiding in God reflects the Prayer of Jesus: “so that they may all be one.”⁵⁸

This leads us to the other dimension: that of coming to know God and His call for each and every one of us. Hence, this formative journey in the Christian faith and human development will aid each member to discover their own unique vocation and to be able to contribute to society in accordance with the Will of God. In the same manner that Jesus obeys His Father’s command (His Father’s will) and abides in His love, so all those who give heed to God’s call and obey the will of God will also abide in God’s love.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Jn 15:18-16:4.

⁵⁸ Jn 17:21.

⁵⁹ See Jn 15:10.

4.4 Vocational Dimension - The Call: The Samaritan Woman as a Model of Evangelisation

We can say that the previous three dimensions reach their true meaningfulness when they converge towards the fourth dimension: the vocational dimension,⁶⁰ which is the ultimate objective of Salesian youth ministry.⁶¹ Pascual Chávez Villanueva, the 9th successor of Don Bosco, affirms that: “All ministry and in particular youth ministry is at its roots vocational: the vocational dimension constitutes its main driving force and its natural culmination.”⁶² All Salesian youth ministry aims at helping the young to develop a relationship of friendship with God (to abide in God’s love), and to ultimately discover the call that God has for each and every one of them and to be able to respond to it.⁶³

Chávez continues to say that it is important to promote a vocational culture, since “it is the essential task of Youth Ministry.”⁶⁴ Within youth ministry which in essence is vocation ministry, it is important “to create the suitable conditions so that every young person may discover, take up and follow in a responsible manner their own vocation.”⁶⁵ Amongst others the young should become aware of “the different vocational paths – matrimony, religious or consecrated life, priestly service, social and ecclesial commitment.”⁶⁶ For this reason, the *EPC* aims to offer a family atmosphere which includes significant vocational witnesses that can also demonstrate to the young different vocational journeys. Within all this, the young are personally accompanied in their discernment to discover God’s will for them and to be able to accept God’s call. This is usually achieved through spiritual direction which will help them to gradually formulate “their plan of life.”⁶⁷ In the Salesian Constitutions, article 37, we read:

⁶⁰ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 160.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Chávez Villanueva, “Come and see” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry, Acts of the General Council 409*, 25.

⁶³ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 160.

⁶⁴ Chávez Villanueva, “Come and see” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry, Acts of the General Council 409*, 25.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 25-26.

⁶⁷ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 160.

We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel. The family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, created by the witness of a community which gives of itself with joy is the most efficacious setting for the discovery and guidance of vocations. This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction.⁶⁸

The process of discovering one's vocation to abide in God's love goes hand in hand with the process of evangelisation, and thus as Chávez states, the two are inseparable.⁶⁹

The accompaniment of youth through education and evangelisation helps the youth to come "to know" God and appreciate their life as a gift from God.⁷⁰ "To know" (*ginosko*) is another Johannine term used by the Fourth Evangelist in conjunction with *menein*. This knowing of God leads the youth to discover the love God has for them so that they can mutually abide in Him. Through this abiding, they gradually come to know God's call for them.

All this is beautifully illustrated in the episode of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman in Jn 4, which eventually leads to Jesus physically abiding with the people of Samaria. Probably here the intention of the Fourth Evangelist is to show how these people had to move from a physical to a spiritual abiding with Jesus. In a similar fashion, Don Bosco and his collaborators, while physically abiding in the Oratory with the boys who had no home or were in need, were led to a spiritual abiding in Jesus that was shared and communicated through their example. Through accompaniment, Don Bosco and his collaborators led the boys in the Oratory to discover God's call for them. Amongst them were even those called to continue Don Bosco's work as Salesians of Don Bosco. Some of them even reached sainthood at a very young, tender age, such as St Dominic Savio. Thus, the call to wholeness emerged together with the call to holiness. This reality lived in the Oratory of Don Bosco continues to be a challenge in relation to the response of the *EPC* to the youth of today.

⁶⁸ Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations*, 43-44. Article 37.

⁶⁹ Chávez Villanueva, "Come and see" (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry, Acts of the General Council 409*, 7. "Evangelisation and vocation are two inseparable elements."

⁷⁰ "Creating an authentic vocational culture in which life is understood and lived as a gift, as a vocation and as a mission, within a diversity of options." *Ibid.*, 9.

Returning to Jn 4, the episode is built on a gradual recognition and knowledge of Jesus by the Samaritan woman.⁷¹ This movement is still a call that needs to be present within the journey of the young people who are accompanied in Salesian youth ministry. It is an experience that gives them the possibility, first of all, to encounter Christ, and then gradually for this meeting to become an ever-deeper relationship of friendship and a discovery of who Jesus is for them. The main aim of this journey is to lead them to abide in Him while He abides in them, opening to Him the doors of their hearts.

This gradual process of knowing Jesus and abiding in Him can take place if the other dimensions are alive. It can happen through various aids such as the sacraments, prayer, the Word of God, the liturgy, the formative moments, the voluntary experiences and sharing in the mission.⁷² And here we can witness the coming together of all the dimensions. They will eventually come to know what God is calling them for, and like the Samaritan woman, they go and announce to others that they have encountered the Risen Lord.

By being Salesian animators, active agents in youth ministry experiences, the youth can go to their peers and other youth and children and announce to them, just by their presence and pastoral action, the beauty of their journey of faith. They can invite others to join in the beautiful environment of the Oratory experience, in which they can continue to journey within the group and in an environment where their deepest yearnings can find fulfilment in God. This will help them to eventually find their state in life, according to God's call for them, and mutually abide in Him by sharing in His mission, just as Jesus abides in God the Father and shares in the mission of the Father who sends his Son to save humanity.⁷³

At Don Bosco's Oratory, the previous three dimensions converge together with the vocational dimension, leading the young to discover God's call for them according to where the Spirit leads them, within a relationship that is meaningful, culturally rooted, and socially

⁷¹ "Though she does not make a full confession, her faith has matured as the dialogue with Jesus has unfolded, and, although she is still asking questions, she now reaches out in evangelising mission to her people, wanting them to meet him and hear what he is offering, 'the gift of God,' living water." Winstanley, *Salesian Gospel Spirituality*, 42.

⁷² Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 162.

⁷³ See Jn 5:17 and see Jn 14:10-14.

engaged. There is an emphasis on the importance of spiritual accompaniment, whilst educating them to the faith, in their cultural context, within their social group, and with attention to the environment in which they live. Accompaniment is not an optional opportunity. It is an indispensable space and condition that reflects the holiness of one's life project. Discovering God's call is not a mechanical choice. It has to do with all that is sacred and beautiful in relation to life itself. All these together help the young to embark on a journey of faith, and whilst living through life's events with others, they are helped to gradually discern and discover the will of God in their own uniqueness.

Conclusion

Salesian youth ministry is based on Salesian spirituality and therefore has an inherent holistic approach. The cooperation of so many people who dedicate their lives for the salvation of the young, aims to offer a holistic approach to their education and evangelisation, to their commitment to the common good, and whilst abiding in the love of God they discover God's plan for them. This abiding in God, or friendship with God, is like a golden thread that passes through the four main dimensions which we have explored throughout this chapter.

We have seen how all these dimensions depend on each other, enhance each other, and recall each other. Education to faith does not happen in a vacuum. It is an impossible venture "unless it becomes an educational and cultural process," which involves "the relational and social dimensions of the individual," so that one can ultimately discover one's own vocation.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the cultural and educational process will not bear much fruit unless it is inspired by the Gospel values.

All these dimensions aim to achieve what God wills through the Salesian charism, which the Holy Spirit raised in the Church through St John Bosco, for the salvation of the young, especially the poorest ones, so that they can all mutually abide in God's love and find

⁷⁴ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 162.

their true joy in Him, as Jesus says to His disciples in Jn 15:11 “so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to study the concept of *menein* as developed in the Fourth Gospel as a source of inspiration for Salesian youth ministry. In the first part of the dissertation we examined the different uses and meaning of *menein* throughout the Fourth Gospel and we argued that it is the context that really helps the reader to bring out the true meaning of this verb within the Johannine narrative, though sometimes it is even difficult to determine the exact meaning of this verb as used in John. In addition, we argued that *menein* can be translated as “staying,” “remaining,” “abiding,” and “dwelling” to mention a few. At times it can take on a physical meaning and in other instances a spiritual one, though in yet other instances it might have both senses.

We also argued that *menein* forms part of the dualistic Johannine vocabulary which is linked with various other symbolic terms used in the same gospel, such as, to believe, to know, to see, etc. John uses this kind of symbolism to distinguish between the true disciples of Jesus and those who are not. In doing so, the Evangelist also helps the reader to distinguish between those who abide in Jesus and those who do not abide in Him. All this reaches its climax in Jn 15 with the metaphor of the vine. The disciples should abide in Jesus as the branches abide in the vine and as Jesus abides in the Father. Those who “remain/abide” in Jesus’ love become his friends. In this way, John uses the “abiding” in a highly theological sense to present through his proper narrative the essence of discipleship.

All of this was of great inspiration to Don Bosco. Although this saint did not write any theological work on the Gospel of John, it is clear that his life was greatly influenced and inspired by this “spiritual gospel.” In a special way, the Johannine theme of “abiding/remaining” had an impact not only on his personal life but also on his youth ministry. All this started in his early years when he was still a young boy. When he was just nine years of age, he had a special dream through which God showed him his mission. Through his continual abiding in God and growing in faith by being accompanied by his spiritual directors, he eventually came to realize God’s will for him. The experiences he had with Fr Cafasso in Turin continued to help him to discern and recognize that God was calling him to help the

various youth who were ending up in ruin because they had no one to guide them. Therefore, he felt the urge to create a saving reality for them. By becoming little with the little ones, he proposed the Valdocco Oratory model, which up until today remains the criterion for all activities and invitations in Salesian youth ministry.

The welcoming environment of the Oratory led so many youths to come and abide within this place to experience and benefit from the holistic proposal offered to them by St John Bosco and his collaborators. Through a Home that welcomes, a Church that evangelises, a School that teaches for life, and a Playground where friendships are formed, the youth were ultimately directed to a deep friendship with God. We referred to all this as the Preventive System, based entirely on reason, religion, and loving-kindness. We argued that through a pedagogy based on love, familiarity, and Salesian presence, where the pupils are befriended by their superiors in the same way that Jesus befriends his disciples, the young are led to a deep spiritual union with the Lord. The climax of all this activity is reached through the sacramental pedagogy of Reconciliation and ultimately the Eucharist. It is in this deep spiritual union, abiding with God, that the boys of the Oratory found their true joy, and that their joy was made complete.

This proposal continued to mature in the Salesian youth ministry which today is present in more than 130 countries. Due to his openness for the Spirit of God to abide in him, St John Bosco truly allowed his union with God to form him as He wanted. Ultimately, all this led him to help so many youths to abide in God. Part of this fruit, as a result of St John Bosco's proposal to abide in God forever, was without doubt St Dominic Savio, who continues to serve as a role model for many young people today.

Salesian youth ministry today maintains the mission of bearers of God's love to the young by proposing a *Salesian Educative Pastoral Project* that includes all the dimensions for a holistic journey. It is based on education to faith that takes into consideration the educational and cultural context in which the faith is being incarnated, within the social dynamics of the youths being addressed, with the aim of helping the young people to ultimately discover their own unique vocation. Through Salesian presence and accompaniment, the young people find themselves journeying with a sense of belonging,

enlightened by the message of the Gospel, educated and equipped for life, and gifted with a clear meaning that gives them the ultimate direction of their life in answering God's call to abide in God now and forever in heaven. All this has been inspired by the Johannine theme of "abiding" as a basic notion of those who would like to live closer to Jesus Christ.

Bibliography

Commentaries

Beasley-Murray, George R., *John*. World Biblical Commentary, vol. 36: Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999.

Beutler, Johannes. *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Tait Michael. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017.

Brodie, Thomas L. *The Gospel according to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Brown, Raymond E., *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. The Anchor Yale Bible. vol. 29. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008a.

———. *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*. The Anchor Yale Bible. vol. 29A. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008b.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. ed. Beasley-Murray, G. R. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014.

Carson, D. A. *The Gospel according to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Fabris, Rinaldo. *Giovanni*. 2nd ed. Rome: Edizioni Borla s.r.l., 2003.

Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. trans. Vriend, John. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel according to St John*. vol. 1. New York: Crossroad, 1982.

———. *The Gospel According to St. John*. vol. 2. New York: Crossroad, 1990a.

———. *The Gospel According to St. John*. vol. 3. New York: Crossroad, 1990b.

Books and Articles

Ashton, John. *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

—, *Studying John. Approaches to the Fourth Gospel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Beck David R., *The Discipleship Paradigm. Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Beirne Margaret M., *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel. A Genuine Discipleship of Equals*. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

Brown Raymond E., *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist, 1979.

Culpepper, R. Alan. *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Culpepper, R. Alan and Black, C. Clifton, eds. *Exploring the Gospel of John*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Dodd, C. H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Duke David, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.

Forestell Terence, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*. Analecta Biblica 57. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1974.

Harrington, Daniel J., *The Gospel of John*. Sacra Pagina 4. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2005.

Koester Craig, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel. Meaning, Mystery, Community*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.

Koester, Craig R. *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Kysar, Robert. *John: The Maverick Gospel*. 3rd ed. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Lee, Dorothy, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John*. New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 2002.

Loader William, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989.

Micallef, Martin. “ ‘The World’ in the Gospel of John: A Message through a Prism.” *Melita Theologica* 72, no.2 (2022): 203-215.

—. “The Fourth Gospel as a Textual Field of Meaning.” *Melita Theologica* 64, no.2 (2014): 5-17.

Martyn J. Louis, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. Nashville: John Knox, 1979.

Porter Stanley E., *John, his Gospel, and Jesus. In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015.

Stander, Adriaan Johannes Jacobus. “*Menein* as Key to a Mystical Reading of John 15.” University of the Free State, 2016.

Schneiders, Sandra M. *Written that You may Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*. Revised and Expanded Edition ed. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003a.

Skinner Christopher W., ed. *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*. Library of New Testament Studies 461. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Sun, Poling Joe. “*Menein* in the Johannine Traditions: An Integrated Approach to the Motif of Abiding in the Fourth Gospel, I and II John.” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993.

Winstanley Michael, *Symbols and Spirituality: Reflecting on John’s Gospel*. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2008.

Biblical Online Sources

Bible Hub, Concordance: Meno
https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_3306.htm
(accessed on 21 February 2022).

BibleTools, Greek/Hebrew Lexicon: Lambano
<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/lexicon.show/ID/g2983/page/3>
(accessed on 9 March 2022).

BibleTools, Greek/Hebrew Lexicon: Meno
<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/lexicon.show/ID/g3306/page/1>
(accessed on 23 February 2022).

Monergism, Key Words in the Gospel of John
<https://www.monergism.com/key-words-gospel-john>
(accessed on 20 February 2022).

Salesian Sources

Aronica, Paul. *A Man Sent by God*. 2nd ed. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1988.

Attard, Fabio and Garcia, Miguel Angel, eds. *Salesian Spiritual Direction: Accompaniment and Prayer*. Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2020.

Auffray, A. *Saint John Bosco*. Portsmouth: Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd, Grosvenor Press, 1930.

Bailey Anthony J. And Winstanley Michael T., *Don Bosco's Gospel Way*. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2002.

Bartolomé Juan José ed., *Witnesses of Evangelical Radicalism: A Biblical and Salesian Reflection*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2015.

Bacchiarello, J., ed. *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco*. Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1996.

Bartolome, Juan Jose and Smyth, Michael, eds. *What Kind of Salesians for the Youth of Today?* Bengaluru, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019.

Bosco, John. *Memoirs of the Oratory*. trans. Lyons, Daniel. New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989.

Bosco, John. "Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin - Rome, 10 May 1884, in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 501.

Bosco, John. "Letter to cleric Giovanni Bonetti – Sant'Ignazio, 20 July 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 961.

- Bosco, John. "To the Pupils at Mirabello, Turin - 30 December 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, 771.
- Bosco, John. "Letter to Fr James Costamagna – Turin, 10 August 1885," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013).
- Bosco, John. "The Preventive System in the Education of the Young – Turin, 1877," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1.
- Bosco, John. "Confidential reminders for the director at the house of – Turin, 1863," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1.
- Bosco, John. "Life of the young Dominic Savio, pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales – 5th Edition, Turin, 1878," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1.
- Bosco, John. "Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for non-residents – Turin. 1877," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013).
- Bosco, John. "The Young Shepherd Boy from the Alps, or the Life of Young Francis Besucco from Argentera – Turin 1878," in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1.
- Braido, Pietro. *Don Bosco Prete dei Giovani nel Secolo delle Libertà*, vol. II. Istituto Storico Salesiano - Roma - Studi - 21. Second ed. Rome: LAS, 2003a.
- . *Don Bosco Prete dei Giovani Nel Secolo Delle Libertà*, Vol. I. Istituto Storico Salesiano - Roma - Studi - 20. Second ed. Rome: LAS, 2003b.
- . *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*. Rome: LAS - Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1989.
- Brocardo, Pietro. *Don Bosco: Profondamente uomo profondamente santo*. 4th ed. Rome: LAS, 2001.
- Buccellato, Giuseppe. *Notes for a 'Spiritual History' of Father John Bosco*. trans. Coelho, Ivo. Turin: ElleDiCi, 2008.
- Buccellato, Giuseppe. *San Giuseppe Cafasso: Il Direttore Spirituale di Don Bosco*. Rome: LAS, 2007.
- Buccellato, Giuseppe. *The Roots of the Spirituality of Saint John Bosco*. Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2019.

- Ceria, Eugenio. *Don Bosco with God*. Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008.
- Chávez Villanueva, Pascual. Letter of the Rector Major. *Acts of the General Council 400*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2007.
- . “*I am the vine, you the branches*” (Jn 15, 5a): *The Vocation to Remain Always United to Jesus to Have Life*. *Acts of the General Council 408*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2010.
- . “*Salesian Youth Ministry*.” *Acts of the General Council 407*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2010.
- . “*Come and see*” (Jn 1,39) *The Need for Vocation Ministry*. *Acts of the General Council 409*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2011.
- . Letter of the Rector Major. *Acts of the General Council 415*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2013.
- Coelho, Ivo. “The Preventive System as Philosophy and Method.” *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 17, no.1 (2006): 67-80.
- D’Souza, Joaquim. “Education to Freedom: Don Bosco and Jacques Maritain in Tandem?” *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 17, no.1 (2006): 9-66.
- Ford, Christopher. “Quality, Culture and Charism.” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10, no.2 (1999): 275-299.
- Formosa, Paul. *A Journey to the Soul: Exploring Presence at the Heart of Gestalt Therapy and Salesian Education*. Sliema, Malta: Pubblikazzjoni Salesjana, 2023.
- Giraud, Aldo. “Presentation of: ‘The Companion of Youth,’” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 695.
- Grech, Louis. *Salesian Spiritual Companionship with Young People Today*. Malta: Horizons, 2018.
- Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista and Amadei, Angelo and Ceria, Eugenio. *The Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco*. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-2002. Vol. I to XIX.

Lemoyne, Giovanni Battista and Amadei, Angelo and Ceria, Eugenio. *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, 19 Vols. Turin: Tipografia Salesiana SAID/SEI, 1897-1917, 1930-1938, 1948).

Lenti Arthur J., *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*. Vols. 1-7 (Rome: LAS, 2007-2010).

Martini, Carlo Maria. *Loved for Who I Am*. England: A Redemptorist Publication, 2000.

McDonnell, Eunan. *Live Jesus with St Francis De Sales and St John Bosco*. Sliema, Malta: Don Bosco Publications Malta, 2022.

Moloney Francis J., "Salesians Beyond 2000." *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10 (1999): 1-18.

—, "Jesus and Salesian Discipleship." *Journal of Salesian Studies* 13 (2005): 151-171.

—, "The Salesian Charism and the Good Shepherd Motif." *Journal of Salesian Studies* 16 (2015): 41-58.

Morrison, John. *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 2010.

Motto, Francesco. *Start Afresh from Don Bosco: Meditations for a Spiritual Retreat*. Rome: Associazione Cultori Storia Salesiana (ACSSA), 2006.

Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Evêque de Genève et Docteur de l'Eglise, Edition Complète, d'après les autographes et les éditions originales [...], publiée par les soins des Religieuses de la Visitation, du 1er Monastère d'Annecy, 27 vols. (Annecy: J. Niérat et al., 1892–1964).

Jeanne Françoise Freymont de Chantal, "Entretiens," in *Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, Vol. II, 478, quoted in W.M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal and François de Sales*. New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985.

Pazzaglia, Luciano. *Don Bosco's Option for Youth And His Educational Approach*. Rome: LAS, 1993.

Salesian Congregation. *Constitutions and Regulations*. Bengaluru, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2015.

Salesian Constitutions: *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco. A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1986.

Salesian Youth Ministry Department. *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*. 3rd ed. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2014.

Salesians Of Don Bosco. General Chapter XXIII. *Educating Young People to the Faith: A Task and Challenge for Today's Salesian Community*. Chapter Documents. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1990.

—. General Chapter XXVI. *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*. Chapter Documents. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2008.

—. General Chapter XXVIII. *What Kind of Salesians for the Youth of Today?* Chapter Documents. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2020.

Stella, Pietro. *Don Bosco: Life and Work*. trans. Drury, John. New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1985.

Vecchi Juan. *Acts of the General Council 363, "Experts, Witnesses and Craftsmen of Communion" The Salesian Community – Animating Nucleus*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1998.

—. *Acts of the General Council 373, "Now is the Acceptable Time" Vocations – A Point that Gives us Food for Thought*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2000.

Viganò Egidio. *In the Ever-growing Splendor of the Gospel. Acts of the General Council 296*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1980.

—. *The 'New Evangelization.'* *Acts of the General Council 331*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1989.

—. *Salesian Spirituality for the New Evangelization. Acts of the General Council 334*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1990.

—. *New Education. Acts of the General Council 337*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1991.

—. *Reading the Founder's Charism again at the Present Day. Acts of the General Council 352*. Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1995.

—. "Saint John Bosco: 'Iuventutis Pater Et Magister,'" Letter of the Rector Major. *Acts of the General Council 329*. Rome: Salesians of Don Bosco, 1989.

Vincent, R., and Pastore C., eds. *Passione Apostolica "Da mihi animas."* Rome: Associazione Biblica Salesiana, 2008.

Vojtas, Michal. *Don Bosco's Oratory*. Jerusalem (Israel): STS Publications, 2017.

Von Speyr, Adrienne. *The Book of All Saints*, trans. D. C. Schindler. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008. PDF e-book.

Winstanley Michael, *Alive! The Gospel Resurrection Narratives: Then and Now*. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2008.

———. *Don Bosco's Gospel Way*. Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2002.

———. *Salesian Gospel Spirituality: An Exploration*. Bolton, UK: Don Bosco Publications, 2020.

Salesian Online Sources

Agenzia Info Salesiana (ANS). "The Salesian Presence in the World" <https://www.infoans.org/en/sections/good-to-know/item/7758-the-salesian-presence-in-the-world> (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Chávez Villanueva, Pascual. "Letter from Rome 1884: The Gospel of Don Bosco," conference given on 26th February 2020.
https://www.sdb.org/en/GC28/Documents/Homilies_Addresses/Letter_from_Rome_1884__The_gospel_of_Don_Bosco
(accessed 4 June 2023)

Finnegan, Jack. Don Bosco Educator [Address]. Day of Reflection for the Salesian West Province, USA. Institute of Salesian Studies.
<http://sdl.sdb.org:8383/greenstone3/library> (accessed on 7 June 2023).

O'Malley, David. "A Salesian Window"
<https://www.salesianschools.com/post/a-salesian-window>
(accessed 20 May 2023).

John Paul II. *Iuvenum Patris*, Letter to Egidio Vigano (Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation) on the centenary of the death of St John Bosco, 31st January 1988.
<https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/IUVENUM-PATRIS-English.pdf> (accessed 27 May 2023).

Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, (Conf. Book 1, Chapter 1).
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>
(accessed 13 June 2023).

Church Documents

Francis. *Evangelium Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican City: LEV, 2013.

John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Encyclical Letter. Vatican City: LEV 2003.

Appendix 1

Don Bosco's Ministry with the Youth: a Historical Background

This appendix aims to provide biographical information about Don Bosco. The aims of this exercise is to help the reader appreciate more deeply his educational system and pastoral project, since this should be understood through its founder and his context.

John Melchior Bosco was born on the 16th August 1815¹ to a poor rural family who lived in the countryside outside Turin, in a small village called Becchi. His family survived from their own fields as most families in those areas did at those times. The situation was even harder for them, since John lost his father before the age of two,² so his mother, Margherita, had to bring up the family on her own. His mother brought up John and his brothers in a very solid Christian faith which was to mark John very profoundly.

For John Bosco everything started with a dream which he had at nine years of age.³ (A description of this dream can be found in Appendix 2.) This dream remained impressed in his mind throughout all his life and he grasped its entire significance at 72 years of age while celebrating Mass at the church dedicated to the Sacred Heart, in Rome.⁴

Don Bosco considered this dream as a vision from God, through which he wanted to show him his mission among the young. Don Bosco could only live out the dream if he remained continuously abiding with God, in the same way the branches remain attached to the vine. Since he undoubtedly did so, he was gradually unravelling God's will for him, and later on in 1844 and then in 1886, he had two successive dreams, in which God continued to show Don Bosco how his mission was to evolve. In the second dream⁵ he saw how some of

¹ Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1985), 3.

² Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, vol.1 (Rome: LAS - Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2007), 41.

³ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, trans. Daniel Lyons (New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 18-19.

⁴ A. Auffray, *Saint John Bosco* (Portsmouth: Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd, Grosvenor Press, 1930), 365.

⁵ J. Bacchiarello, ed., *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1996), 8-11. In this dream we find: "Then a marvellous thing happened ... many lambs turned into shepherds, and they

the young people at the Oratory were themselves becoming shepherds of souls, and they were also going to other places to shepherd other souls. In the third dream⁶ he saw how the congregation was to spread all over the world by missionaries going to distant lands.

John Bosco was a very joyful child who always sought to create a very nice atmosphere among his friends with all his games and acrobatic skills. He was a born leader. He had his own ways and methods which he used to persuade others to come for his shows and games on Sundays and holidays. He then used these occasions to explain the gospel to those present. He also founded the Society for a Good Time amongst his companions, where everybody could bring books and games and have a good time together.⁷

John was an educator since a very tender age. Providentially John Bosco also had two very good teachers. The first one was Fr. Calosso⁸ whom he lost quite early. Then, he also met Fr. Cafasso⁹ who became his spiritual director.¹⁰ When John Bosco encountered Fr. Calosso he expressed his wish to study in order to become a priest. When Fr. Calosso asked him why he wanted to become a priest John replied: "I'd like to attract my companions, talk to them, and teach them our religion. They're not bad, but they become bad because they have no one to guide them."¹¹ This answer reveals how from a young age, John Bosco sought to abide in God, by seeking help through someone whom he considered as a guide. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied as he also wanted others to pursue a journey of faith so that they too could become friends of God.

took care of the flock. When the shepherds became too many, they parted and went elsewhere to herd other strange animals into pens." (BM, II, 190).

⁶ Ibid., 202-204. In this dream the Shepherdess (Mary) says to Don Bosco: "These centres which you see will be houses of study and novitiates and will in time produce multitudes of missionaries for work in these countries." (BM, XVIII, 72)

⁷ Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 68.

⁸ Ibid., 33-43.

⁹ Auffray, *Saint John Bosco*, 38.

¹⁰ Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 165. "But since I had no one to care directly for my vocation, I turned to Fr Cafasso. He advised me to go forward and trust in his advice." "Fr Cafasso, who for six years had been my guide, was especially my spiritual director. If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life." Pg 182

¹¹ Ibid., 35.

In order to support his studies, John had to leave home at the age of twelve and took on various part time jobs to make ends meet. These jobs were also very providential as he managed to learn various skills, such as carpentry, tailoring, cobbling, while he also worked in a pub. Later on he passed on these skills to the youth to whom he ministered. After completing his studies in the seminary of Chieri, at the age of 25, John was ordained priest on the 5th June 1841.¹²

At that point in time, Italy was very unstable both economically and politically. This country was experiencing the unification of Italy or the so-called Risorgimento. The industrial revolution was also on its way, so much so, that in Turin there were the first localised manifestations of industrialization.¹³

After being ordained, Don Bosco was enrolled in a course of Pastoral Studies. In the mean time, he visited prisons, hospitals, streets and market places in Turin. There he came into contact with a lot of homeless boys who were unemployed and spent their time roaming the streets of Turin and living by stealing, and often ending up in prisons.¹⁴ When Don Bosco became aware of this situation, he yearned to do something. He therefore repeated what he used to when he was still a child, namely, bringing these abandoned boys together by organising games and activities for them. This was a way of attracting them to him, while also providing them with food, clothing and shelter at his Oratory. He was a good teacher for them while he nourished them with basic religious education.¹⁵

As his work continued to expand, he founded the Salesian Congregation under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales who was especially known for his loving-kindness and gentleness. Later on, together with Mary Domenica Mazzarello, he also founded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, with the aim of doing similar work for girls.

¹² Ibid., 166. "Archbishop Fransoni ordained John and his fifteen classmates presbyters on Saturday, June 5." (Pg 170, note no. 12)

¹³ Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience* (Roma: LAS - Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1989), 11-14.

¹⁴ Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 182. When Fr Cafasso took Don Bosco to the prisons in Turin he recounts "It was he who first took me into the prisons, where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me."

¹⁵ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, vol. II 1841-1846 (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, Inc., 1966), 45-53.

Don Bosco's work started to increase and spread very rapidly. This meant that Don Bosco had to spend more time organizing and meeting people, travelling and also writing. He needed to sustain this growing network of Salesian communities in their pastoral and spiritual well-being, as well as financially, in order to support the humanitarian and charitable projects that were spreading in different countries. In doing so, Don Bosco developed his own printing press and edited several popular magazines. He also wrote various books and pamphlets to aid students in his homes in their needs of educational resources. He also built many churches, oratories, and schools, while he managed to commission a series of missionary projects to South America.¹⁶ Don Bosco died on the 31st January, 1888. His death, “saw hundreds of thousands line the streets of Turin to pay their last respects to 'Don Bosco,' the father and teacher of youth.”¹⁷

Don Bosco will always be remembered as a man of God, a man of prayer, who actively followed the Will of God. He was a man full of great pastoral zeal, full of courage and determination. He always trusted in God's Providence and believed in every youth he encountered. For him, every youth was a soul to be won. Don Bosco was declared a saint on Easter Sunday, 1st April 1934, by Pope Pius XI. On that occasion the Pope declared him “a giant of sanctity.”¹⁸

Today the Salesian Congregation is present in more than 130 countries with more than 14,000 Salesians of Don Bosco (SDBs) who continue the work started by Don Bosco.¹⁹ However, Don Bosco founded a Salesian Family and not just SDBs. This family includes Salesian Sisters, and also many lay people and youth. This explains the Salesian way of doing things, that is, doing things as a family. We will now explore further the charism of Don Bosco and the educative system he used, for which the Salesians are very grateful, as this is such a special gift by the Holy Spirit to the entire Universal Church.

¹⁶ Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 49.

¹⁷ Christopher Ford, “Quality, Culture and Charism,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10, no.2 (1999): 292.

¹⁸ Paul Aronica, *A Man Sent by God*, 2nd ed. (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1988), 30.

¹⁹ Agenzia Info Salesiana (ANS), “The Salesian Presence in the World,”

<https://www.infoans.org/en/sections/good-to-know/item/7758-the-salesian-presence-in-the-world> (accessed on 25 May 2023).

Appendix 2

The Dream of Nine Years

The following is the narration of the foundational dream of nine years, based on what we can read in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.²⁰

Young John Bosco dreamt he was in a very large yard near his home and there was a crowd of children playing there. Some of them were laughing and playing games whilst others were swearing and fighting. At this point, John tried to stop them using words and then by his fists. But at that moment a dignified man appeared, a nobly dressed adult with a white cloak whose face shone in a way that John could not look directly at him. This dignified man then called John by his name and told him to take charge of these children. However, he added these words “You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows but with gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue.” John replied frightened that he was still a boy and was unable to talk to these children about religion. Suddenly all the kids stopped from what they were doing and gathered around the man who was speaking. Very confused John asked the man: “Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?” Then the man replied that precisely because it seemed impossible that he must strive to make it possible through obedience and acquisition of knowledge. But John still did not know how he could do all this, so, the man gave him a teacher and told him that under her guidance he can become wise and that without her all wisdom is foolishness. The man also added that he is the son of whom John's mother taught him to greet three times a day. Suddenly a lady appeared, sparkling all over with white stars. John was very confused as she told him to approach her and took him by his hand and told him to look at the kids who had all turned into wild animals such as goats, dogs, cats and bears and told him that this was the field of his work. She told him to make himself humble, strong and energetic and what he will see happening to these animals in a moment is what he must do to her children. Then all those wild animals turned into gentle lambs all jumping

²⁰ The original text narrated in first person can be found in John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, trans. Daniel Lyons (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 18-19.

to welcome that man and that lady. John started crying and begged the lady to speak so that he could understand what all this could mean. Then she replied to him: “In good time you will understand everything!” And then a noise woke John up and all disappeared.

Appendix 3

The Preventive System

The Preventive System is both an educational and a pastoral method at the same time. It is an original way in which the Holy Spirit inspired Don Bosco to carry out his ministry. Its guiding principle is that of pastoral charity.²¹ Don Bosco felt a deep call to show God’s love to the young.²² “Don Bosco’s mission and project of life are expressed in a style of life and action which we call the Salesian spirit.”²³ The Preventive system is “the embodiment of the Salesian spirit.”²⁴ It connects us to “Don Bosco’s soul and to his attitudes and evangelical choices.”²⁵

In his letter to Fr Costamagna, a Salesian missionary in South America, Don Bosco wrote: “I would like to give a sermon myself, or a conference, on the Salesian spirit that must animate and guide our actions and conversations. We must make the Preventive System really our own.”²⁶ Through his approach Don Bosco deeply connects the two sides of the same commandment of love: love of God and love of neighbour. Through this he abides in God’s love and calls others to do the same, especially the youth, through their education and evangelisation.

²¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, Third ed. (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2014), 88.

²² Salesian Congregation, *Constitutions and Regulations* (Bengaluru, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2015), 18. Article 2.

²³ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 87.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Bosco, “Letter to Fr James Costamagna – Turin, 10 August 1885,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 513.

Before Don Bosco wrote anything about the Preventive System, it was something passed on by tradition,²⁷ and the Oratory was the best example where this system could be seen at work. When Don Bosco was then asked to write something about it, he only wrote a brief sketch, which he refers to as the “difficult art of the education of the young.”²⁸ However, we can also infer more about his educational method from other writings of his such as the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, his letters and other writings and studies.

It is very important that educators be always reasonable in the education of the young. “Educative love must be reasonable,”²⁹ to truly respect the dignity of the person being educated as a child of God. Educators should “be always guided by reason and not by passion.”³⁰ First of all, educators should state clearly what the pupils are invited to do, and in case the pupil does not follow what educators say, they must remember that the pupil would have avoided the failing “if a friendly voice admonished him”³¹ and that “the Preventive System befriends the pupil.”³² Hence, the Preventive System is a system based on friendship, a mutually abiding friendship where a spirit of openness and understanding one another is maintained.³³ Jesus considered his disciples as friends and not servants that just blindly obey their master without any dialogue.³⁴

“The religion of the Preventive System is that of the ordinary people. It is simple and goes straight to the essential: ‘love of God and love of neighbour.’”³⁵ It is a “spirituality of friendship and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.”³⁶ Don Bosco was a man who

²⁷ Jack Finnegan, *Don Bosco Educator* [Address]. Day of Reflection for the Salesian West Province, USA. Institute of Salesian Studies. <http://sdl.sdb.org:8383/greenstone3/library> (accessed on 7 June 2023). “Don Bosco did not develop a fully worked out theory of education, his method is operative, practical and project-based and an effective proposal open to development rather than a theory.”

²⁸ John Bosco, “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young – Turin, 1877,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 489.

²⁹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 95.

³⁰ Braido, *Don Bosco’s Pedagogical Experience*, 138.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³² John Bosco, “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young – Turin, 1877,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 491.

³³ “Familiarity, confidence and mutual affection take the place of rules ... where relationships are personal and spontaneous and the family spirit prevails.” Joaquim D’Souza, “Education to Freedom: Don Bosco and Jacques Maritain in Tandem?” *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 17, no.1 (2006):10.

³⁴ Cfr. Jn 15:15.

³⁵ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 96.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

collaborated with the Spirit to save his soul and the soul of others. “When a newly accepted boy appeared before him in his room, Don Bosco's first word to him was always about his soul and eternal salvation. The friendliness of his fatherly manner, his serene aspect, his habitual smile disposed the hearts and inspired respect and confidence.”³⁷ This is what happened also with Dominic Savio as Don Bosco narrates in the life story he had written about Dominic.³⁸

Don Bosco's pedagogy was also a pedagogy of the sacraments.³⁹ “Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Mass are the pillars that ought to support an educational edifice.”⁴⁰ He believed that the sacraments are the secret that keeps everything going in the education of the young, however he never forced it, but he says that an educator ought to “encourage them, and offer them every opportunity to make good use of them.”⁴¹ Therefore only a Christian can fully apply the Preventive System.⁴² The role of the educators is to be witnesses among the young, role models of life in the Spirit.

In Don Bosco's pedagogy it is important that the educators gain familiarity with the boys especially in the recreation. “He insisted on benevolence and loving-kindness in educational relationships.”⁴³ Don Bosco affirms: “We surround them with a loving assistance in recreation, in school, at work; we encourage them with kind expressions and as soon as they seem to forget their duties, we remind them of them in a kindly manner and recall them to goodness.”⁴⁴ Don Bosco insisted that Youth Ministry

³⁷ BM, VI, 382.

³⁸ “As soon as he arrived at the Oratory, he came immediately to my room in order to put himself, as he used say, completely in my hands. Almost immediately his gaze fell on the wall where a piece of cardboard displayed a saying in large letters, which I often used: Da mihi animas caetera tolle. He looked at them attentively and I helped him to translate them as follows: Give me souls, and take away everything else. He thought for a moment and then said: ‘I understand; here you do business not with money, but with souls; I hope that my soul will have its share in this business.’” John Bosco, “Life of the young Dominic Savio, pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales – 5th Edition, Turin, 1878,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 1180.

³⁹ Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 130.

⁴⁰ John Bosco, “The Preventive System in the Education of the Young – Turin, 1877,” *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 492.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “In this context of Catholic religion, Bosco's pedagogy included a training, largely through Salesian example, in an awareness, understanding, and practice of the Christian ideals of love, humility, piety, and prayer together with encouragement in the use of the available means to grace: confession, communion, penance, and mortification.” John Morrison, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco* (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 2010), 111.

⁴³ Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 68.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 66-67.

does not produce results if the young people do not feel loved or if love does not become the language that blossoms into friendship and cordiality. Teachers who give themselves entirely for the good of young people but fail to let them feel that what interests them is the good of the young, will bear no fruit in the lives of these young people. What matters most in love is not what one does but the attention one gives to the young person.⁴⁵

When a journalist of the *Journal de Rome* once asked Don Bosco: “Would you tell me what is your educational system?” he answered: “Very simple. Leave the boys full freedom to do what they like most. The point is to discover in them the gems of their good dispositions and to endeavour to develop them.”⁴⁶ Hence, it is important to discern the inspirations of God so that the young person can make choices leading to fullness of life, so that they become “the consolation of their parents, an honour to their town, good citizens on earth to then be the fortunate inhabitants of heaven.”⁴⁷ The Preventive System, or more generally, Salesian youth ministry, “is based on the experience of God in the context of everyday life. It is a journey of holiness, a specific project of life in the Spirit.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 95.

⁴⁶ Braidò, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience*, 71.

⁴⁷ Aldo Giraudo, Presentation of: “The Companion of Youth,” in *Salesian Sources*, vol.1, *Don Bosco and his Work*, Salesian Historical Institute (Rome: LAS, 2013), 693.

⁴⁸ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*, 97.