

THE RESPECT AND REVERENCE FOR AUTHORITY WHICH characterizes traditional societies seem to be more felt in the Asian milieu. The King archetype is very much alive. Thus, people give utmost respect to monks and priests, and the tribal elders.

Too, our Salesian life is uniquely marked with the asceticism we ascribe to work. Like Don Bosco, we give ourselves *tirelessly* for the young. This is the warrior archetype of the male psyche. It is the energy in us that gets things done.

And the lover archetype, the capacity for unlimited sacrifice, is also very much alive in us, having left all of our nets behind to dedicate ourselves to the designs of our Master for the young. If Saint Francis was married to lady Poverty, we Salesians are married to the young. GC 27 puts it bluntly: the young are our “burning bush.”

But times have changed. The young have changed. They want to take charge of their own lives so early And they do. They are their own kings. Likewise, they are more daring and confident compared to the earlier generations before them. They are their own warriors. They wage their own battles. Furthermore, we look at the young people today as more casual and laidback, and at times we picture them as lazy and nonchalant. The truth is they are capable of great sacrifice when they like what they do. Their lover instinct is very much alive, though at times it may be self-serving.

But spite of their bravado for life, they hunger for mentors. Surveys attest to this. They attach themselves to people who can show them the maps to navigate life. Notice that they are so enamored with the world of entertainment and sports simply because that’s where they find their totems, their idols, their guides. They long for the prophets of their lives. This is the dimension of the human personality that matures last and slowly. Thus, the young need mentors from outside. I believe, that’s where SDBs come in.

And this has never been so critical than today. This paper is an attempt to carve the person of the prophetic Salesian in the technology-mediated world of today’s young people, the millennials, born between the eighties till the early two thousand. And oftentimes, this is the neglected segment in the ministry.

# WHERE ARE OUR SALESIANS?

## Salesian Prophetism in the Digital World of Millennials

Presenter: Fr. Armand D Robleza, SDB

Salesian Lay Brothers Congress - 05 November, 2017

1. In his letter from Rome, on May 10, 1884, Don Bosco was a picture of a grieving father. He recounted a dream or “a distraction right after falling asleep” where he encountered Valfre, a resident at the Oratory before 1870. His former ward showed him the present-day oratory and at a certain point challenged Don Bosco: “You’ve been educating young people for so many years and you don’t understand? Look harder! Where are our Salesians?”

2. Don Bosco continued his narrative. “I looked and I saw that very few priests and clerics mixed with the boys, and fewer still were joining in their games. The superiors were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation. Most of them were walking up and down, chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing. Others looked on the recreation but paid little heed of the boys. Others supervised from afar, not noticing whether anyone was doing something wrong. Some did take notice but only rarely, and then in a threatening manner. Here and there a Salesian did try to mix with a group of boys, but I saw that the latter were bent on keeping their distance from teachers and superiors.”

“Where are our Salesians?” Valfre’s question stings yet today.

3. GC27 points us to a sore spot that if left untended could become cancerous for us Salesians. “We are becoming aware that there is at times *a certain distance between us and the young*; it is a mental and cultural one rather than a physical one. In some situations, we look on the new generation as if they were a “problem” and not an “opportunity,” an appeal from the Lord, an eloquent reflection of the “signs of the times” and a challenge that confronts us.” [GC27, 31]

4. We can understand mental and cultural distance in the way the older generations treat the young ones. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are often quick to condemn the young ones’ aura of superficiality and entitlement. They handily harp on the tendency of Gen Y people to easily give up or get bored with their day jobs. “There’s nothing more to learn. I am not growing here anymore.” Even so, elders, who grew up in more tightly-knit societies and difficult historical eras, cannot reconcile with the millennials’ attitude that everything must work to their advantage.

5. GC27 is just saying that we SDBs also fall into this quagmire. Like the aloof Salesians in the dream of Don Bosco, if we are not mindful, we could find ourselves watching nonchalantly along the peripheries of youth lives, especially the young adults. Consequently, we readily judge their traits that we consciously deleted from our own lives. We forget that the Lord sends us “to play with them.” Yes, we have a problem here and now. And the young are the problem. Really? **Or have we become self-referential stooges?** We directly or indirectly propose that our world, that is, our attitudes and values are the measuring tapes of life to which the young must conform. And we call it education, or worse, evangelization.

## TODAY'S BUZZWORD: ACCOMPANIMENT

6. Maybe, millennials are not exactly the type who could not care less. They are not afraid of what other people might think. They have this air of autonomy, thinking that they can handle life by themselves. Young professionals do not want handholding; but they welcome mentorship. That involves, on the part of the “educator-evangelizer”, accepting the Gen Y’s so-called “negative attitudes” as their specific realities. These are actually their own tools to make their unique contribution to society, to build that world in the future that belongs to them. We can only guide them and empower them. Today, the buzzword for this is **accompaniment**.

7. Are we not also talking of our young Salesians in formation, and how we accompany them?

8. We may be distant in age and lifestyle with the young adults of today, but we can choose to love what they love. This is our unique Salesian choice. For us SDBs, “evangelization is not just conformity to the values of the Gospel, transmitted by the Founder; **it is also an encounter with culture**. The indispensable cultural commitment implies *meeting the new demands of life that culture generates*, demands that test the realism of our Christian proposal...Discernment must [reformulate] our Christian experience in relation to the concrete historical situations. In fact, evangelization of culture represents the most profound and most global form of evangelization in any society.” [The Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry, 75-76]

9. Like Don Bosco, our apostolic interventions must first of all be realistic. We cannot be effective prophets if we deny the reality, sometimes very disturbing, of the young people today. In fact, the young typify and mirror to us the real situation of a given society. Yes, we prepare them for the future by enabling them to find meaning and handle the present. **“The world of the young is the place *par excellence* where the typical cultural trends of our society are seen...** These are the elements that reveal their mentality and sensitivities. The challenges are not a problem or an obstacle, but positive ones which call for a courageous intervention... Our evangelization activities cannot be seen anymore as a single homogeneous cultural world but needs to be seen in a perspective determined by a plurality of situations.” [ibid]

### **SALESIANS WITH THE YOUNG... WHATEVER**

10. If Don Bosco were alive today, he will surely be inking a regular column in a broadsheet focused on the integration of faith with one's daily life. An avid blogger he will surely be tracking trends and fads among the young. Who knows? He might establish a training and consulting firm with capable lay people to reach out to young workers in factories and offices. He will have his hands full with regular youth camps for spiritual and cultural uplifting. Think of a counselling center with nation-wide networks for youth in trouble and at risk. Never count out the possibility of Don Bosco having his own youth bands and street-dancers. If the youth love it, he will surely love it too. He knows pretty well that influencing young people will surely overflow to the bigger society at large. I leave to your own consideration the parallelisms with the concrete interventions our Saint did during his time almost 200 years ago.

11. Salesians will be present in all departments of life as long as there are needy young people. And we have our own agenda. We are not mere social-workers, we are evangelizers of the spirit. We are not simply administrators of schools, we are educators in the faith. We are not just parish priests, we are a religious community who live with the young and the poor. In his closing message to the Chapter 27, the Rector Major, Father Angel Fernandez, said: “We are called to take our heart, mind, and all our energies back to the ‘beginning’ and ‘the origins’, to our first love where we experienced **the joy of being looked upon by the Lord Jesus** and for which we said yes. We want to experience *the primacy of God* in the daily contemplation of ordinary existence, in following Christ.” [GC27, 120] in simple terms, Salesians are called to be as genuine as they can get.

12. The millennials lay a premium on authenticity. Sometimes they seem to be uninvolved about the realities around them. They come across as distant from the Church and state institutions. Have they become so hopelessly uncaring?

13. But the truth is: Gen Y people do really care. But they look for genuineness from people and institutions, or else expect them to disengage readily and swiftly. If we SDBs would make an impact on them, **God’s storyline must be palpable in our lives.** There is no other way.

14. Let me go back to Father Angel Fernandez. “... The times we are living in are not the best ones for being open to transcendence, we do desire, both personally and as communities, to give *primacy to God* in our life, encouraged by Salesian holiness and the thirst for authenticity that young people have... This was Don Bosco’s great certainty and passion, that he was so completely

caught up in *God's storyline* and, abandoning himself to Him, he pushed on to the point of recklessness.' [GC 27, 120-121]

15. Nowadays, in our journey of accompanying the young, we find ourselves face-to-face with a world of contradictions, a world of disconnections, and a world of entitlement. Distant from the young in lifestyle, not necessarily by age, we could end up bewildered, lost, and ineffective. We find ourselves dragging millennials back to our own world. And it doesn't fit them any bit. **Our reference point is *God's storyline* unfolding** as we confront and animate these youthful lives in front of us.

## **A WORLD OF CONTRADICTIONS**

16. For better or for worse, our millennials find themselves navigating **a world of contradictions**. It is a world where lasting unions and broken vows sit side by side. It is a world where institutions of integrity and even spirituality are tarnished with crimes of passion and greed. But more sinister than these events and trends, the young have to make sense of what is truly right or wrong. And it's not getting any easier for them. Not only is their world pockmarked with immorality and dis-integrity; morality itself is now under fire and questioned. The demarcation between right and wrong is now porous and confused. Right often becomes a matter of personal opinion. Situation ethics dictate righteousness or turpitude. A lie posted on facebook becomes truth if there is no contradictory post within twenty-four hours. When a morally questionable post coming from a famous movie actress gets

more than a million “likes,” then it is true! In my country, to build a prosperous society, kill the drug addicts! The sorry part is majority of the population agree. ... and majority of the population are Catholics. Life is like a boat sailing at full speed with no rudder for guidance. What happened?

17. We now live in an **open-source** world where data and input comes from everywhere and from anyone. Social media is everyone’s domain where each one has the facility to post what he wants, regardless of its truth or falsity, regardless of the sensitivity of others. It is impossible to police or filter what is posted, not only because of the sheer deluge of messages, but the very digital nature of the medium leaves it with no accountability. Once you switch social media on, it runs by itself; and there’s no way stopping it.

18. But we cannot simply blame technology, much like we cannot blame the car itself if someone gets run over. The problem is not technology, but the people using the technology. Aside from the presence of sinister people who make no qualms posting offensive or fake or simply immoral messages, people generally suffer from the Law of Consistency. People are generally good and honest, and they instinctively believe the world around them to be honest likewise. Thus, people believe something as true and sincere, before they question it.

19. Transfer this to social media. People generally tend to take what they browse in their gadgets as true and sincere, regardless of its source. Thus, with an open-source platform, truth and lie stand side by side with equal value. Believing that everything is true, the lie becomes true as well. The medium has no moral compass; the audience ends up losing his moral compass too, if he is gullible enough.

## CONTRADICTIONS GIVE WAY TO DIVERSITY

20. This creates a world complacent with diversity. We Salesians must face the fact that diversity is here to stay. We must recognize that people get along comfortably despite being different along race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. People tend to set aside absolutes. Everything becomes relative.

21. This will be one of the telling trends of the future. By 2025, half of the world's workforce will be millennials. This demographic segment value so much belongingness, yet they expect a democratic approach to business praxis. Everyone has a piece of the truth. No one can claim monopoly or authority over what is right. Indeed, as Malcom Forbes said: "Diversity is the art of thinking independently together."

## TOLERANCE

22. The upside to all of this contradiction is that people have become more tolerant of differences. Timothy Keller explained it best when he said, "Tolerance isn't about not having beliefs. It's about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you." An open-source platform spawns diversity with its enriching yet confusing tenors of life. But it is actually a challenge to be tolerant of differences and disagreements, if one were to be steadfast to his beliefs and values, yet respectful of others' divergent take.

23. Nowadays, for a healthy **spirituality of contradiction** an attitude of tolerance is a sine qua non. We can agree to disagree only if and when we

stand solidly on our own beliefs. One has to stand firm in his beliefs yet remain respectful of others' attitudes and values. Opposite the partisan preachers of his time, Jesus of Nazareth did not invoke revolt; he preached compassion and love of enemies. Tolerance is not subservience or compromise; it is holding on to what you believe as true.

## **AND WHERE ARE MY SALESIANS?**

24. If the misuse of social media is the culprit, then we cannot expect social media to get us out of the conundrum of truth and lies sleeping together. We either overhaul the system or find another system that works. Where can we find reliable truth?

25. Truth is the voice of reality. If you search for truth, go and find real people, those whose *God's storyline* influences their daily lives. They take God as the absolute peg guiding their lives. For all the overwhelming technology gripping our lives, we need each other in flesh and blood to witness to truth and righteousness.

We need irresistible prophets; and some of them are Salesians.

26. During his times of tumultuous changes, confusion and conflict, Don Bosco made no political allegiance, not because he was uncaring, but he knew that working for the young needs the support of all sectors of society, differences notwithstanding. Don Bosco was not guilty of nonchalance; he was a sharp figure of apostolic creativity. Sometimes, we might say that Don Bosco kowtowed to the political personages of his time, as was his friendship with Rattazzi. Far be it from the truth. We know that he made enemies among the civil and ecclesiastical authorities because of his daring and

unconventional ways. But his prodigious ministry was guided by the certainty that what he is about to undertake is the absolute will of God, yet assured by his firm devotion to the Blessed Mother. Too, the singular desire of his heart was the good of souls, especially the young. Don Bosco clearly discerned his mission; he knew exactly where he stood. Everything else was passing, or at best, instrumental.

27. Here we affirm the person of the Salesian lay brother. Reaching out to working youth in situations of plurality of beliefs, values, and behaviors could be more apropos to the brother. He is lay, supposedly immersed in our world pregnant with diversities. He is like the others, yet, unique and steadfast in his beliefs. His very person is an open testimony of contradictions, yet synthesized in his faith in God. He is no hidden operator with a hidden agenda. He is at home in the world of the young riddled with contradictions; yet he is open with his consecration. He is one with the common people and their concrete, often confused, situations yet he is at home with the mystery of the Great Other. The Salesian lay brother is definitely an ordinary person, yet a determined disciple. He is a totem of tolerance that breathes respect, and acceptance, and appreciation of differences in a world of diversity.

28. And if the vocation of the Salesian lay brother truly complements the clerical dimension of our Salesian vocation and life, then his presence lends credence to our consecration and enriches our mission. The lay Salesian is not a historical appendage or apostolic necessity integrated by Don Bosco into his Congregation. The Salesian lay brother is an invention of God, a gift of the Spirit, an original insight of Don Bosco that energizes our Salesian inventiveness and creativity. Without this lay dimension, our life and ministry will not be Salesian. It will be less credible to the young. When a priest speaks of morality, there's nothing special about it; that is his job. But when a lay

person speaks of morality, that is prophetism. For a prophet is taken by God from among men, not from the ranks of those dedicated to the temple and its services.

29. In fine, the Salesian ministry moves through divergence. With Salesians, God speaks through priests, and non-priests. That is an open source platform. That is diversity. Could tolerance, therefore, be a telling element in Salesian spirituality today? The Salesian lay brother could have the valid answers.

## **A WORLD OF DISCONNECTIONS**

30. Today's world enjoys the benefit of **easy access**, not only to the many apps available, but to people everywhere. No wonder many people equate digital technology with social media. Many people do not make a bone cutting-off someone in the middle of his sentence simply because her gadget's ringtone blared, and she instinctively feels compelled to attend to it. Does this mean disrespect? Bad manners? Well, maybe some decades ago. But today, **disconnection** is the new normal. Nowadays, people generally do not anymore make an issue out of it. In simple terms, it is now fine and easy to disconnect. In fact, disconnection has become a psychological ploy we engage in when we do not want to be disturbed or we lack interest in the other person. Ever noticed people pulling out their smartphones as soon as the conversation starts to wind down after a fun dinner? Disconnection is not a technological glitch; it is a lifestyle.

31. The ease of access promotes the disconnection of connections; but it also

creates the connection of disconnections. What about people who are not at all part of your life insisting that they be connected; someone whom you do not know from Adam sends you a friend request. You get a business offer or opportunity notice in your gadget from someone who is a total stranger. Ever wondered about those comments from people who pop up out of nowhere? Honestly, don't we at times feel violated? Isn't it funny? Now that we have easy access to get connected, we complain about privacy issues. And these issues are not just about our posts being shared to one and sundry without our knowledge and consent, but discovering ourselves part of a sharing loop we never signed up for. This is not connecting, neither is it community; it is abusive license.

## **DISCONNECTIONS LEAD TO NONCHALANCE**

32. As human beings, we crave for connections. We are social beings. And social media with its global reach and user-friendly apps has become an efficient platform to connect. However, **the ease to connect also spells the equal facility to disconnect.** A lifestyle replete with opportunities for connections is also festered with disconnecting behaviors. Office people complain that today's millennial generation talks loud even in places where such behavior is considered improper, as in the elevator or in the office where serious work is expected. Their message? "Who cares? I will go on doing what I want to do." Yet, for their friendliness, Gen Y has this penchant to cast other people aside from their circles. They have this tendency to create new words and expressions only their circles understand. They can easily give a nonchalant shoulder to people they are not interested with. It has been observed that today's generation has lost the generosity of sharing with others in the office; they munch on their sandwiches oblivious of others. Unlike before, people would invite the others to share food before they

would even take their own first bite. So, what's your problem? As we say in street lingo: "*deadma.*" Millennials could be very jealous with their network of friends; but if you do not belong, better stay out in the cold. Millennials are a connected, friendly bunch of homo sapiens, but they can also be very narcissistic.

## INTEGRITY

33. At first glance, their tendency to be aloof is very disturbing. But deep beneath this veneer, there lurks the **desire and the search for integrity**. They were brought up with Gen X parents who went through an era of unprecedented technological and human progress. Success was almost a god. But this also carried the price of shadowy wheeling and dealing and corruption in human transactions. This is not to demonize their parents. Every upside carries with it a downside too. Their parents were the more open type compared to the quiet and compliant grandpa generation before them. Gen X parents spoke openly about everything in front of their children whom they encouraged to "speak up." Can you blame Gen Y for being straightforward?

34. Today's young adults are very open with one another; they connect casually. And in doing so, they speak about the myriad things happening in their lives. They even take a picture of their food for their friends to see. They feel they can be their real selves, warts and all, with their peers. They strut around in various fashion of dress and undress. "Well, I just want to let my hair down today. I will relax and not mind people's impressions. For once, I just want to be me." So, she goes around town, dressed like she is getting into the showers. Their being casual bespeaks of their honesty with themselves and with one another. And they expect everyone to be as honest

and sincere. And should they suspect that you do not qualify for their integrity search, you are scratched out from the list of living human beings. Surveys show that millennial people readily quit their jobs, not because of the heavy work load; but because of their bosses who exhibit behaviors that make them untrustworthy. Could it be the same reason why young people leave the Church? The answer is “often enough.”

## **AND WHERE ARE MY SALESIANS?**

35. And where is our Salesian witness in this marriage of connecting and disconnecting? Beware: this disturbing confusion is very real in the world of the millennials. They can easily turn on and off other people because they live in a culture where *virtual is real*. Technology allows us to keep in touch even in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Facebook. Facetime. Skype. Instagram. Twitter. There is no need to dress up, take a ride, spend so much to literally and bodily be with my friend. To communicate with someone with my gadget while taking my shower is the same as talking to him in flesh and blood in the office. **I can be connected and disconnected at the same time.**

36. The monologue needs some reflecting. “I connect with my peers because they are my peers. That’s just being real and honest. And I connect in a face-to-face situation as in a raucous dinner; I can equally connect with a friend half across the globe serenely tucked in my bed. Both are valid moments of connections. In the second instance I seem to be disconnected through distance. I cannot feel the weather or the stress at the other end. But with my digital gadget I connect nevertheless.

37. So, when I talk seeming nonsense with my peers in loud chatter, I am just being honest and real with myself at the moment. And when I choose not to

talk to you even if you are just an arm's length away, I am just being myself. It is not a judgment call on you. My disconnecting is my way of staying connected. Yes, there is no flesh and blood interaction between us, but I still consider you my boss, my colleague, my client. Virtually I am connected with you; and that is real!"

38. Nowadays, we Salesians must give a striking witness to our Gen Y people if we would truly be prophets of communion. And this has got to be real, not virtual. Staying away from the community and yet professing that I belong to my community falls into the same quagmire of the connection-disconnection equation of the young. We end up on the same platform as they are. There is no difference actually. There is no prophetism to speak of. We must become real with one another as we can be. The authenticity of our communities will give credibility to the content of our evangelizing message with young people.

39. Fr. Angel Fernandez in his closing GC27 speech reflected on the Chapter proceedings. He said, "On different occasions during the Chapter we have expressed the conviction that fraternity lived as community is one of the ways of having an experience of God, of living the mysticism of fraternity in a world in which at times human relationships are so damaged. 'The humanizing power of the Gospel is witnessed in **fraternity lived in community** as is created through welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy.' Pope Francis told us." [GC27, 1201-21]

40. Then the Rector Major continued with his gentle challenge. "Young people need us to be really their brothers. Brothers who, with the simplicity and family spirit typical of Don Bosco, lived as authentic fraternity which, though not exempt from daily problems, grows and is purified by faith to the

point where it becomes ‘*counter-cultural*’ and attractive as the Gospel proposes.” [Ibid]

41. Then, the real prophet in the Rector Major comes out. “This will often mean a change of mentality. Not infrequently, in the four corners of the world where our Congregation has been established, we run a certain risk of sacrificing the community, our fellowship, and at times even our communion, for the sake of work, activity, or simply sheer activism. Hence our Constitutions, with preventive pedagogy, state that the three elements of our consecration are inseparable. When one of them is weak or non-existent, we cannot speak of consecration according to Don Bosco’s charism. It will be something else, but it will not be Salesian. [Ibid]

42. Young people can live with being real while virtual. But they suffocate with dishonesty.

## **A WORLD ON FAST AND FURIOUS MODE**

43. Today’s digital technology morphs and develops at a pace that’s best described as fast and furious. Your top of the line gadget will be a bygone model in a few month’s time. And the smart apps on your fingertips develop so fast you barely master them yet. And still, Silicon Valley holds on to their credo of “faster, simpler, and cheaper.” Users get caught up in a continuous learning mode, trying to catch up with the furious development of the technology in their hands.

44. Digital technology is here to stay, and there's no way guessing what's going to come up next. The mantra "faster, simpler, and cheaper" promises a user-friendly grind. Life is supposed to be a lot easier to handle with tools in our hands. And it is. But we must also accept that technology is not only here to help us with life, rather it usually defines our lives, if we are unmindful that is.

45. If we have the right tools working so efficiently at that, then logically, we should have more time to spend nurturing our relationships with each other and with the Transcendent God. The time we spend doing chores repeatedly and less efficiently will now be available for a more relaxed and fulfilling lifestyle. Or so we thought. Sadly, often such is not the case. We merely end up with time as a luxury that is better spent in other pursuits. With time in our hands, people end up busier than before. And a busier day obviously drags around more cares, more issues to deal with, more deadlines, more demands, more people to meet with. And people cry for "more time, please!"

46. Nowadays, people are not simply on a rush; they are even busier. And with so many things to attend to, on limited time, can we really live meaningful lives? And the first aspect of our lives to suffer is spirituality.

47. Einstein's prediction that, someday, technology will rule our human lives has come. Steve Job's dream that technology will be part and parcel of our personal space, with gadgets functioning like vital organs of our human bodies, has become a reality. Let us put hardware and software where they belong. Media is primarily the carrier of the communication exchange. By the year 2020, we will drown in 44 trillion gigabytes of information. Media dishes out an enormous amount of information, yet sadly bereft of deeper

reflection.

48. Today's technology and the social media it begets can both be mesmerizing, and in some instances, even addictive; but its **penchant for content-overload** does not strengthen the wonder of pregnant emptiness—the staple of the human soul; its **tenor of immediate entertainment** rings empty when it comes to contemplation—the lifeblood of spirituality; its **real-time and non-stop streaming** obliterates the sacredness of silence. *Quo vadis*, human soul?

49. I believe media and spirituality are friends, but never could the twain fully unite. Media, with its technical prowess, could veritably be a market source of information about spirituality; but it is **not the mountain of contemplation**. It will never be the sacred space for prayer. It has no soul of its own. It behooves the media-user himself, therefore, to establish connections with the Great Other.

## **SPEED BEGETS ENTITLEMENT**

50. Life indeed zooms at gigahertz speed in technology-enabled societies. Figuratively, people do not walk; they run. Or better still, they rush. Obviously, the fast lane demands more effort, and talent, and investments. So, we have a situation where men and women have to measure up. They have to be in top shape, physically and financially, properly-educated, well-connected to catch the speeding train of opportunities. These do not fall from the skies; they are resources you build with hard work.

51. Now, we understand why millennials value education so much. Without a degree, one goes nowhere. If one does not come from a reputable school,

he is right away cast as second class. Nowadays, we notice a preponderance among the younger brood to work for a post-graduate degree to have better credentials.

52. And money? Gen Y certainly knows its value. They work for the money to maintain their lifestyle. They work for the money to establish their own businesses because they prefer autonomy with their resources. Despite the negative publicity, millennials are not a lazy lot, they are willing to work hard, and they really do.

53. What about the use of time? Millennials are on a rush. They cannot wait for that promotion in the office to come by. Surveys consistently show that the young adult of today values so much his personal “me” time. They are even willing to take pay cuts if just to enjoy their own autonomy. With possibilities abounding nowadays, millennials in the workplace generally have no qualms of going on a vacation at any time of the year. But the desire for one’s own space and time is not merely to have an opportunity to relax and wind down; in fact, they spend this personal space for other interests and pursuits.

## **COURAGEOUS EFFORT**

54. Young people at work are daring. They have the opportunities... and the tools. At times, they have this aura of over-confidence. But this bravado comes with inescapable and bountiful effort. Thus, they feel that they are entitled to the fruits of their labor. Everybody is rightfully entitled; but millennials have taken this to the max. They are willing to take risks; this could be a sign of a courageous spirit. “This is my own life; and I’ll do it my own way. If I fail, that’s my call. I don’t have to blame anyone.”

55. Being technology-savvy, they are at home with the dizzying pace and diversity of opportunities abounding. They are naturals in uncertainties. They could be so unlike their parents who have been steeped and secure in structures and systems. Thus, they in turn tend to brand the young ones as proud and self-assured. But, indeed, they are. The present world is their home.

56. They expect that with their efforts, everything must work to their advantage. They tend to jump from one employment to another. Why? Because they are not happy. If you read that again it will sound like expectations not rewarded or attained. And they have their dreams, which they pursue relentlessly. They are in a hurry. Now, we understand why; they feel that the world will not wait for them.

57. Yes, Gen Y feels so entitled; but this is also because they do not scrimp on effort. They have the guts. Once they set their hearts on a task, they go at it full steam ahead. They only need someone to accompany them.

### **AND WHERE ARE MY SALESIANS?**

58. At first glance, it seems that our response as Salesians consists in being examples of courage and daring to our young workers. While this may be helpful and true, we might be just behaving in ways similar to theirs which at times border on rashness and self-promotion. We could end up false prophets of the spirit.

59. If our witnessing would be genuine, may I suggest that we look closely at what is feeding this courageous streak of effort.

60. Behind the strong personality of the young is the slew of human insecurities of wanting to succeed, and thus finding their rightful autonomy. These are not bad at all; they are normal human needs. But these are not the stuff of Gospel courage we Salesians propose.

61. For us religious real strength and steadfastness express one's discipleship of the Lord Jesus. "**Work and temperance** are the Salesian way of living the radical approach of the Gospel. They are our badge and our characteristic feature. For us, work is the visible sign of Salesian mysticism and the expression of our passion for souls, while temperance is the visible sign of Salesian asceticism and the expression of the *coetera tolle*." [GC27,12] For us, work is not merely the sum total of our efforts to succeed in life. Instead, we work because the love of Christ urges us give ourselves tirelessly for the young. Yes, we work not to achieve, but to give. Meanwhile, we Salesians never shy away from moments of self-denial if just to guard ourselves from pride and complacency. We deny ourselves not to be stoic in front of pain, but to ignite the flames of our love for God and the young. Don Bosco assures us, "Work and temperance: the two weapons armed with which we will succeed in winning over everything and everyone."

62. Pope Francis spoke to the Chapter members thus: "Temperance, then, is a sense of proportion, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and of Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods." [GC27, 121]

63. The Rector Major meanwhile speaks to us. “I believe that this challenge must become part of our lives, and while it is true that in many parts of the Congregation we have presences which have as their priority the least, the poor, the excluded, it is equally true that this testimony will shine out brightly if our way of life is characterized by sobriety, austerity, and also poverty. Undoubtedly, dealing with this situation according to the profession we have made is a matter of personal conscience, but we have to help each other in community over these coming six years. We are invited to act in such a way that the witness of poverty and sobriety becomes more evident where it may be lacking. Any change, advance, improvement in our various Provinces in this regard will be a sign of authenticity and will make the *radical Gospel approach we are proposing* more concrete. [GC27, 122]

64. Maybe, young people judge our authenticity with the simple tenor of our lives. Make no mistake about it: they do.

## **SUMMARY: AGENTS OF DISRUPTION**

65. We cannot escape it: to be evangelizing educators or educating evangelizers entails that we stand as prophets with a counter-cultural voice in the wilderness of young workers’ lives steeped in technology. This is our Salesian choice.

66. Notice however, that a prophet speaks but will never impose his values and behaviors on other people. He leaves them free to agree or disagree, to live up to his message or not. In the same manner, working with millennials is about prophetism. We present ourselves, our lives, our motivations, and

leave them to make their choices and craft their own behaviors accordingly. They are no longer children after all. We must also caution ourselves about the danger of being self-referential. We easily tend to take ourselves too seriously, thinking that we have the answers and other people better listen to us. And if we are truly in tune with God's storyline, we always allow the grace of God to continue creating His project in his own mysterious ways.

67. Today's Gen Y do not reject tradition or religion. They crave for mentors actually. But they expect them to be **tolerant, authentic, and courageous**. For us then, all our apostolic interventions, especially among the millennials, must start with our self-introspection. Our only choice is to be genuine Salesians.

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF TOLERANCE**

68. In his Opening Message to the 27 General Chapter, our past Rector Major, Father Pascual Chavez said: "Pope Francis' Church wants to offer itself as an open place where everyone can feel at home and meet because there is room in it for dialogue, diversity and acceptance. We should not oblige the world to enter the Church; it is rather the Church which must welcome the world as it is, as a place for salvation." [GC27, 74]

69. And the prophet-religious takes on the style of the Pope. "He pays attention to the everyday, but with exquisite pastoral sensitivity, seeking to contemplate God in everything and look at everything from God's perspective. This way we can discover the need this society has for salvation and the urgency of setting processes of transformation in motion which are suited to making it more human and fraternal, more in keeping with God's

plan. He tries to do all this by maintaining and building unity, without exacerbating social differences. [GC27, 76]

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF AUTHENTICITY**

70. The prophet-religious stands as a counter-culture reminder to a world pummeled by disconnection. He returns time and again to his core motivation: the centrality of Christ in his life—his Gospel, his logic of love, which is the cross.

71. Father Pascual Chavez muses poignantly: “I would very much like to say that what concerns us is not the future of the Congregation, almost as if it were a matter of survival, but rather our prophetic capacity, that is to say, our charismatic identity, our apostolic passion which constitutes our true social and ecclesial relevance, following the criterion which Jesus himself gave us: *‘By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.’* [Jn 13:5]

72. Charismatic identity and apostolic passion come from a ‘radical Gospel approach,’ which is none other than contemplating Christ in such a way that it allows us *to become little by little, a faithful image of him.*” [GC27, 74-75]

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF COURAGE**

73. In a world rushing headlong, courageous effort must always be motivated not by success or achievements, but by simplicity and personal abnegation.

74. “Speaking to the *Bishops of Brazil*, the Pope said that it seems the Church has forgotten that there is nothing more lofty than Jerusalem, stronger than the abasement of the cross, more convincing than kindness, love, the pace of pilgrims; because ours is not a marathon but a pilgrimage. So we need to measure our pace with that of the people we wish to stay beside, find the time to be with those who are walking, be able to accompany them patiently, with a readiness to listen to and understand situations that are different. We should not be travelling so fast that we see nothing around us!”

75. “In Rio de Janeiro, speaking to *political and cultural leaders* the Pope sought to emphasize the importance of the culture of encounter for promoting a society which can make room for everyone, excludes no one, and which regards no human being as disposable. A culture of encounter which should eliminate the social exclusion of young people who are so often denied possibilities for work and a future.”

76. In his *address to the young* particularly, he invited them to join the fray themselves, invest their energies in building a Church and a new society, spend their life for things that are worth living for, especially Jesus Christ and service to the poor, not allowing themselves to be stripped of hope and joy nor giving in to promises of a cheap paradise of happiness.” [GC27, 77]

77. At times the Church lacks vitality, fascination, visibility and credibility for continuing to attract to itself the men and women of our time, especially the new generation. And if we were to take the cudgels of the Pope and Don Bosco, we have to immerse ourselves in the world of the millennials, understand profoundly the dynamics that govern the lives of this demographic segment, but still, offer a different yet challenging message coming from the Lord and his cross. We must welcome diversity, but with

the tolerant love of the Lord. We can be both connected and disconnected, but never letting go of our grasp of the Lord's hand. We can rush and relish our entitlement, but always with a poor heart which the Lord exalted in the Gospel. We are prophets. We live with the people but we have a message from the Lord.

78. We can consider ourselves **agents of disruption**, which is today's buzzword in the world of digital media. A disruptive technology is one that displaces an established technology and shakes up the industry or a groundbreaking product that creates a completely new industry.

79. We mean to shake everyone, especially the young adults, in their complacency with their world often dictated to by digital media. In the word of the Gospel, we mean to "*cast fire upon the earth.*" We are a small voice with a message that oftentimes is unpopular. Many are even afraid to try our lifestyle. But that is what is. In the end, without a counter-culture proposal, there can be no change.

80. Salesians, stand up. You are meant to be game-changers. Your task is to wake up the world. And your tour of duty starts today.