

UNDERSTANDING OF SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY IN LINE WITH JOHANNINE EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

1. Introduction

One of the major pillars of the Salesian congregation is its devotion to the Holy Eucharist. When Don Bosco began his oratory, he planned all the other programmes such as games, drama, musical recreation everything in view of the celebration the Holy Eucharist. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist is the centrality of the Salesian houses. Every Salesian finds meaning for his being as Salesian in his relationship with the Eucharistic Lord. Let us analyse the role of Johannine Eucharistic spirituality of leaning on Jesus in the Salesian spirituality.

2. Don Bosco: An Apostle of the Eucharist

One of the modern saints who lived the spirituality of the Eucharist in its perfection is Don Bosco. For Don Bosco Eucharist was a moment of encounter with Christ, who is active and alive in this Blessed Sacrament.¹ He possessed the Eucharistic Heart and lived as the beloved of the Lord through his intimacy with the Eucharistic Lord. We see a great passion in him for the Holy Eucharist Childhood onwards. It instilled in him an ardent desire to be a priest by all cost. He lived the spirituality of Eucharist by being in constant union with God. He always lived in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord. He considered the presence of Jesus in the house as the greatest privilege. His sacramental presence in our community gives us opportune moments to converse with him and be transformed by his love.² He used to inspire his boys to love Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to love him with their whole heart. His exemplary example inspired his boys to fall in love with the person Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and frequenting them for the reception of the Holy Eucharist.³

He used to emphasis three aspects of the Holy Eucharist to grow in the Eucharistic spirituality. They are the celebration of Mass, sacramental communion and adoration of the consecrated species.⁴ His constant union with God was manifested the way in which he used to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. His Biographer

¹Don Egidio Vigano, "The Eucharist in the Apostolic Spirit of Don Bosco," *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco: Official Organ of animation and Communication for the Salesian Congregation*, LXIX, 324 (1988): 5.

²Vigano, 6.

³Vigano, 7.

⁴Ibid.

Don Lemoyne states: “Occasionally as he said Mass, his face would be bathed in tears; at times he seemed to be in ecstasy or experiencing extraordinary spiritual gratification. It also happened that once after the elevation, he looked so ecstatic that he appeared to be seeing our Lord himself. Nevertheless, he always acted in a natural and calm manner, and without affectation, never permitting anything extraordinary to affect his demeanour, especially when he was celebrating Mass in a public Church.”⁵

The second dimension is sacramental communion. Don Bosco used to tell his boys: “What a joy it is to receive our divine Redeemer into our hearts, that same God from whom we must draw the strength and constancy needed every moment of our lives.”⁶ Don Bosco encouraged the practise of frequent communion in his oratory. Confession had a prominent role in the formation of young. Don Bosco himself used to go for weekly confession to Fr. Caffaso. He advocated the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation so that they would receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist in a most worthy manner and help them to grow in their friendship with Jesus. The reception of frequent communion inspired his boys to live always in the presence of God. It instilled in them a great desire to thrive for sanctity.⁷

The third dimension was Eucharistic adoration. The permanent presence of Christ is the heart of every Salesian house. Don Bosco used to remind his boys during his good night talks that the devil is afraid of two things. They are the frequent communion and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. He proposed the Eucharistic adoration as a graceful and opportune moments to grow in our intimate friendship with Christ. He used to inspire his boys with following words: “Do you want our Lord to grant you many graces? Visit him often. Do you want our Lord to grant you only a few? Visits him but seldom.”⁸ The Salesian Spirituality full of joy and enthusiasm solely whose secret is youthful heart centred on the Eucharistic spirituality.⁹

3. Eucharist: The Core of Salesian Spirituality

Article 88 of Salesian Constitutions says: “For us sons of Don Bosco the Eucharistic presence in our houses is a reason for frequent encounter with Christ.

⁵Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, trans. Diego Borgatello, Vol. IV (New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1967), 314.

⁶Eugene Ceria, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, ed. Diego Borgatello, Vol. XXII (New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1980), 18.

⁷John Morison, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco* (New York: Don Bosco Publication, 1979), 124-125.

⁸Vigano, 11.

⁹*Ibid.*

From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young.”¹⁰ The driving force behind Don Bosco’s charism was his adherence towards the Eucharistic Spirituality. His programme of life was based on the principle that Jesus Christ is with us. The paschal event is at our disposal here and now through the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacramental presence. Hence, Emmanuel-‘God with us’ intervenes daily in the formation of every person to carry on his salvific mission in their lives.¹¹ Through his paschal presence in the Eucharist, he continues to present in our history, through Church, his spouse until the end of time as he promised.¹² Don Bosco was definite that apart from the Eucharistic spirituality, our preventive spirituality of the presence and pedagogy can’t bear fruit. It is Eucharistic spirituality that transforms our presence as Eucharistic presence and empowering our mission for the integral growth of humanity.¹³ The ultimate aim of Salesian spirituality is making Christ the heart of the world, who is the way, the truth and the life. He gave himself his own body and blood so that we all may grow into his person, the new and perfect man.¹⁴

Our mission of educating and forming the young incorporates the formation of Christ in everyone. Eucharistic spirituality is the greatest treasure of the Church. It is the source of all her works aiming at salvation of humanity. Therefore, our mission of *Da Mihi Animas Cetera Tolle*, should be nurtured and sustained by the greatest treasure of the Church. In our pastoral and pedagogical planning emphasis on Eucharistic spirituality and sharing its fruits with all whom we care should be our first agenda than wasting time on corporate ideas with an intention of making our pedagogy a relevant and effective one.¹⁵

4. Salesian Presence as Eucharistic Presence

Don Bosco’s time was marked by the political and social turmoil. There was the political tension between the Church and state. The rapid industrial revolution caused exploitation of young and wide economic disparity between rich and the poor.¹⁶ On 30 May 1862, he had the dream of two columns. In this dream he saw the bloody battle the Church fights under the leadership of Pope and the heroic martyrdom of the Pope by defending the enemies of the Church. The new Pope ties

¹⁰*Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, Article 88.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 16.

¹²*Ibid.*, 19.

¹³*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 49.

the ship, which symbolizes the Church to the columns enthroned by the Blessed Sacrament and Mary of Help of Christians.¹⁷ Don Bosco decoded an insightful divine message from this dream that we need to lean on to the Blessed Sacrament to keep alive the flames of our faith and Christian witness.¹⁸

The dream that Don Bosco had a prophetic witness in our times too. The varied forms of political turmoil and economic exploitation are happening in our times too. Our pedagogical and pastoral commitment of evangelizing the young should be nurtured by our leaning on the Eucharist after the example of St. John Bosco.¹⁹ Our presence among the young should lead them to experience the deepening of faith and enter into an intimate friendship with the person of Jesus.²⁰ To fulfil the mission our presence should be transformed as Eucharistic presence. Our communities must grow around the altar, drawing the riches associated with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The contemplation of the presence of Christ in our spirit and passion towards his pastoral charity should enable us to be a Eucharistic presence for them.²¹ Accordingly, our Eucharistic presence reveal to them the unfathomable riches of Christ's mercy. We walk side by side with the young, like the risen Lord walked with his disciples who went to Emmaus, helping them to recognise Emmanuel who is present with them. We accompany them to find deepest meaning for their existence by leaning on to the person of Jesus and by growing in their intimacy with him.²²

5. Conclusion

The gospel of St. John and his personal experience of leaning on Jesus would lead us to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Eucharistic spirituality. The intimacy that John had with the Lord transformed him as a Eucharistic presence which enable him to follow the Lord faithfully and nurture all those who are entrusted to his care through his selfless love. The same selfless love of being a Eucharistic presence we encounter in the person of Jesus. The Salesian preventive spirituality is a Eucharistic spirituality in its essence and practise. This way of life help us to build an intimate friendship with the person of Jesus and become a Eucharistic and nurturing presence for all those who are entrusted to our care.

¹⁷Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, ed. Diego Borgatello, Vol. VII (New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1972), 107.

¹⁸Viagano, 49.

¹⁹Ibid., 50.

²⁰Ibid., 47.

²¹Ibid., 42.

²²Ibid., 46.