

***The Quality of Educational Relationships: a historical case study.***

In the context of today's crisis of clerical child abuse and the loss of credibility of the Church authorities and the criticisms of our response as religious orders, it is timely that as Salesians we look again at the quality of our educational relationships.

The contribution that I would like to offer comes from my own discipline of Church History and in particular of my study of the history of the Salesians in England which I published 20 years ago. What I would like to offer to this Colloquium is a historical case study.

My original study was called '*The Dynamics of Growth: The Foundation and Development of the Salesians in England*'. (LAS, Roma, 1988) It aimed to try to discover what the factors were that led to the growth and the decline of religious communities such as the Salesians in England.

What emerged from this study was not only the fact that it was possible to track a significant pattern of growth and development but to clearly see considerable evidence of a crisis of growth in the early years of the 20th century in the GBR province, particularly during the decade, leading up to the First World War, which seemed, at least on the face of it, to be associated with failures in educational relationships.

Since the foundation of the first house at Battersea in 1887, there had been a considerable dynamism in the growth of vocations in those early years in England, which justified the setting up of the English Province as early as 1902, with admittedly the addition of the houses in Cape Town and Malta, both which relied very heavily on confreres from the UK. The total membership of the Province rose from 4 in 1887 to 87 in 1904 and then remained at that level till 1914. (See Table and Graph of the Salesians in England, op cit.)

What emerges from the statistics, however, is that in the last decade before the Great War, the pattern of fast growth slowed to a standstill as was recognised in the first canonical visitation of the province in 1908, where there is a comprehensive account of the state of the Province and the difficulties that it faced.

***Documentary Evidence***

In reviewing the documentary evidence that exists for this period, one of the most significant a letter and report from Fr Edward Goy sent to the Superiors in Turin probably at the end of 1909 or early in 1910. This report or letter of protest raises serious questions about how the English Superior, Fr Charles Macey had been dealing with the admissions of candidates and particularly how he had been dealing with cases of immorality. Fr Goy wrote:

*In 1900 Fr Macey called me and said to me: Look I am giving you an order, and what it requires is that every night you should visit the dormitories between 11.30pm and 2am. I did this for five years. As a result I found a boy in the cubicle of Fr Flower, who was then a cleric and assistant.*

*I referred this to Fr Macey but he would not believe me. The following year the boy went away, but Fr Flower had another boy. He (Flower) became a priest, the Economer, and the confidante of Fr Macey. He handles the money. He has his favourites (Little Benjamins), he has them in his room, he has them and in his office. Every year he has one. Every day after lunch except on the rarest occasions, right up to five minutes to two, he is shut in his office with a boy. I have knocked many times, I have tried to open the door, but the door was closed. I stood elsewhere to observe and when the recreation was practically over, they came out, one in one direction and the other in a different direction. The consequences are that everyone was talking about it and even the boys were talking about it too. The money that he spent and still spends you can imagine from the gifts that he gives and continues to give. To one he gave a shotgun and ammunition, to another a bicycle, to another a gold watch, to another a gold chain, to another a gold cup, and so on. To all of them he gave gifts of sweets, cakes, and fruit, fresh every day: and at night he went extremely early in the morning to the dormitory and put extremely expensive sweets under the pillows of the boys. It happened several times that other boys were awake, they waited till the priest left then they got up and removed the sweets from under the pillow and put them back during the day. He was even accused of immorality by one of the boys, but nothing happened to him. The fact is that when these boys became familiar with Fr Flower they went, as they say, to the devil. And the other boys? The Lord alone knows what harm they came to. It also happened that having had a boy in his room, and when someone else arrived, he would make the boy exit by the window of his room into dormitory.*

ACS S.31(42) 14 e 15 “1910-1913”(pg 6,-8)

This instance of inappropriate relationships with young people was not unique and in his 19 page letter Fr Goy suggests other confreres have similar vices. Fr Goy seeks to make clear to the Superiors that he believed that the Fr Macey has systematically failed to deal with the situation which has resulted in immense harm to the boys involved and also to the reputation of the Salesians themselves.

This letter gives such detailed and specific evidence that it is difficult not be convinced that there was at least, some substance to the accusations being made. If we take this evidence at face value, what seems to have happened is the classic situation where an adult uses his position of closeness to young people as a cleric then of power as the Prefect (vicar of the Rector) and wealth (as the Economer) to win the attention of young people who are vulnerable because of their age and status in the boarding school.

The other feature of the relationships described is their secrecy and exclusive nature, taking place behind closed doors and involving inappropriate gifts and also the serial nature of these ‘special friendships’. As it is, the evidence, if it is to be believed, suggests that there was clearly a serious problem in terms of educational relationships. If it went further and if they sometimes developed into sexual relations, which seems to clearly be the suggestion, then this leaves the reader in considerable embarrassment.

The central purpose of the letter, however, was to complain and it includes a copy of a protest letter to Fr Macey about the fact that he believes that what Fr Goy himself had said in the House/Provincial Council meetings was not being kept confidential and he can only draw the conclusion that Fr Macey was breaking confidentiality and that as a result Fr Goy himself

because of his forthright criticism of some of the confreres is being accused of breaking the seal of confession. This somewhat rambling document which had been clearly worked over a number of times does, however, present a cautionary tale on the history of educational relationships in one Province.

### ***Who was Fr Edward Goy?***

In Fr Goy's obituary we have a touching picture of an Italian, born in 1871 who came from Pavia who had entered the diocesan seminary and been ordained deacon before he came to the Salesians at all, in 1896 and after his perpetual profession in 1897 was ordained a priest in October 1897 and sent to Battersea.

According to this obituary he was both a practical worker, as a carpenter, plumber and gardener and a well educated theological teacher who taught the early Salesians both dogmatic and moral theology at Battersea. He had a special ministry in the confessional and a touching devotion to the childhood of Christ, summed up in his frequently repeated phrase: 'Be chummy with the Little One. Who can be afraid of a child? Love the Little One and go hand in hand with him before his Father and you will have nothing to fear'.

Fr Frederick Couche, the Provincial when Fr Goy died remarked in his Obituary: 'He was a man of strong opinions and with apostolic frankness, which without a shred of human respect, he would express with decision and conviction with never a parade of his learning. He detested the little tricks and vanities of the world (in any shape or form, intellectual or otherwise) and anything in the way of pose or still more of sham was most abhorrent to him'. (see Obituaries of the GBR province (1888-1966) vol.1) .

In his report, Fr Goy also mentions Cyril Walsh, William Smith and Anthony Fuest as having been able 'to do what they liked' during the night.

At this distance, these accusations are difficult to prove but if they are true highlight some serious problems of educational relationships and morality which clearly was in danger of totally undermining the whole Salesian Educational Project in England.

### ***Fr Virion's Visitation Report***

In Fr Paul Virion's detailed report on the State of the Province in 1908, he confirmed that he was deeply concerned about questions of chastity and morality:

*'Young priests and cleric stay behind in the sacristy quite freely. In all this though, it would appear that there has been a notable improvement. The presence of Fr Campana was scandalous for many times he encouraged the weakness of others by his own wicked example. Moreover one can say there is no supervision.'*

*Again he commented on the lack of secure morality among the Salesians themselves:*

*MA: Catechist for the Artisans, intelligent not very zealous for the good of the artisans. Not secure with regard to morality; frequently has boys in his room.*

*GL enjoys a bad reputation for morality and sincerity.*

(ASC.S31(24) 12 Inghilterra. Bta.p19b ).

The question that arises now is what were the particular circumstances and the context in which these problems emerged in the early days of the UK province and how were they dealt with?

### ***The General Context of British Society.***

For the general context of society of this period in England it is worth recalling that the Mid Victorian progressive consensus began to break down under the pressure of a looming economic crisis with the rise of Labour, of the Nationalist crisis in Ireland and the imperial crisis which led to the Boer War in South Africa and the resultant loss of international prestige, and the challenge of the Naval Race with the newly united German Reich. At the same time the reign of Edward VII the son of Queen Victoria, was characterised by a tendency to accept 'fin de siècle' easy going attitudes to public morality with the consequent breakdown of the Victorian Puritanism.

### ***The Salesian Context***

The Province had been founded in Battersea, London in 1887 and the first Salesians were sent by Don Bosco himself, but sustained developed by Fr Michael Rua who visited England four times. Its first superior Fr McKiernan died within a year of his arrival and Fr Charles Bernard Macey an Englishman and convert to Catholicism became the second superior and remained effectively in charge from 1888 till 1909 and again from 1914-1919.

Our main source for this period is Fr Paul Virion's Visitation report for 1908. After the setting up of the Province in 1902, in 1908 the first formal canonical visitation of the province took place under Fr Paul Virion who was born in 1859 in Strasbourg and had studied at the Haute Ecole for Architecture in Paris before joining the Salesians attracted by their work at Menilmontant in Paris, and who was appointed the provincial of France from 1900 to 1919.

His mortuary letter describes him as being 'firm but gentle' and his report suggests that he brought a certain objectivity to his report on what had become the very personal regime of Fr Charles Bernard Macey who had been one of the founding members of the Mission in England and who remained superior from 1889 with a short break, from 1908 till 1914 and then till the end of the great war while the new provincial Fr Francis Scaloni who had been appointed in 1909 in was stuck in occupied Belgium.

He begins by highlighting the obvious imbalance between the 5 main houses and the 3 dependant missions:

*The Province has fifty perpetually professed members, twenty-five temporarily professed and nine novices. It is too small, that is to say, the number of houses is too restricted. The one in Cape Town is too far away. In England only Battersea is of any importance, the others are small and as a result there are difficulties when certain confreres have to be changed.*

*In the list he appends to his report, Battersea had 40 confreres and 2 novices, Burwash 8 confreres and three novices, Farnborough seven and East Hill five.*

He comments:

*The Provincial looks after the different houses with diligence (excepting that of Cape Town) and is much loved by nearly all his dependants, the greater part of whom were his pupils. It appears however that he shows a certain partiality and weakness for some of them. The Irish, on the other hand, do not show much confidence and complain he does not like them and the same goes for the Coadjutors.*

The main weakness of the province that Fr Virion highlights are the personal predominance of Fr Macey:

*The Provincial Council does not have regular meetings, only gathering to discuss particular subjects. There is no freedom of discussion, the Provincial is absolute in his opinion and does not allow any contradiction.*

*Further: There is a tendency in the Province to abandon the customs and norms in use in our Society in order to conform to the usages of the Religious Orders.*

The divisions that emerged between priests and clerics and the lay brothers clearly also worried Fr Virion.

*They are hardly ever found together, they speak very little to one another apart from necessity.*

*More accentuated still is the separation between the clerics and priests and lay brothers.*

*In summary there is little of the family spirit. As well as that there is antipathy between the English and Irish.*

More specifically pertinent to our subject is his criticism of Fr Macey that he:

*Lacks the necessary care to exclude from the society some whose morality is not secure; there is a little weakness of heart on the part of the Provincial.*

His overall summary confirms his own reputation for gentleness and firmness:

*They (the Salesians in England) have worked and are working a great deal, rendering precious services to the Holy Catholic Church. On the part of numerous confreres there is optimum good will and lively desire to do good. On the other hand, the Provincial is too personal, idiosyncratic in his style, he stifles initiative and therefore does not form personnel trained to be in charge.*

*The priests have excessive freedom: the members are helped very little. Salesian customs are not sufficiently well known. He has not always the necessary energy to stop disorders and send away those who have not given real proof of having a vocation. Situations have been accepted which are dangerous for the young priest assigned to them.*

As we reflect on what we might garner from this report relative to the theme of educational relationships it is worth considering whether educational relationships are most often modelled not taught: that is they are modelled on what we experience rather than on a theory and therefore the judgement that:.' *the Provincial is too personal, idiosyncratic in his style he stifles initiative and therefore does not form personnel trained to be in charge.'*

Here we see a particular model of personal relationships between adults, that stifles and does not actually educate to initiative and taking responsibility. This is, one suspects, part an explanation of why there are 40 out of 80 confreres at one house with 200 boys. The Provincial seems to have been unable to let his former pupils grow up and leave him and of course, could not accept any suggestions or initiatives from them. He kept them in a state of dependency.

While this is very worrying enough as comment about relationships between adults there is no doubt that this will probably have its impact on the relationships between educators and their students. The tendency to imitate the educational relationships you have learned is very strong indeed.

A second feature that is highlighted by Fr Virion is the provincial's tendency to have favourites. He refers to 'a weakness of heart', and that he shows 'a certain partiality and weakness for some of them'.

Such a tendency on the part of the superior is not only divisive but it also leads to the cultivating of a style of relationships by educators with students that uses inappropriate pressure when young people are in a dependent situation.

The third feature which is highlighted is that he lacks the necessary care to exclude from the Society some whose morality was not secure.

The tendency highlighted in Fr Goy's letter to ignore the reports that came to him and to refuse to believe the evidence presented to him particularly in the case of a favourite like Fr Flower was clearly a very perilous path when the safety of children and young people could be at risk.

### **Fr James Flower conflicting evidence.**

Fr James Flower was born in Wiltshire in 1878 and made his noviciate at Battersea being professed in 1893. He was ordained in 1902 and died at Chertsey in 1935. It has to be said that Fr Tozzi wrote an almost lyrical obituary in Italian of Fr Flower where he expands on his filial devotion to Fr Macey, whom he followed to Chertsey in 1919 and whom he served until his dying day, *being there to close his eyes in 1928.*

He served as Bursar at Battersea and Chertsey and supervised the building of St Ann's Church and gathered most of the necessary the funds.

*'Of a gentle and amiable disposition, always smiling, always cheerful, always kind to others, he left a lasting impression on all who knew him. His heroism and patience in suffering were extraordinary and astonished those who knew what he had to endure. His spirit of work, his constant concern for others, his forgetfulness of self were characteristics which will never be forgotten by those who knew him and who will always hold him in veneration.'* (obituary) *His obituary suggests that he suffered for a long time from a debilitating disease perhaps consumption and died of it at Chertsey.* (obituary in **SDB Deceased Confreres 1888-1966, collected by Fr Bernard Higgins**)

Chertsey is where Fr Macey had retired to when he was no longer Provincial and his relationship with Fr Flower seems to have continued here till his death in 1928.

While Obituaries are not the best sources for well informed and well balanced comments on people's lives, we do know that Fr Tozzi was far from being a soft touch. As a young novice master in Burwash before he set off for Africa, he complained about the English lack of piety and too much freedom exercised by students and Salesians.

What can we conclude from this document? It would seem that Fr Tozzi at least had no idea of the accusations made against Fr Flower, which is quite possible as he was in Cape Town from 1899 till 1921 when he returned to become Provincial on the death of Fr Scaloni.

Perhaps a more telling piece of evidence is in a letter from Fr Scaloni to Fr Gusmano, a member of the Superior Council in Turin in March 1910:

*Knowing the events from various sources, I can assure you that Fr Goy's letter is not at all exaggerated. As you can see, I don't yet sleep on a bed of roses, the more so in fact, because Fr*

*Goy does not tell everything. We have in fact a good many priests like Fr M., Fr Q., Fr M., Fr McG and Fr F. who for the good of the Congregation should be sent away. I have spoken about it a little in the Chapter( Provincial Council) and they say that, before the end of the month should the Superiors authorize me, I should promote the exit of these 'poor devils'. The Congregations would not lose anything and being in the Congregation is not doing any more good to their souls than could be done for them as secular priests. If I am authorized to act in this way I will help them by persuasion and will try to induce them to get themselves accepted by a bishop without making them unfriendly.*

Fr Scaloni went on to say that these were not the worst of his problems:

*The most embarrassing case is that of an English priest who is very well thought of, who for at least two years committed vile acts with a youngster, ( probably also with others) without whom I cannot convince him of his guilt. The youngster who merits belief, has denounced him under the advice of his confessor but he doesn't want the priest to know that he has spoken and he would be more than capable of denying it, to make up the calumny if I do not act against the culprit: I do not know how to deal with it – up till now I have not been able to get from the youngster anything written or any agreement to act. Please ask Fr Albera what should be done. To change the confrere's house would only be to suspend sentence and would encounter resistance from his Rector, /fr Macey who is convinced it is a calumny. As this priest is from a well off family and is constitutionally rather weak, frequently coughing up blood, I am inclined to send him home to recoup his health and to prolong his leave of absence for health reasons until the Lord sees fit to free us of him. ( ASC 3654 A10, A 11, Scaloni- Gusmano 4/3/1910.)*

It is difficult not to believe that Fr Scaloni was writing about the case of Fr Flower, and that the idea of his being sent home 'on leave of absence' is an idea that Fr Tozzi also looked at. It may also be that Fr Flower's removal from Battersea and his focus on building the Church at Chertsey gave him a much healthier focus in his life and kept him away from direct contact with young people.

There is no record of any ecclesiastical or civil procedure against Fr Flower or any of the others whom Fr Goy complains. Given the culture of that time where children were expected 'to be seen and not heard' and where referring cases to the civil authorities were almost unheard of, it is not surprising that there is no record of any procedure at all.

Having said that the report that a series of pupils were sent away *and he chose another* suggests that serious injustice may have taken place and the evidence was ignored or covered up.

The replacement of Fr Macey by Fr Scaloni as Provincial was clearly seen as a significant action on behalf of the central authorities. Fr Scaloni's subsequent moving of Fr Macey and Flower to Chertsey may indicate an attempt to contain and isolate what were perceived to be dangerous weaknesses. Fr Scaloni sets up a new noviciate and student house at Oxford and could be said to be the refounder of the 'salesian province in England.

### **Conclusion**

Overall in looking at this case study we can come to some significant conclusions.

It would seem that clerical abuse of minors is not just a modern phenomenon, but clearly existed

and was noted 100 years ago. It is clear also that issues of justice for those young people who were abused did not feature as a major concern of the ecclesiastical authorities of the time. What was more pressing for them, it would appear were concerns about the religious congregation itself and the need to maintain its reputation.

The problems of how to deal with Salesians when there was an accusation was clearly highly problematic.

First of all, the problem of how to distinguish between true reports of child abuse and false ones. How to find evidence that would be believable in the face of a denial and how to find some appropriate method of removing them from ministry and protecting the children from their influence.

It should also be noted that in Salesian tradition there had always been a careful effort to monitor the quality of educational relationships and to be wary of relationship which became sentimental or overdependent, what were often called: special friendships' while encouraging genuine personal interactions.

As far as the records show there was no effective removal of Fr James Flower from ministry and his death effectively brought this chapter of history to an end without any effective resolution or learning on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities.

#### Appendix 1: Fr Goy's Protest

*Nel 1900 don Macey mi chiamo e mi disse: guarda che ti do un ordine e che consiste che tu ogni notte devi visitare i dormitori dale 11.30 alle 2. Feci questo per circa 5 anni. Orbene, trovai un ragazzo nella cella di don Flower, allora chierico ed assistente; referii la cosa a don Macey, non me credette. L'anno prossimo il giovane ando via; ma don Flowe ne ebbe un altro. Divenne prete, economo, confidente di don Macey. Percio maneggia il danaro. Hi i beniamini: li ebbe in camera, li ebbe ed li ha in ufficio. Tutti gli anni ne ebbe uno. Dopo pranzo ogni di, slavo rarissime occasiooni, fino a 5 minuti alled due e in ufficio chiuso col ragazzo. Bussai io parecche volte, feci per aprire, la porta era chiusa. Stetti altrove ad osservare e qdo la ricreazione era quasi al termine, uscivano, uno andava da una parte, l'altro dall'altra. Conseguenze: tutti ne parlavano e ne parlano, anche i ragazzi. Il denaro che spese e spende si puo avere un idea dei regali che ha fatto e che fara. Ad uno gli compro un fucile e ammunzione( il fucile l'ho adesso) ad un altro un bicicletta, adun terzo gli dono un orologio d'oro, ad un sesto posate d'argento, e cosi via. A tutti gli poi doni di dolci, paste, frutta, nova ogni giorno: di note se ne andava a buonissima ora in dormitorio e poneva dolci costosi sotto il guanciale dei ragazzi. Avvenne parecchie volte che altri giovani erano svegli, lasciarono che il prete se ne uscisse, e poi si alzavano e pigliavano i detti dolci di sotto il guanciale, ridendosi poi durante la giornata, Fu anche accusato di immoralita da qualche giovane: ma non se ne fece nulla. Il fatto e che questi giovani qdo cominciarono a essere famigliari con don Flower, se ne andarono, come si dice, al diavolo. E gli altri giovani? Il Signore solo sa qto male ne ricevono. Avvenne anche che avendo ragazzo un camera, al sopravvesine di qualcuno, fece passare il ragazzo per la finestra dalla camera in dormitorio,*

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