

ST. MICHAEL AND YOUTH

1. SOME PREMISES, AS INTRODUCTION

To make a specific study on *St. Michael and the youth* is not easy. The worst presumption is to analyse, to section, to scan with an aseptic view a way of living Christian and religious life (St. Michael's life, precisely) within a context and reality which are completely different from ours. Many things seem almost incomprehensible, if we do not first make an effort to locate the setting in the history and culture of his time.

Yet, it is just from this first effort that the newness and intensity of a reality that we call 'experience' powerfully emerges. An experience which is not only action, but which develops as newness of life, as basic intuition for human and Christian experience of many persons who drew inspiration from this newness: the Religious persons of Betharram.

Starting with this understanding, we perceive the shaft of light that St Michael's 'experience' can offer also to our path as wayfarers, sometimes a little lost in time, to take us back to the 'springs' to draw fresh water and reinvigorate our steps.

We realise that the horizons are slowly widening: St Michael not only has something to say to us, the Betharramite Religious persons, but he is also the meeting point for many who intend to live a 'lay' spirituality in a deep way. We realise, in brief, that while we are trying to understand St Michael and his newness of life and go back to him, he pushes us beyond our horizons, towards that look of Love through he dared to dream, once, as a child and as an adult...

2. ST. MICHAEL AND ATTENTIVENESS TO YOUNG PEOPLE

St Michael's pastoral attention was extremely vast: his glance was attentive and welcoming towards every one. Nevertheless, we may grasp a very particular modality in his looking at the world of the youth. Let us try to enter his 'world' and we will understand it...

2.1. *A glance at the situation of his time.*

In this context, we are interested in analysing the situation of his times especially on the reality of the youth.

We can read it in a very partial way, focusing especially on the scholastic situation. As a matter of fact, we have a large number of documents pertinent to this, while we have none concerning the situation of the young people in a wider scope. We might even put forward hypotheses on our subject, in view of our wider historical knowledge and the ideas which marked France during the 19th century, but frankly this does not seem honest to me.

However, the choice of intervention carried out by St Michael towards youth was unequivocal; after studies made on our Institute, therefore, the Betharramites today have in their hands documents and references to the educational reality of France and to the work performed by St Michael in this field.

In 1833 the educational situation in French society is not positive: young people are seen as ‘labour-force’, good for agriculture. There are few possibilities to approach education, also because the educational situation is in a bad state. “Few teachers -reports a witness- are in a regular position; they have no teaching diploma, no authorisation”¹... Only a few of them are educators and those few almost as makeshift ones; Fr. Brunot reports that “Most of them (the teachers, editor’s note), compelled by birth to live as servants, thought, that by consecrating themselves to education, they had nothing to do.”² St Michael’s reasoning is undoubtedly complex: we wonder about the reasoning relating to youth reality: “ ‘Our elderly (...) could not read; yet, they lived happily, why not imitate them?’ ‘Bordeaux needs vine-dressers not readers. After you have filled the heads of our children with history and geography, who will sow potatoes?’ One feels that sometimes criticism is inspired by less meanly utilitarian preoccupations, which remain however not very noble: ‘We are not less educated than them (children, editor’s note), and we are successful in our business; if we had educated them more, then they would look down upon us. Particularly we avoid educating girls: they know always too much’.”³The attitude of an emerging adult world is marked by the awareness of being the repository of knowledge and the only manager of the life-style of children who have no other duty than submission to their father’s will. In a patriarchal society as the one just described, education is unlikely to be considered as a means of improvement for the quality of life.

It is interesting to note that, in such a situation, the only ‘educational body’ recognised by everybody, governors included, is the Church: “Without the help of the clergy we would worry about the destiny of elementary education in the countryside”, was the conclusion of a ministerial inquiry realised by *Guizot* (Minister of Louis Philip) in 1833. And it is right in that year that a law abolishes the monopoly of elementary education requested by Napoleon; since then, anyone owning two report cards was authorised to open a school.⁴

2.2. The option for opening Notre Dame College.

In this context, St Michael comes out with attention and courage. What urges him to start an educational work is the awareness that no action of conversion to Christianity would be possible without the education of youth from an elementary level.

The School of Betharram is founded because it better meets the need for ‘*new evangelisation*’; in fact, the disturbances produced on one hand by the French Revolution and, on the other hand, by the Jansenist ideas which made Christian life seem to be a religion of terror instead of joy, were evident.

The people more ‘*at risk*’ were the young: actually they were deeply disconcerted and without reference-points. To think to promote a process of human and Christian formation meant necessarily to start with them.

¹Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), 36.

²Ibid., p.35-36.

³Ibid., p.36.

⁴Ibid., p.37.

Obvious! But why does St Michael open a school and not an ‘Oratory’ (as St John Bosco will do later)? I described the very difficult, ineffective scholastic situation in France: this is a first excellent reason to intervene ‘*in frontier*’.

Yet, I believe that a more profound reason must be looked for in another direction: St. Michael had the human and Christian formation of youth very much at heart. He was deeply convinced that such a formation could be obtained only by ‘*living with*’ the young. Time and the quality of the way of living with them would significantly mark this educational process. The obvious means, the most difficult for that historical period, I would dare say the natural ‘*bet*’ for a far-sighted man like St Michael could be none other than the school, *his own* school.

At the beginning St Michael is obliged to limit himself to work addressed mainly to the youngest. His dream, however, is to open also a ‘secondary’ school: its’ opening, however, is postponed till 1847. Three years later, in 1850, a new law on the freedom of ‘secondary’ teaching is approved by the French Government.⁵

I have already mentioned the basic reasons which urge St Michael to open a school for children and young people. Some further words are needed on the meaning of such a work within Fr. Michael’s options. Initially (1837) the running of the school had been entrusted to a former student of Fr. Michael, Pietro Vincenzo Eliçabide; but when it became necessary to send him away because of his excessive requests, Fr. Michael chose one of his young religious, Fr. Barbé, and sent him to Dax to obtain the teaching diploma in order to run the school. “He (Fr. Barbé, *editor’s note*) was only 27 when he was appointed Headmaster of the school! (...) He will put his life, with abnegation, at the service of the children and young.”⁶ Fr. Michael does not hesitate to invest young energies at the service of youth, for their human, intellectual, spiritual formation. He is convinced that every religious, placed at the service of youth, enables the development of a new mentality, of a new society, of a new Christian culture. It is precisely that Christian culture that he finds totally absent; precisely that human formation that seems precarious; he is worried by the devastation done by the French Revolution and by Jansenist theology which, instead of promoting the discovery of the God of Incarnation, a God to whom ‘it has pleased to make Himself loved’⁷, always presents the spectre of judgement and of punishment.

This is one of his features in acting: he will do the same also later on, when new horizons are opened in Argentina. He will do the same also in other locations in Southern France.

The historical importance of opening the school of Notre Dame of Betharram is to be found in this process of evangelisation which was so important to St. Michael. “He would have made his this reflection by Gilson: ‘*Free catholic teaching is not simply an institution where the Christian doctrine is taught more than other subjects, but where also the rest is taught in a Christian spirit*’.”⁸

⁵Cf. Duvignau P., *Un Maître spirituel du XIX siècle. St. Michel Garicoïts*, Beauchesne, Paris 1963, pp.86-91.

⁶Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), p.37.

⁷St. Michael’s *Manifesto*

⁸Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), p.45

2.3. *His glance at the poorest.*

In the 19th century in France, as moreover in all of Europe, education was a privilege. The rich have always had access to formation, to knowledge, to culture, to science, to the arts. The poor could hardly afford to attend any kind of school. Not even the private ones which were rapidly mushrooming in France as a consequence of the laws issued by the Government.

St Michael, moreover, had not forgotten his poor origins: the school Notre Dame is attended also and particularly by young boys coming from the most humble social classes: “(St Michael) immediately wanted to make middle school education available to the most modest pockets...”⁹

3. HIS PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

After having sketched the situation of education in France during the 19th century, a deeper analysis is required to understand St Michael’s active modalities in his educational relationship with youth.

An educational relationship always comes from a basic intuition enabling the person to reconstruct the whole of his own knowledge and to reorganise it organically around this fundamental experience.

For St Michael, the fundamental experience is the discovery of God who, through Jesus, becomes one of us for love. “By sharing our human condition, Jesus gives back meaning to our lives and reveals its immeasurable greatness; ‘Through Him we know that God is not far from mankind, that God is not alien to the mystery of mankind. (...) Jesus’ humanity is the highest manifestation of God’.”¹⁰ And then: “At the moment of Incarnation, the Son of God accepted the risk of a human life lived without reserve, that is to say unto suffering and death. And it was necessary, ‘as what is not assumed cannot be saved’.”¹¹

It is from the contemplation of a God who ‘bothers himself’ for man and who, in order to fully give him back his dignity, does not hesitate to become a travelling companion for every person, that St Michael draws a way of managing, concretely, an educational relationship with young people. This kind of relation is expressed in a series of attitudes which mark a person and impress a ‘style’, that is to say *a way of being and acting*.

The ‘style’ qualifies the person (and the spirit of a Congregation) and stresses some qualities which cannot be lost with the passing of time. I mean that what characterises the identity of a person is not the lasting continuity of an activity, but the presence of the same features of what he is, of what he believes. That is to say, in other words, that ‘style’ touches the most remote inner part of a person and comes from basic attitudes learnt and matured in time. Situations, the conditions of life may change, but ‘style’ remains as the *character* of the person.

⁹Ibid., p.38

¹⁰Hialé G., *Jésus de Nazareth: le lieu de l’Ecce Venio*, in *Session à Bétharram pour la célébration du 150ème anniversaire 1835-1985*, 8-29 July 1985, p.136

¹¹Ibid., p.139

It is the same for our Congregation: to be this it does not need to be a Congregation in the continuation of the works, but rather in the fidelity to a certain style. Within this style, tenaciously wanted by St Michael, it is necessary to rewrite, always, the work of the Religious of Betharram; in whichever Continent they are, whichever latitude, the *style* will deeply mark the action of the Betharramites. Interventions will be diversified, places will change, new action fields will be ‘reinvented’, but what characterises us (*style*) must accompany us as a distinctive sign not only to a belonging but also to a way of considering ourselves, the world, the others, the events crossed by the same logic grasped by St Michael in the mystery of Incarnation.

Before identifying some elements of this ‘style’, however, some words are needed to explain what *education* meant to St Michael.

3.1. To educate, in St Michael.

Very briefly, for St Michael “*education is the work of love*”.¹² How could we forget the educational work carried out by another great Saint of the 19th century, St John Bosco? He defined education as “*a matter of heart*”. It is not my intention to make, in this context, a parallel between these two figures of educators; it is not even my intention to stress differences and similarities between the two. Yet, my consideration is not merely academic, but rather an appreciation of two personalities who, although being separated by cultural, social and national differences, provided answers which are basically similar in their starting- and reference-points.

Education is a work of love because it enables young people to reply, personally, to God’s loving project on them. Therefore, the main task for an educator is to “enable every human creature delivered by woman to reply to the supreme commandment: You will love the Lord God, with all your heart, with all your spirit, with all your strengths”.¹³

In a difficult social context for youth, “in a country gnawed by Rousseau’s Philosophy and by the anticlerical position of Voltaire”¹⁴, being and declaring oneself Catholic was very hard. For this reason, St Michael’s educational action had to aim at “preparing intellectually and morally ready men. Convinced of the efficacy of grace, he tried to prepare not preserved Christians, but rather avant-guard Christians able to be, at the same time, the salt, the leaven and the light in human paste”.¹⁵

As we can see, the educational process realised by St Michael places the young in the centre of himself. It is not education on the young, but with the young and for the young. We can perceive, in this method, a far-sighted attitude: perhaps a certain awareness of the fact that the young could not be a ‘*dull mass*’ in the hands of the educator, but that they had to be active subjects, *protagonists* - we would say today - of the educational process itself.

¹²Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), p.43

¹³Ibid., p.43

¹⁴Ibid., p.45

¹⁵Ibid., p.45

“He knew that his task as educator was to make himself loved, both to provide a model and exploit his authority and his teaching, and also to teach the boy to do without him, to become free and autonomous, making him aware of his own potential”.¹⁶

3.2. Merits of St Michael’s educational style.

Below I will briefly summarise in some short indications the merits of this educational style which, however, have already been able to perceive by looking at the meaning of *educating* the way it has been presented in the previous chapter.

3.2.1. Dignity of the lives of young people.

First of all, for St Michael, an educator must have a great respect for the lives of young people. A respect that must be based fundamentally on the same love as God’s.

“We read in one of his letters: ‘What I will do to this child, I will have done to Jesus Christ himself’.”¹⁷

We have the witness by a doctor (Poey Miro, atheist, doctor at Mirepeix) who said: “If all priests were all like Fr. Garicoïts who greets a child with greater effusion than how he greets myself, because he holds his soul and his intelligence in high esteem, despite his young age!”¹⁸

The dignity of the lives of young people remains a point of strength in St Michael’s education; the awareness that God, in Jesus, became one of us makes us understand how life is the privileged ‘*theological environment*’, that space and time are the co-ordinates of the encounter with the Lord of life. For the educator, even more so for a Betharramite, respect for a person’s dignity is respect for the dignity of the Holy Mystery of God himself.

Life, seen in this perspective, is no longer a ‘*valley of tears*’, but the path on which the Lord manifests himself and warms one’s heart, like in the story of the two disciples of Emmaus, and he still asks: ‘*What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.*’ (Lk. 24,17).

Here is a characteristic tightly linked to what was mentioned before: education cannot be a sad process. Indeed, for St Michael “there is no true education *without joy*. Especially as the young have a right to this joy: instead of being a punishment inflicted upon them, isn’t education perhaps a means for their happiness?”¹⁹

Finally, the art of educating is seen by Fr. Michael as an on-going process; the educator knows how to become a travelling companion, he knows how to listen to the little and great victories of growth, he knows how to collect dreams and to give shape to aspirations. Definitely, for Fr. Michael ‘*part-time*’ educational action is not possible.

¹⁶Ibid., p.46

¹⁷Carricart P., *L’enseignement au temps de Saint Michel Garicoïts*, in *Session à Bétharram pour la célébration du 150ème anniversaire 1835-1985*, 8-29 July 1985, p.191

¹⁸Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), p.40.

And also cf. Carricart P., *L’enseignement au temps de Saint Michel Garicoïts*, in *Session à Bétharram pour la célébration du 150ème anniversaire 1835-1985*, 8-29 July 1985, p.191

¹⁹Brunot A., *S. Michele: maestro dell’educazione*, in *Bel Ramo*, 1, (1963), p.40

Here is what Fr. Brunot's says about him: "The concept of life and of the world, which develop so slowly during the formative years, is handed on not only through sermons and pious exhortations, nor through classes of catechesis presented in a perfect way, but every day, at every moment, during recreation, taking a walk, particularly at school, reading an author, an historical event, a scientific event, located *in a Christian perspective*. Whether through a meaningless fact or through a significant fact, the educator opens in the boy the paths of God. He makes God come out (*educere*), from anything. He is a revealer."²⁰

3.2.2. *Climate of mutual trust and esteem.*

Fr. Michael's educational work, however, is not limited to the attitudes of respect and recognition of the dignity of the young; he takes care of them within a climate of mutual trust and esteem.

Trust and esteem become two key-words of his educational work. His method was certainly not based on fear; in this sense, a letter is curious, in which Fr. Michael answers to a Sister who had asked him how to '*get herself loved*' by the young: "You are asking me how to act to get yourself feared and loved, let's say better, loved and respected. Yes, dear Sister, respectful affection, respectful love; what does it mean? Respectful love is a precious feeling, equally precious in the eyes of faith and of reason. This is the very feeling that guided Jesus in his earthly life. Why did he enter it by these words: *Here I am!* and why did he never interrupt his unlimited dedication? Because he loved us and esteemed us very much. And why did he love and esteem us so much? Because he wanted to make himself loved and esteemed by us, and to use the respectful love we would feel for him to effectively bind our hearts to God. You also wish for respectful love from your girls to use it as an extremely efficacious means to orient their hearts towards God: very well. But how to get oneself loved and esteemed by these girls? The answer is quickly said: *love them and esteem them very much*, and always act towards them, *always* as someone who loves and esteems them; talk to them, teach them, reward them, even punish them, as someone who loves and esteems them. This is how your model and mine, Jesus Christ, has always acted".²¹

This passage needs no further explanation; it goes far beyond the expectations of our engagement as educators: it has much to say and to teach us...

3.2.2. *Welcoming as a life-style.*

Linked to the previous theme, like a necklace of precious stones, the feature of welcoming the young arises spontaneously in this perspective of St. Michael's educational work.

To welcome is to love the life of the young unconditionally, and not because it is perfect. Welcoming, not to get the sympathy of the young: this would be a merely strategic move and it doesn't fit in with those who care for the quality of life of the young.

To St Michael, welcoming was synonymous for:

- A. *Talking with the young*: to talk, that is to say to give back the dignity and value of being *persons*. Yet, talking presupposes first of all, listening: therefore *talking to*

²⁰Ibid., p.45

²¹Ibid., p.45

And also Miéyaa P., *La vie de Saint Michel Garicoïts, Tome second: les oeuvres*, pp.867

the young has as its assumption a great respect for the mystery of the person who opens, slowly and sometimes even with great difficulty for his own growth. It is an unveiling of self-identity which preludes to the search of one's own meaning of life. Those who educate, like Fr. Michael, know very well that the effort of listening and talking, are difficult yet extremely precious attitudes in the lives of the young.

- B.** *Living with them:* I have already mentioned above the importance of giving time to education; yet, this condition is never stressed sufficiently. Spending time with the young is a process through which harmony and a climate of trust are developed, that harmony and that climate of trust without which there is no listening, nor any other kind of education.

“The Master lives amid his pupils; games and work; recreation and walks...”²²

3.2.4. Educating to walk together to encounter the Lord through the discovery of a Plan on one's life to be realised within the Church.

Within the educational activity carried out by Fr. Michael, vocational attention plays a great role. It is a constant feature of his action that makes him very attentive to enable each youth to realise himself according to God's project for him. However, although he was a tireless promoter of this '*vocational meaning of life*', St Michael devoted much of himself to favour the birth and the development of vocations to sacerdotal and religious life.

“... Bro. Gaye, the first coadjutor brother of the community and discreet confident of the Founder for over twenty years, gave the following amazing witness on the occasion of the beatification process: '*The reason that urged the servant of God to bring to missionary work primary and secondary teaching was that of favouring ecclesiastic vocations*'.”²³

We know moreover that “it can be said, to this regard, that success was total; Fr. Miéyaa lists the names of 120 priests whose vocation is awakened or clarified at Betharram, often under the influence of Fr. Michael Garicoïts himself.”²⁴

Next to this specific vocational work, one must remember attention to the self-realisation of all young. Many were the young who, in different ways, asked Fr. Michael for advice, confided their anxieties, expected clarifications, wished to be helped in the difficult, yet enthusiastic task of living. For them all, he had an exquisite attention; we have a large number of autographed letters which prove it. As an example, a letter by Fr. Michael to a young (Adriano Planté): “To be a man capable of facing the duties of his position, of his mission on this earth, a man free from any ties, a man always in the hands of God, of his Lord and Father: '*Homo idoneus, expeditus et expositus*'.”²⁵

4. THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE BETHARRAMITES, TODAY

²²Carricart P., *L'enseignement au temps de Saint Michel Garicoïts, in Session à Bétharram pour la célébration du 150ème anniversaire 1835-1985*, 8-29 July 1985, p. 192

²³Ibid., p.193

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Brunot A., *S. Michele...*, p.45

4.1. To re-start from the young.

St Michael had focused his attention on the world of youth aware that within it was the challenge not only for the present but for the future. Of course, to make a specific option does not mean to exclude the others, as if the Church was only for the young, but it means to detect that starting point through which everybody may be reached.

As children of St Michael, we often wonder on the choices to adopt, on how to maintain our identity (as it is not linked to a work). I believe that the ‘filter’ which would enable us to keep a deep bond with our charisma actually is attention to the world of youth. In this sense, a consideration by Fr. Brunot is interesting: “Who would believe it? Already during his times, Fr. Garicoïts had to fight to make his priests understand the importance of educating the young. Already during his times, his religious were reluctant about this difficult, thankless, prestigeless job!”²⁶

Some features of our times (secularisation everywhere, loss of reference values, need for giving life meaning) reveal to us that this is still the time to make accurate, brave options; in brief, ‘*frontier*’ options.

The Pope himself, in the past few years, has been telling us about the need for a ‘*New Evangelisation*’: not new in contents but in its’ methods.

For this reason, if we want to look for our founding charisma and for the path of the Church, we must have the courage to re-start from the young. In them is the challenge for the present and for the future of our history, towards them we are sent to ‘*bring the same happiness*’.²⁷

4.2. Welcoming the questions on life by the young.

Towards them we are sent with the above mentioned style. Welcoming, for us Betharramites, consists in “recognising that life is great because it is inhabited by Christ”.²⁸

Welcoming is a word that means recognising the dignity of every youth; welcoming means recognising the questions asked by the young; it means to be aware that “salvation is already for everybody and therefore we are not saving anybody, we are rather called upon to support one’s openness to the redeeming work made by Christ and to help reinforce one’s adhesion to faith”.²⁹

Welcoming is a positive attitude: this engages us to have always a positive glance at reality and youth. Let’s remember Jesus’ attitude: ‘*And Jesus looking upon him loved him*’ (Mk. 10,21). Love, expressed in welcoming, does not depend on the success of the educational work. We are not welcoming so that the young positively reply to the solicitations offered by the educator, we are welcoming so that “(the young people) become autonomous, capable of making their own decisions, responsibly, freely and honestly; to develop a love of

²⁶Ibid., p.43

²⁷St Michael’s *Manifest*

²⁸Italian Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, Provincial Commission for Youth and Vocational Animation, *Progetto di Pastorale Giovanile e Vocazionale*, p. 24

²⁹Ibid.

life, their own culture and their own traditions, with a critical appreciation; (...) to see that they are always actively involved in the direction of their own lives, and that this commitment will develop into specific examples of solidarity, in the gift of themselves to others and to God.”³⁰ Welcoming to teaching how to be free and responsible, also and above all when this freedom is expressed by refusal: ‘(...), *he went away sorrowful*’ (Mt. 19,22).

4.3. Welcoming to educate, in a climate of mutual trust and esteem.

Of course, as mentioned above, welcoming cannot be exploited for our aims. On the other hand, welcoming must not be ‘*silly*’, ‘*insignificant*’ or ‘*non-committal*’. Welcoming must always be marked by basic conditions which make it ‘*significant*’.

These conditions are precisely those St Michael reminded us of: a climate of mutual trust and respect. In this climate, which is always the result of conquest not of fear, dialogue may arise and the educational process can be sparked.

Moreover, in this climate it is possible to support the young in developing attitudes which enable them to “avoid giving up at the inevitable disappointments and to operate enthusiastically and not fanatically” and, finally, to make them able to be “open to others, and welcome life as a gift to share and to be drawn to reach towards the Author of this gift”.³¹

In this path “we must be distinguished by the integrity of our relationships, and by our way of living, without pretending to be different from what we really are. We must be ready to stretch ourselves to our own furthest limits, with a joy that is always real, living always in a state of reconciliation with our own communities. We must also learn to be travelling companions for our young people, walking at their pace, in the conviction that we will never have finished growing together.”³²

5. CONCLUSION

The study cannot pretend to be exhaustive, either from an historical or analytical point of view.

Many things are yet to be discovered: but, this makes me aware of the fact that the treasure that St Michael handed on to us, has left very deep veins. They require an ability of careful observation to scan the riches entrusted to us.

One of the most beautiful results of this inheritance concerning the attention to young people is the Congregation’s Youth Apostolate Project, drawn up last Summer. It is an attempt to mediate the historical experience of St Michael and of the Work he founded with the experience of our times. I think that St Michael would appreciate it.

Undoubtedly, he will be even more pleased when these guidelines, becoming concrete actions in our communities, sow germs of hope and signs of new life.

³⁰Fathers and Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, *Youth Apostolate Project*, 1996, p.7

³¹*Ibid.*, p.7

³²*Ibid.*

We are requested to give this service in and for the Church, in favour of the young generations. St Michael offered this same service, fully, profusely, bravely and joyfully to the young people and to the Church of his times.

At the end of this report I like to think, with the figure of St Michael, the face of St John Bosco: since always, this Saint has been known as the Father of the young people; since always, St Michael has been considered the Apostle of the Father's Will. I am not able to say if between the two Saints there are points of convergence; however, I like to think that both, in different places and in different countries, were able to interpret the '*signs of the times*' and to provide the emerging poverties with appropriate answers.

The Congregation wanted by St Michael has continued, during its history, to be witness to the educational work made of its Founder, committing itself in various fields to the education of young people. There is still much to do, though; above all, we must interpret history; the questions that today's young ask are a challenge to our way of being significantly present in contemporary history.

The pages still to be written call upon us with courage, the same courage and the same loving glance that guided St Michael. They are riches that he contemplated in the gesture of Love of the Lord, Jesus, to whom '*it has pleased to make himself loved*'.

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