

TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**YOUTH TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION:
A SALESIAN PERSPECTIVE**

BY
JACOB AUGUSTINE SDB

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF FR. DAVID BLOWEY OFM *Conv.*

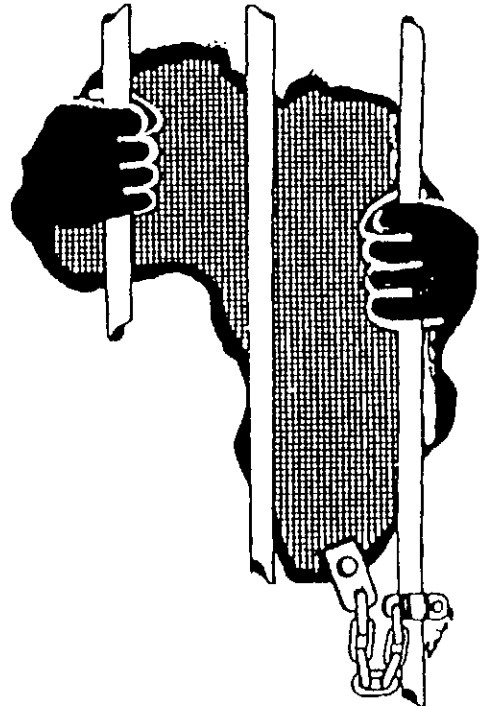
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“... a special appeal to you young people of the world, who are humanity’s future and living stones in the civilization of love ... a high and exhilarating task awaits you: that of becoming men and women capable of solidarity, peace and love life ... become craftsmen of a new humanity.”

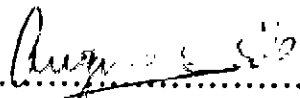
(World Peace Day Message, 1st January 2001 by John Paul II)



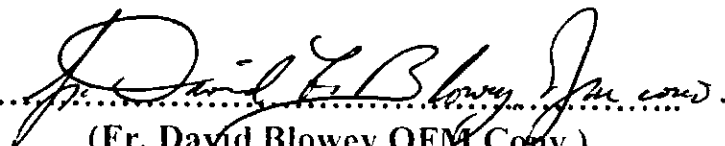
STUDENT DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution.

All sources have been cited in full.

Signed: 
(Jacob Augustine sdb)

Guided and Approved by

..... 
(Fr. David Blowey OFM Conv.)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	: All Africa Conference of Churches
ANSMag	: Salesian News Agency Magazine
C	: <i>Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales</i> (Rome, 1984). ⁱ
GC	: General Chapter ⁱⁱ
SGC	: Special General Chapter ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ For example, C. 40 would mean constitution No. 40 of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

ⁱⁱ For example, GC23, n. 275 refers to Documents of the 23rd General Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, paragraph 275.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, SGC. 5 refers to the documents of the 20th Special General Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, paragraph 5.

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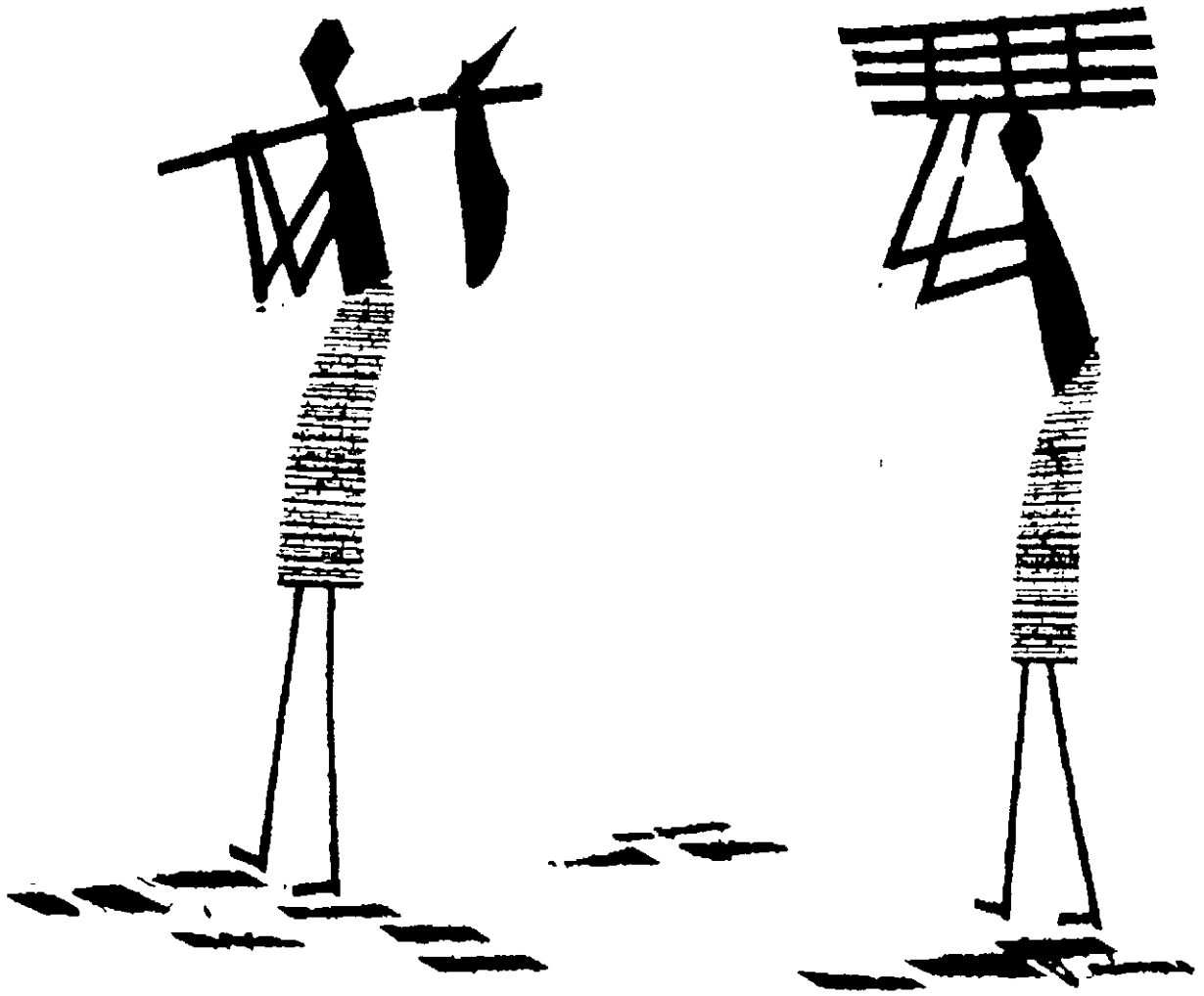
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PART I
Theology of Reconstruction:
Historical and Biblical Foundation

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

As we march with courage in this new era of science and technology, a century full of hope and great expectations, the youthful population of Africa, a valuable asset in hand charged with aspirations to excel and participate in the affairs of the world, challenge all those who are involved in youth ministry on the African soil. The education of the young with which a youth minister involves himself/herself should involve a 'liberating and empowering' method, a method that challenges the young to set the world on the move towards liberation. The words of Pope John Paul II in his address to World Youth Day 2000 speak of such pulsating response that is required of a person interested in the affairs of the world. "When you return home," says the pope, "do not grow lax. Reinforce and deepen your bond with the Christian communities to which you belong... paraphrasing St. Catherine of Siena's words, reminds you: 'If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze'!"¹

In response to the existing educational, socio-political and religious challenges that the African landscape faces today, the African theologians (since 1990s) speak of "reconstruction of Africa" in their theological investigations. Likewise, having the interest of the young at heart, every Salesian is challenged to respond to and to educate young people towards this reconstruction project. How are we to venture into such renewal in spirit? What does it mean to be young and work for reconstruction by setting the world ablaze? Are the young just future possibilities and never a present potentialities, dying to participate in this reconstruction process? what are the possibilities for a Salesian style of ministry in Africa in this era of 'reconstruction'? These are some of the queries that will be dealt with in this essay. The adventurous, emotional and dynamic youth population is indeed a weapon in our hands to reconstruct a new Africa. Most

¹ John Paul II, "From the Depth of My Heart I Want to Thank God for the Gift of Your Youth in the Church Conclusion of World Youth Day 2000," *L' Osservatore Romano*, 34:1656 (23 August 2000), p. 1

of the time we view the period of the young as having a lot of problems and hence 'giving' becomes the end of all our youth ministries. This essay is aimed at showing not just how young people are sometimes seen as a problem, but also how they are people filled with energies to transform society. This quest to transform should be viewed as a 'reconstruction project' which we need to inculcate in the young.

The essay is divided into two parts. Part one deals more with the theoretical part of the emerging theology of reconstruction and the Biblical foundations to such theology in Africa. Second part deals with the response of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Eastern Africa. Based on the Salesian educative method of Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness,² this section shows how a breakthrough is necessary in terms of a 'reconstruction project' in our youth ministry today. The concluding part of the essay discusses possible developments in the Salesian presences in the Eastern African province.

² Cfr. "Writings of Don Bosco," in *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, (Rome: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1984), pp. 246-253. Based on reason, religion and loving kindness, Salesian system of education excludes all violent punishment, and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement. By the preventive system pupils acquire a better understanding, so that an educator can always speak to them in the language of the heart, not only during the time of their education but even afterwards. Having once succeeded in gaining the confidence of the pupils, the educator can subsequently exercise a great influence over them, and counsel them, advise and even correct them, whatever position they may occupy in the world later on

Section 1. THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION: An Historical Overview

Africa today is undergoing tremendous changes in the wake of the emerging 'new world order.'³ To be open to the signs of the times amidst these changing realities is to experience these changes, be they scientific, socio-political, economic, religious and involves being able to respond in faith, hope and love in order to generate and sustain life.⁴ Faith is understood not in the sense of an intellectual concept or just an acceptance of the message of the Gospel, but as an encounter with the Lord⁵ that translates itself as commitment for the betterment of society. African theologians have for the past few decades been trying to present an answer to this commitment that their Christian faith demands. While various theologies have emerged in response to a particular African context and time,⁶ a new trend or thought process was envisioned in the 1990s, which Mugambi terms, "Theology of Reconstruction," with its orientation towards the transformation of the African landscape.⁷

1.1 A QUEST FOR IDENTITY!

Caught up in this web of changing realities, the African think-tanks have been searching for an African identity to build a society that would respect its own cultural values and ethnic differences. African leaders had shrilled together as well in trying to transform the societies. Movements such as Pan-Africanism, African Personality, African Humanism, Ujamaa, Negritude, Consciencism were born in answer to this quest for an identity. The cry for an

³ New World Order refers to Globalisation.

⁴ J. N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1995), p. 16!

⁵ Jose B. Chipenda, "Theological Options in Africa Today," in Kofi Appiah-Kubi (ed.), *African Theology en route*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 66ff.

⁶ For example, Theology of Inculturation, African Theology, Black Theology.

⁷ Several books and articles have been written and published on this topic. Cf. Mary N. Getui and Emmanuel A. Obeng, (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1999).

African Renaissance in the 1990s by Thabo Mbeki⁸ is aimed at working towards an identity that leaves Africa on a par with the rest of the world. Christian theological reflections and leadership are challenged as well, whether African churches should continue to rely on theological packages designed for other cultures and historical contexts - Europe and North America - or look for alternatives. Theology needs to be read in a particular context. It is in answer to this quest for an African identity that theology of reconstruction has emerged.

1.2 WHAT IS THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION?

Theology of reconstruction is a recent phrase in the contemporary African theological vocabulary. The term 'reconstruction' is used in the engineering field, indicating construction, destruction or reconstruction of a building complex by an engineer with the given mathematical details. As Africa entered a new historical era, ushered in by the end of three vicious systems of oppression - institutionalised racism, formal colonialism and cold-war tutelage,⁹ 'reconstruction' was coined as a theological metaphor since the 1990s to make theology living and dynamic, active and creative in our societies.¹⁰ Reconstruction is understood as a process of rebuilding something which has fallen apart. In our African context, what has been destroyed, as argued by many scholars, is political independence, economic stability, cultural heritage, education, 'African religiosity.' What is striking is that all these seem to have remained merely an 'intellectual pleasure' among the academic institutes and 'progressive think-tanks.' As a result, 'political systems' remain fallen, though the people on top are indigenous. The African continent continues to be in want with the economic strategies coming from outside with all the manipulations to benefit the top few nations. Religion continues to be the 'opium' without any

⁸ Thabo Mbeki is presently the president of South Africa.

⁹ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 40.

¹⁰ Appiah-Kubi, *African Theology en route*, p. viii.

dialogue with the unjust social realities. With all these individual parts fallen apart, theology of reconstruction emerges as a response to restore hope, a faith in dialogue with the existing social realities, restoring courage to those who have become fearful and liberation to those who are bound in various forms of captivity (Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:16-22) and justice into unjust situations. Such a type of work involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves, irrespective of what others have to say about the continent and its people. For example, speaking of creating new myths, Mugambi says:

As the 20th century nears its end, Africa must begin to make new myths, and re-interpret old ones, for survival of its own peoples. The myth of a vanishing people, must be replaced by the myth of a resurgent, or resilient people. The myth of a desperate people must be replaced by the myth of a people full of hope. The myth of a hungry people must be replaced by the myth of a people capable of feeding itself, and so on.¹¹

The dominant factor with the proponents of this theology is their attempt to understand theology as 'faith being in dialogue' with the African soil, which has had its destructive historical colonial past, "a continent full of bad news"¹² infested with conflicts, poverty and misery, racial discriminations, economic imbalances, cultural and confessional differences in the present and a bright continent only in the future. While the political, cultural, religious and spiritual concerns of Africa are not forgotten in the theological thinking, the African theologians see a much greater need to go to a deeper level both philosophically and theologically and aim at bringing fullness of life to the people. As a result, theology of reconstruction, aimed at shaping a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present, was born.

¹¹ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 38.

¹² John Paul II, "On the Church in Africa - *Ecclesia in Africa*." *Post-Synodal Exhortation*, 40 (Nairobi: St. Pauline Publications Africa, 1995).

This theology of reconstruction is an attempt at the comprehensive approach to link Africa's struggle for democratic freedoms with the Church's ministry of reconciliation and conflict resolution. As Ngoy Daniel Mulunda-Nyanga puts it:

To talk about the reconstruction of Africa is to offer symbols of hope. As biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests, it is to offer symbols potent enough to contradict a situation of hopelessness in which newness is unthinkable.¹³

1.3 EMERGENCE OF RECONSTRUCTION AS A PARADIGM IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY

Any theology, while trying to understand faith, needs to answer questions that a particular religion would face according to its historical background and social context. Patristic theology, for example, evolved as an answer to the growing number of 'isms' in the Church. Scholastic theology, instead, concentrated on a deeper understanding of the dogmatic stand of the Church. The Medieval era tried to reconcile theology with political powers, paving the way to the period of Renaissance. Now all modern theologies grapple with the aspect of 'Faith in the new world order,' in which structures of domination and injustice widen the gulf between the affluent and the destitute. It is in answer to this discriminatory phenomenon that Christian theology of liberation was born. The thinking was motivated by the Exodus motif: 'Let my people go!' (Ex 10:3c).

1.4 FROM LIBERATION TO RECONSTRUCTION: A Paradigm shift

Liberation is not a theoretical proposition to be debated in a philosophy or theology seminary. It is a historical reality, born in the struggle for freedom in which an oppressed people recognise that they were not created to be seized, bartered, deeded, and auctioned¹⁴

¹³ Ngoy Daniel Mulunda-Nyanga, *The Reconstruction of Africa*. (Nairobi: AACC, 1997), p. 2.

¹⁴ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (NY: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 155.

The incarnation of Christianity as a liberating force in a particular context is linked to social justice and human freedom, but the development had taken different forms in accordance with the context in which the liberation motif was envisioned. Thus, for example, in Latin America liberation theology developed as a 'progressive thinking' in the 1960s to mobilise people for liberation against dictatorial regimes and economic imbalances. Asian theologians, Indians in particular, had to face the challenge of discriminatory caste differences and Vedic traditions against which "Dalit Theology" was developed. In North America, the liberation motif led civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s to discern theology that would help them to mobilise the community for change. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., James Cone, Malcom X, gave theological rationalisation to the civil rights movement in the USA.¹⁵

Grounded in an analysis of social context, 'doing theology' in Africa has become a much more complex task since the 1960s and 1970s. Owing to the political independence that the majority of African nations had obtained in this period, theology had to be understood in terms of African life and culture as well as in terms of political independence. As Martey argues, the African theologian in neocolonial Africa, like the Black theologian in racist South Africa, must grapple with sociopolitical and economic issues as well as with religiocultural ones.¹⁶ In response to this, Justin Ukpong identifies at least three major theological paradigms operational in the African context. They are African inculturation theology (focusing on theology and the problem of cultural identity), Black theology (dealing with in question of colour), and liberation theology (addressing the problem of poverty and injustice in Africa).¹⁷

Theology of inculturation developed as the Africanization of Christian Doctrine, cult, pastoral practices and art, basing them on African culture and religious tradition. This found

¹⁵ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 39.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology - Inculturation and Liberation* (Maruknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), p. xi.

¹⁷ Justin S. Ukpong, "African Theologies Now - A Profile," *Spearhead* 80 (1984): PP.1-6.

support in the renewal from the *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).¹⁸ Theology of inculturation became a popular trend in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the situation in South Africa was a bit different, where the theological thinking was motivated not so much by the cultural phenomenon¹⁹ as the existing political situation which sparked the emergence of "Black Theology."²⁰ Latin American Liberation theology, on the otherhand, emphasized the liberation motif in socio-economic terms with Jesus Christ as the ultimate liberator. Jean-Marc Ela says, "The Bible, which speaks of God and human beings in the same breath, always includes in the deliverance of God's people their political, economic and social liberation - without, however, its being reduced to these".²¹ These trends of thought are seen not so much as contradictory to each other but as a thinking that complement one another.

Looking at these three trends of thought critically, Mugambi argues that Christian theology in Africa, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, emphasised very much the theme of liberation as an Exodus from colonial bondage, without highlighting the transformative and reconstructive dimensions. Transposition of the liberation theme from the Old Testament (Exodus) to the African experience, for Mugambi, leads to some distortions of the theological message contained in it. He speaks of five differences that distort the theological message:

- i) **Historical distance:** The Israelites were in bondage in the second millennium before the Christian era. The African colonial experience has been in the second millennium within the Christian era. This historical distance implies also considerable differences in historical circumstances.

¹⁸ Martey, p. 65

¹⁹ Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 90

²⁰ The term is borrowed from theology done in North America. Here we speak of a liberation theology that fought racism during apartheid

²¹ Ela, p. 90.

- ii) **Cultural distance:** The Israelites had great affinity with the peoples of the Mediterranean region, and their cosmopolitan experience is much more evident than that of Africans in the twentieth century under European colonial domination.
- iii) **Religious heritage:** In the Old Testament, the charismatic leadership of heroes such as Moses derived inspiration from the religious heritage of the Israelites, whereas the association of messianic leadership in contemporary Africa is greatly influenced by biblical idioms.
- iv) **Ideological distance:** The ideological configuration of the Mediterranean region during the Exodus period is very different from that of Africa in the twentieth century.
- v) **Religious plurality:** Whereas in the Old Testament the Israelites claim to have the only true religion, in contemporary Africa several religions vie for recognition as heralds of divine and universal truth (Christianity, Islam, Judaism).²²

Given these differences, Mugambi says that we need to have a paradigm shift in our theological liberative thought. Kā Mana goes still further and speaks of theologies such as Inculturation theology, Black theology, liberation theology as just insurrection theologies against the colonial powers.

In March 1990 the Executive Committee of All-Africa Conference of Churches met in Nairobi to ponder these questions in addition to the normal business on its usual agenda. While reflecting on the theme of 'Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa,' the theme of reconstruction appeared most appropriate for Mugambi. It was here that Mugambi proposed that the liberation motif should shift from liberation to reconstruction as the theological axiom. This was because he saw the 21st Century as a century of reconstruction in many ways,

²² Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 14

with calls for national conventions, constitutional reforms and economic revitalisation.²³ For Kā Mana, the paradigm shift in our theology consists in a process that embraces a new vision, one that moves from insurrection²⁴ to reconstruction. His theology of reconstruction integrated the motif of identity and liberation but moves on to the need to reconstruct Africa as well as the world, according to certain requirements, namely respecting what it means to be human.

Doing theology in a new way which would re-interpret the Gospel according to the concepts that are more meaningful to the peoples of Africa is being envisioned in this new field of theological thinking. There are various areas that need reconstruction in Africa today. We shall only concentrate on four of these areas which address the young directly or indirectly.

1.5 AREAS OF RECONSTRUCTION

The theme of reconstruction highlights basically the necessity of creating a new society within the same geographical space, but across different historical moments, at different levels. While several areas need to be reconstructed within the African landscape, we shall speak of four major areas of concern: The socio-economic, educational, religious and political.

i. The Socio-economic scene:

With the gulf between the rich and the poor on the increase, socio-economic reconstruction would entail rebuilding society on the basis of justice and peace. With the high increase in the decrees in economy, all the available resources - material and spiritual - need to be pooled to give hope to the rising young generation. Africa is not a poor continent, but its people are the

²³ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 5

²⁴ Kā Mana views theology of inculturation, social, economic and political liberation as insurrection theologies against the West.

poorest in the world. This may be because of mismanagement of the individual country's economy and its resources. This mismanagement leads to economic instability and budget deficits. Besides, with over-borrowing and dependency on the foreign aid, debt crises, which Africa faces today, seem to lead the continent towards regression. Theology needs to engage in dialogue with the existing social reality and economic instability. Faith, in such contexts, needs to be understood in terms of justice and peace.

ii. Educational:

Due to colonialism, poverty, slavery, discrimination, political indoctrination, etc. most Africans have been deprived of their right to education. To be effective in the reconstruction process, there is a need for well-educated Africans. As Africans, they need to think for themselves. There is a need for education that addresses African realities, with a mission to reconstruct, not just for individual successes, but for a collective transformation. Education is needed that prepares a person for responsible and mature participation in the life of his or her community.²⁵ Academically speaking, one of the fields of study that needs to be emphasized in our educational systems is the critical appreciation and proper appropriation of science and technology.

iii. Religious:

With religions vying with one another to claim supremacy and authenticity, the continent is being torn apart. Churches are divided along ethnic, language and cultural lines. Religion has not only become the opium of the people, but has turned out to be the way and the means to

²⁵ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 136.

obtain that opium for some. Religion acts as the pillar and guide of our future. In such a situation we need to study how religion can work towards reconstruction in Africa? Religious leaders will have to play the role of 'pace-setters'²⁶ in social reconstruction, challenging the policy makers both in and outside Africa.

ii. Political:

The political life of Africa is marred by conflicting political ideologies. A critical analysis of Africa's political life reveals that the continent has been used as a testing ground and battle-field for ideologies. This has severely affected Africans in various ways, such as hating and dividing themselves, feeling insecure, shunning their traditional leadership and hating their heritage. African politics needs an overhaul. Though a lot of blame is attributed to the colonial era, the present political leaders have a responsibility as well in the destruction of the political system. Magesa's contention that the African Clan can be used as a paradigm for democracy in Africa needs to be considered. The clan in Africa, for Magesa, is the strongest force, a strong 'bondedness' that leads to the establishment of group identity and, within it, rights and duties²⁷. What the clan seeks to preserve by its structures of leadership and operation are unity, justice, service, honour to God and the ancestors, the correct transmission of tradition, and the widening of the clan through marriage and the formation of friendships and alliances so that the life of the clan and its happiness might be assured. As Waliggo points out, "this is the wonderful sense of the community and communion that the Christian Church must rediscover from African

²⁶ Mugambi, "Religion in Social Transformation of Africa," in Laurenti Magesa and Zablon Nthamburi (eds.), *Democracy and Reconciliation* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1999), p. 94.

²⁷ Laurenti Magesa, "Theology of Democracy," in Magesa and Nthamburi, *Democracy and Reconciliation*, pp. 123-126.

values.”²⁸ Theology indeed is challenged politically at this time of reconstruction. How would theology make sense of a political situation that dehumanizes people, treats them as mere chattels and condemns them to a life of misery and serfdom?²⁹

1.6 AGENTS OF RECONSTRUCTION

While every individual is challenged to participate in this reconstruction, for it is the individual who can influence others to change for a better tomorrow, we focus our attention on the young people on the African continent. Young people stand out as a valuable asset in our hands to rebuild the fallen African continent. We shall deal at length about youth as agents of reconstruction in the later part of our essay.

²⁸ John M. Waliggo, “The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church,” in J. N. K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds.), *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology* (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), pp. 122-124.

²⁹ Zablon Nthamburi, “Theology and Politics,” in Magesa and Nthamburi, *Democracy and Reconciliation*, p. 135.

Section 2. RECONSTRUCTION: A Biblical Perspective

Christians down the centuries have always turned to the scriptures for inspiration and authority for their theological musings. African theologians are no exception either. As Zablon put it, “for all traditions, including African Christians, the Bible is the ultimate source of authority upon which the Christian faith is to be built.”³⁰ However, this dependency on the Bible as the source and norm of Christianity has not curtailed theologians from launching deeply into varieties of biblical interpretations for the African landscape. While the Bible is accepted to have risen from a culture which is very different from ours in time and space,³¹ Ela’s challenge to read the Bible correctly in a context of African realities³² compels us to understand the African-political reality and interpret it in the light of biblical symbols, so as to bring about the transformation of the oppressive status quo.³³ Thus, the Bible, as word of God, becomes meaningful when it is seen in concrete contexts and used to promote life,³⁴ for, the world is not given to us as a ready-made reality, but as a construction project.³⁵ The objective of this section is to see how ‘reconstruction’ appears so dominantly in the Bible.

2.1 RECONSTRUCTION: a Dominant Theme in the Bible

The Bible taken as a whole unfolds itself as the manifestation of the works of God. As an inspired word, Scripture remains a unique source of God’s reflection, expressing the rich

³⁰ Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta, “Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches,” in Hanna W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1997), p. 50.

³¹ Emmanuel Adow Obeng, “The Use of Biblical Critical Methods in Rooting the Scriptures in Africa,” in Hanna W. Kinoti and John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity*, p. 15.

³² Ela, p. 113.

³³ Martey, p. 55.

³⁴ Laurenti Magessa, “From Privatized to Popular Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa,” in Kinoti and Waliggo, *The Bible in African Christianity*, p. 28.

³⁵ Ela, p. 100.

experience of a people who were convinced that in historical events and through great leaders, God was shaping their destiny³⁶ by calling together a desperate group of slaves and nomads and forming them into a “chosen people” and a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). Through careful analysis of events right from the moment of creation until the ‘new-creation’ in and through Christ, we comprehend a continuously ‘evolving divine project’ with re-construction as its focus of attention, a project understood in the sense of the re-creation of Israel (the New Israel in the New Testament) into a new nation.

As we delve into Israel’s history, we can posit three major periods in the Bible in regard to the socio-politico-religious reconstruction:

- i. Mosaic period
- ii. Post-Exilic period
- iii. Messianic period

2.1 Mosaic period³⁷ (Slavery in Egypt, Liberation, Life in the desert, Exile):

The Mosaic period marks the formal inauguration of a new religion with its own distinct priesthood, ritual and creed.³⁸ One of the charismatic elements in this period is the heroic way in which people are led to overcome political oppression, to sustain hopes for land and freedom and to be transformed by their faith in “the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands of generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34:1-6).

³⁶ Donald Senior and Carrol Stuhlmueller. *The Biblical Foundations for Missions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18-21.

³⁸ Cfr. Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:1-31; 35:1-40: 38). Priestly Levites (Num 1:47-54, Chapters 3-4, 8; Deut 31:9, 24-28) and the expression of Israel’s creed (Ex 15, Deut 26:5-10; Josh 24).

Though Moses is very often likened to a political hero in Israel's history, one cannot deny the fact that Moses was not only a guide enabling Israel to escape from Egypt, but also a chief architect, a re-constructor, who united them into a single people, the author of their faith, a legislator and religious initiator. The Book of Deuteronomy, written six centuries later than Exodus, recaptures this significant role of Moses. The book represents an effort, under the long reign of King Josiah, to formulate a theology of reconstruction based on Mosaic law (Deut 1:19-20) and highlights those aspects of society which required explanation.³⁹ It is very revealing to find that the prophetic messages were all a reminder to go back to this historical period, for the prophets were thought to be the conscience of the people.

If the Mosaic period has to have any meaning for Africa, it would primarily lie in the fact that African reconstruction requires charismatic leadership, both in the political and religious realms. The quality of these leaders is to be measured by the degree by which a leader is to direct social reconstruction without de-stabilizing the society which he or she leads.⁴⁰ Africa needs leaders who would dare to risk and guide people towards a true socio-politico-economic religious transformation, leaders who are morally alert, sound and genuinely interested in the essentials of both the material and spiritual good of the people. The God of Exodus needs to be experienced as a God of promise and of leaving the present to face the future, the source of new things to come⁴¹.

2.2 Post-exilic period

At this period of Israel's history, the theme of reconstruction develops as reconstruction of the past by keeping alive its memory in the present. "Temple" becomes the reference point. In fact, the post-exilic period is centered around the reconstruction of the temple that was destroyed

³⁹ Mugambi, *From Liberation*, p. 165.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 30.

in 587 BC, during the deportation of Israel to Babylonia (2Chrō. 36:19; 2Kgs. 25:9). With the destruction and deportation into a foreign land, Israel feels that she is driven back to the period before Moses (cfr. Lam. 2:6-11). Destruction of the temple meant destruction of Israel. Therefore, the urgency to re-construct the temple is stressed in Ezra (cfr. Ezra 5). The temple at this period was no longer understood as a place where only sacrifice and worship were to be carried out, but as a 'sacred space'⁴² where the past memory was kept alive, a hope that what had been in the past might be again in the present.⁴³ That is to say, Israel chose to recall the prosperous time when she lavishly adorned the sacred space (temple), that God had chosen to inhabit. Reconstruction based on the past at this period was directed towards the nourishing of hope: it was present- and future-oriented, a vision to move a way forward.

Another theme that is dominant at this period is the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah. This is because to have lost Jerusalem was to have lost Israel's dignity and personal identity. Nehemiah's primary concern is therefore reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. Restoration of the walls meant that Israel would no longer be disgraced (Neh. 2:17). Nehemiah's perseverance in pursuing this project is also to be highlighted in this period. In fact, after the Babylonian exile, a 'new nation' was constructed under the direction of Nehemiah and Ezra. The Maccabee brothers concern themselves in restoring the sanctity of the temple, after its desecration by the Hellenists (1 Macc. 2:15ff).

The relevance of this period to African renaissance would be in the fact that the 'African past' needs to be looked into with a fresh outlook to build on what was glorious - be it cultural identity, political stability, economic sufficiency. To reconstruct is to live in an active way the memory of faith in order to make out of it a faithful practice capable of creating a new society. Besides, going back to the roots, we need to look at the present conditions as well. While

⁴² Alice L. Laffey, "A Theological Construction of Israel's Temple," in *The Bible Today* 26/4 (July 1988): 209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Africa's religiosity is to be appreciated, people need to think critically: What can Africa's religiosity mean at a time when the news about Africa tops the international news items?

'nothing good can come out of this continent or its people.'

2.3 Messianic period

With the coming of Christ, reconstruction work becomes more active, alive and challenging. The Gospels clearly portray that the messianic mission of Christ, from the beginning to the end, was centered on and directed to, the coming of the Kingdom of God. In fact, the mission of Jesus (cfr. Lk 4:18-19) focuses clearly on the practical and performative character of his mission: a mission to those who are poor, captive, blind and oppressed, and a mission concerned about changing the conflictual situation of humanity in the world. Christ becomes a fulfilment of the old, a reconstructor (cfr. Mt.5:17) who mobilizes the energies of individuals to transform the social conditions. As Kā Mana⁴⁴ argues, Christ mobilises the energies of the whole being, individual and social, to help people to accede to their real status, that of love which is the essence of the Kingdom of God.

Speaking of the Kingdom, Gerhard Lohfink, in his book *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* shows how Jesus sought the restoration or reconstruction of lost and scattered Israel in his preaching of the Kingdom. In Lohfink's view Jesus sought to draw together an Israel fractured by struggling parties and groups; and so he went to tax collectors (cfr. Matt 10:3) and to zealots (cfr. Lk 6:15), to the poor and to the rich, to the rural population of Galilee and to the capital city of Jerusalem⁴⁵. Restoration being the main element of Jesus'

⁴⁴ The citation is taken from the translation done by one of my classmates since the original writing was in French. Cfr. Kā Mana, *Theologie Africaine pour temps de crise. Christianisme et reconstruction de l'Afrique* (Paris: Edition Karthala, 1993).

⁴⁵ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: the Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 11-12.

ministry, his miracles of healing occupied an important place. They stood in close connection with his preaching of the kingdom. Healing signified the restoration of the people of God among whom, in the eschatological age of Salvation, no disease is permitted. The relationship of Jesus' mighty works to reconstruct the community is especially evident in the jubilant exclamation of Luke 7:22 (cfr. Matt. 11:5): "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."⁴⁶ When we take the Gospels as a whole, all the threats (cfr. Matt. 8:11-12, 11:21-22, 12:41-42; Lk. 10:13-14, 11:31-32), all the denunciations, all the parables of the crisis (cfr. Lk. 14:16-24), all the sayings against 'this' generation (cfr. Matt. 12:41-42) show plainly enough that Jesus' entire activity was related to gathering of Israel and reconstructing them into a holy nation, a new people. To put this in Ka Mana's terms, Jesus becomes a catalyst for reconstruction who mobilizes the energies of the people towards a true transformation. This energy is brought about by the Cross, which becomes one of the fundamental energies of the theology of reconstruction, which consists in coming out of a crisis situation.

A lesson to learn for the African theology of reconstruction from the Messianic period is to invest the 'Word incarnate' in the individual consciences and in the collective imagination so that all is oriented towards a global action of transformation and the social renewal according to a human perspective, namely the one that Christ manifests and incarnates.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.



PART II:
RECONSTRUCTING
THE SALESIAN WAY

Section 3. YOUTH QUEST FOR RECONSTRUCTION

Do not say, "I am only a boy": for you shall go to all to whom I send you (Jer. 1:4).

Modernist science with a mechanistic world-view has managed to create a fascinating reality in which the individuals, both the young and the old, are likened to their behavioural patterns. As a result, a young person, due to his/her restless behaviour, is very often looked at as someone having a number of problems, very fearful about the future, a person who stands confused. While 'youth have problems' is not denied, yet to imagine youth only as an age 'full of problems' and hence 'they would only make things worse' does not fully portray a true picture of the young person today.

Today, more than ever, youth constitute not only an ever increasing percentage of the world population, particularly in Africa, but also make their presence felt in their search for meaning and purpose of life, and in their aspiration and vision of a just, fraternal, humane and sharing society.⁴⁷ There is among the young a quest for social reconstruction. Here in this chapter we shall delve into this aspect of the youth quest for reconstruction, as felt and expressed in various forms and at various levels here in Eastern Africa. But before we begin to deal with the matter, it is important for us to know who exactly the youth are.

3.1. YOUTH: Who are they?

Youth occupy an important place in the society today, representing a large section of the population⁴⁸ having a tremendous potential for progressive nation building. When we speak of

⁴⁷ Cfr. "Foreword" in Joe Arimpoor, *Indian Youth in Perspective, a Research Study* (Madras: SIGA, 1982), p. vii.

⁴⁸ Currently, more than half of the world's population is below age 25, and 29% are between the ages 10 and 25; 80% of those live in the developing countries. In Africa, 40% of the present population ... is under the age of eighteen. In Kenya alone, the youth constitute 50% of the population which is now estimated at 30 million people. For further details cfr. Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyanch, *Secularism in Africa* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1997), p. 103.

"young people." we refer to preadolescents, adolescents and young adults, varying in ages between an early teens (say fifteen) right until thirty years. However, 'youth'⁴⁹ is not merely an age group; it is a transitional stage in life having its own specific characteristics and life choices. Some of these predominant characteristics present in the young are a sense of unity and a feeling of world solidarity together with sense of common responsibility. As the UN study spells out:

There is a growing sense of unity among young people, a feeling of world solidarity and a sense of common responsibility to achieve peace. Youth of the world is seeking a universal identity. This is a new kind of population, more resilient and adaptable than their elders, ready for change, and open to new ideas. Youth of the world will soon predominate in world affairs.⁵⁰

3.2. YOUTH: What are they?

The society at large seems to hold two differing opinions about young people today. There are some who view this period as characterised by a time of indecision, despair and doubt, always in need of the sympathetic help of an adult. To some, the growing population of the young has caused serious social, economic and demographic implications for a country like Kenya⁵¹. There are yet others who view youth more as dynamic, full of life, creative and a decisive force in shaping the society. Therefore, the period of youth unrest is viewed optimistically by these few as a time of development, a creative force at hand to shape the society. As Martin Buber had put it: "Youth are the megaphones of today's society, crying out against the injustices which most of us endure in silence."⁵²

⁴⁹ The definition of youth in terms of chronological age is very problematic. However, the United Nations (UN) define youth as a person aged between 15 - 24 years old. The Commonwealth defines youth as one aged between 15-29 years old. For many African countries, this age bracket is widened to accommodate persons of low age as 5 years and as high as 35 years (sometimes up to 40 years old. Cfr. "The Need to Develop a Kenya National Youth Policy (KNYP)," *Concept Paper*, (Nairobi: DBYES documentation center, post 1997), p.1

⁵⁰ Arimpoor, p. 4.

⁵¹ Shorter and Onyancha, p. 103.

⁵² Martin Buber as cited by Arimpoor, p. 1.

To a question in the handout on 'situation analysis of young people in our Salesian setups,' the response of the SDBs, FMAs and some of the young people reflected the same point of view. Out of thirty who responded, twenty two people mentioned that when they hear the word 'youth' what comes to their mind is: dynamism, creativity, joyfulness and life in its fullness. For the remaining eight, youth is a time of crises, confusion and despair.

Youth unrest, upheaval and turmoil indeed are evident everywhere. Their creative dynamism and active participation in the welfare of the society mirror their quest for reconstruction of the African landscape. Despite the gloomy picture that is very often created about the young people, there are already some youth initiatives and youth responsibilities that cry out for a genuine transformation of the existing social order. Concerned about the society in which they live, these young individuals have become the cornerstones for several 'reconstructive' works, organisations and movements in the society today. We shall now explore such groups that are initiated and managed by the young themselves, with the aim of working towards reconstruction of the African landscape.

3.3. YOUTH: Agents of Reconstruction:

As we march with courage in this era of science and technology, a century full of hope and great expectations, the youthful population in Africa, a valuable asset in hand, excels and participates in the affairs of Africa. The courage and the constancy with which they go about effecting 'change' in the society cannot simply be ignored.

3.3.1. The Youth Peace Building Initiative (YPBI) - AACC contribution

In an attempt to address the absence of peace in Africa, the AACC Youth Programme's focus had been on peace-building. The theme of 1995 was 'Building a Culture of Peace,' and that of 1996 was 'Leadership is a Peace Mission.' The process in 1996 gave birth to the new start called Youth Peace Building Initiative (YPBI). The aim of YPBI was to help young people to transform themselves from objects and subjects of wars into agents of peace, thus contributing substantially towards peace, community-building, valuing and respecting life, fighting against the hearts and minds of war, restoring their identity and much more⁵³.

3.3.2. *Chemichemi ya Ukweli*⁵⁴ (Wellsprings of Truth)

Chemichemi ya Ukweli is a group that brings together different faiths and sects. It was started in 1997, with a few religious leaders who were worried about the growth of chaos in Kenya. It is part of a movement for peace verses chaos. Chaos interpreted as use of force on or with the intention of damaging human personality. The movement is founded on people of different classes. Its belief lies in the fact that we are all brothers and sisters, anyone whether hurt, killed or imprisoned is a brother or sister to us. *Chemchemi ya Ukweli* has its power invested on Love and Truth. There are six aims on which this movement lies:

- Life is sacred and cannot be exchanged with any other thing
- Our strength is Love and Truth
- Our means and methods are peaceful and clear
- All of us human beings are emotional creatures
- We are ready to face any misappropriateness or injustice

⁵³ In order to help the Youth Ministers in training the young people to be peace builders AACC has brought out a Youth Peace Training Manual for Youth in Africa which was coordinated by Khepi Shole. For further details cfr. Khepi Shole, Nja'ah Peter Toh and others (eds.), *Youth Peace Training Manual* (Nairobi: AACC Publications, 1999).

⁵⁴ The source for this section is taken from a leaflet that the author had from one of the co-ordinators at 'Chemichemi ya Ukweli' Center, Westlands, "Life is Sacred," (Nairobi: Chemichemi ya Ukweli, [n.d]), *recto*. The leaflet speaks about the goal and the scope of *ChemChem* ya Ukweli.

- We feel with those who are oppressed and segregated⁵⁵

What is interesting about the group is that it is the young who are actively involved in calling to an end to oppression, chaos and social injustice by building sound relationships, understanding and reaching reconciliation by means of peace. Modeled on Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the movement involves people of various age and classes to bring peace in different situations⁵⁶.

3.3.3. *Amani People's Theater*⁵⁷

Amani People's Theater (APT) was started six years back (1994) by a group of young people who wanted to make a difference in the society by working with grassroots communities. Their aim was to enhance a peaceful coexistence among the community members. It branched off as a separate body from its mother movement called, "People for Peace in Africa." Wanting to highlight the intelligence and creativity of people at every walk of life in working for peace through non-violence, APT makes use of 'theatrical work' as its pedagogical tool. "People's Theater" has its foundations in indigenous African theater, which was essentially interactive, educational, therapeutic and mediative⁵⁸. It blends education, research and entertainment. Those involved in it do not just become dramatic actors but prepare to become reflective social actors. APT consciously avoids creating more spectators to the transformation of the story and of the world; instead it aspires, in spirit and practice to see more people actively participate in the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The material presented is from an interview that the author had with one of the co-ordinators from the centre. For a detailed discussion on this, see from the unpublished material. Babu Ayindo, "Theater's Pedagogy for Peace: The Amani People's Experience" (Nairobi: *Amani People's Theater*, [n.d.]). Copies are obtainable from Amani People's Theater's Office, Nairobi.

⁵⁸ Babu Ayindo, pp. 14-15.

transformation of both the tale and the world. Hence, the animators reach down to the grassroots and empower them towards transformation through theatrical performances.

3.3.4. Salesian Youth Movement (GC 23. n.275):

In its practical guidelines the GC 23 considers the “group” as an important element. It concentrated its attention particularly on the young person, his tendency to associate with others, and the young group as an expression of Christian community. Groups which have as a point of reference Don Bosco’s spirituality and pedagogical principles “form explicitly or implicitly the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM).”⁵⁹ The Salesian Youth Movement (SYM), says the GC 23, “is based on free communication between groups” (n. 277) and “unites many young people: from those farthest away ... to those who consciously and explicitly make their own the salesian ethic” (n. 276). “Youth for the young” is the expression typical of the movement⁶⁰.

In a recent ‘SYM World Forum 2000’ in Italy, the young people had made the following commitment:

We, the young people of the Salesian Youth Movement, have come together at Colle Don Bosco from 76 nations. We speak different languages, have various traditions, histories and cultures but we are united in:

- one passion: life in all its expressions
- One rule: the Gospel of the Lord
- One dream: the happiness of all young people, especially the poorest among them
- One lifestyle: Salesian Youth Spirituality

We identified a strong commitment to be leaders and Gospel witnesses for the third millennium. Young people across the world have to face challenge of personal, social,

⁵⁹ Luc Van Looy, “The Salesian Youth movement,” *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco*, 72/336 (Roma: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, April-June 1991), pp. 45-53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

economic, political and religious differences. We are committed to help them to discover the presence of Christ in the struggles of the poor and in the experience of daily life.⁹¹

To ensure an active participation with this sense of unity towards social transformation, various smaller groups and movements have mushroomed in a particular socio-political and cultural milieu. Thus we have, "Youth Changing Lives for Christ" at Don Bosco Upper Hill, Nairobi, "*Mawimbi* (Waves)" youth group at Moshi, Tanzania, and various other youth educational centers. All these to empower the young in the socio-political field by helping them integrate faith and life. The young people at Don Bosco Upper Hill have the vision of changing their life, be it moral, spiritual, cultural and socio-political, modeled after Christ. As one of the animators addressing the young put it: "Young people at Upper Hill have chosen to be part of a group of young Christians who want to be closer to Jesus, and to bring their friends to Him. It is a group with full energy to set Nairobi on fire, strength even to tire out the strongest of demons."

The members of "*Mawimbi*," on the other hand, are determined to move other fellow youth, like the waves, towards change in themselves and in the society in which they live. They, like *Amani* People's Theater, make use of the group participatory method through folklore dance and dramas. What is striking in these groups is to see the active and dynamic participation of the young people and the challenges they set for themselves in working for social reconstruction.

3.4. YOUTH ACTION AND SOCIAL NATURE

Much can be said about 'youth action' groups working for the transformation of the society in Africa. Many religious groups seem to offer various forms of opportunities in regard to this. Looking at the response of some of the above mentioned groups, youth indeed are a

⁹¹ The citation is from the handout given out during the SYM World Forum 2000 held in Italy in August 2000. Cfr. "SYM World Forum 2000." *Deliberations of the Salesian World Youth Commitments* (Rome: August 2000). Photocopy.

great asset in the society today. But at a period (youth) where quest for social responsibility is at its peak. What more could we do to enhance this quest among the young? How could our youth activities raise the consciousness among the young who engage in the reconstruction agenda?

Speaking on the "silence of young people," Michael Warren proposes two important elements that are to be kept in mind when we speak of "Youth Action" towards reconstruction. First of all, what is important for young people today is to have actions and activities that uncover injustice in the society. For Warren certain actions cause no trouble because they leave the structures of injustice untouched or unexposed.⁵² When Martin Luther King Jr. protested racism in the United States, he was accused of being a troublemaker, though he was actually exposing injustice. Another aspect of action, according to Warren, that is very much needed is to carry out actions that are 'public'; that is to say activities that the youth carry out for their own well being and for the common good of the community. We shall deal about these aspects towards the end of our paper

The insights presented in this section do not exhaust the list of youth and youth groups which participate in the reconstruction project; but at the same time, what is presented helps us to see and appreciate that something constructive can be done to make the future better than the past. The young people at hand are indeed a big asset in this regard. Young Christian lives, as the light of the world and salt of the earth (Mt.5:13,14), have the potential to help Africa wake up with optimism and sing for joy. The Church and all those who actively involve themselves in the lives of the young are challenged to tirelessly engage all their creativity in leading the young to Christ through reconstruction in Africa. The social nature of young people lends itself towards such creative ministry⁵³.

⁵² Michael Warren, *Youth Gospel Liberation* (New York, Don Bosco Publications, 1994), pp. 18-31.

⁵³ Psychologists like Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson remind us that major steps in human growth take place by means of life-crises, which confront people with major decisions. These occur during this 'youth years' when a young person decides for 'social transformation.' (cf. Erick, Erikson, H., *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: W. W. Norton Publishers, 1968)

Section 4. RECONSTRUCTION: A SALESIAN PERSPECTIVE

Having the interest of the young at heart, already way back in 1971, the special 20th general chapter of the Salesian society called for a total renewal in the pastoral commitment of every Salesian. For the last thirty years or so, the congregation has spent a lot energy in renewal work, following the Second Vatican Council's bidding in the degree "*Perfectae Caritatis*": The "up-to-date renewal" with its components, the "return to the sources" and the "adaptation to the changed conditions of our times" (PC 2). The call to renewal was to interpret Don Bosco's charism for modern times. As the chapter itself put it:

The Holy Spirit who has raised up St. John Bosco as the father and teacher of youth and through him has caused to flourish in the Church new religious communities wishes even today to inspire the members of these families and to help them to realise better their mission in the Church. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit they must deepen their knowledge of their original spirit and be aware once more of the evangelical values which Don Bosco pursued as the ideal of his vocation, so that they may revitalize them in the modern world with all the necessary adaptations.⁶⁴

With the emerging youth quest for reconstruction, the renewal of our activity requires a careful study of our present work and responsibilities, and a fresh look to the future. This calls for a journey back into Don Bosco's place in history that has shaped his pedagogical action to the poor and abandoned boys.

It goes without saying that Don Bosco was one of the eminent youth ministers of the last century. His vision of hope for the young as good citizens of tomorrow and his paternal involvement in the young people's lives earned him the honour of being called "the father and teacher of youth," "the saint of youth."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ SGC, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Egidio Vigano, "From Peking Towards 88," *Acts of the General Council*, 68/323, p. 16.

To know and to understand Don Bosco and to interpret him in the light of a theology of reconstruction, it is important for us to single out the type of boys with which he involved himself and the historical milieu that shaped his pedagogical method - preventive system based on Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness. Hence, in this chapter we shall present a situational analysis of young people at risk at Don Bosco's time, the historical circumstances and the type of response that he had for such situations. Based on these, we shall read and rewrite anew the Salesian Pedagogical Method⁶⁶ according to the signs of the times, in line with a youth quest for reconstruction.

4.1 HISTORICAL EVENTS IN DON BOSCO'S RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Don Bosco lived from 16th August 1815 to 31st January 1888⁶⁷. In the last century his timely response to educate young people to faith was the end-result of various socio-political-economic situations of his time. Some of such events were: the date of his birth coincided with the final transition of Europe from the 'ancient regime' to our modern world, a transition hastened by the powerful upheavals of the French revolution and the empire of Napoleon (1789-1814). The rapid social and cultural changes, the Industrial Revolution, the irrepressible aspirations towards national unity which, although initially checked, were eventually realised with great determination in Germany and Italy; the colonial expansion of Europe, with its concomitant economic, political and cultural imperialism amidst all the historical events also played a vital role in Don Bosco's response.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Salesian pedagogy is entirely based on the preventive system with reason, religion and loving kindness as its foundations.

⁶⁷ Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience* (Rome: LAS, 1989), p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

As a result of such circumstances, where daily life became more complex, we can envision four major areas which affected the living conditions of the young and various other poor people of Italy at Don Bosco's period: the Socio-Economic scene, the Educational scene, The Religious scene and the Political scene.

4.1.1 The Socio-Economic Scene:

At this time of history, the economic and the social map of Italy was very much varied. Farming and artisan trade seemed to have been the work of most of the working population. The dawn of the Industrial Revolution did not have much of a positive effect on the population. Famine was the common experience all around. An early statement in a *Farmers Gazette* in 1848 portrays exactly the type of situation the society was in:

Going through the country, in areas removed from population centers, one is struck by the looks of farm labourers. Everyone in those areas, men, women and children, are skinny, yellow with scurvy, tired-looking, exhausted from hunger as well as overwork⁶⁹.

Employment opportunities in construction, machine operation and common labour contrasted more sharply with the realities of rural life, where there were repeatedly poor harvests⁷⁰.

4.1.2 The Religious Scene:

A general migration of the vast majority of the population into the city centers had as one of its side effects the general weakening of the faith. Besides, there was an equally clear transition from a period of firm alliance between 'throne' and 'altar' to a stage of increasing

⁶⁹ Umberto Levra, "Il Bisogno, il castigo, la pieta. Torino 1814-1848," in Bracco (Torino: eDBI), pp. 20-24, as translated and quoted by Arthur Lenti, "Don Bosco's Love Affair with 'Poor and Abandoned' Young People and the Beginnings of the Oratory" in *Journal of Salesian Studies*. VI/1 (Spring, 1995): 4.

⁷⁰ John Bosco (St.), *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of St. John Bosco*, trans. by Daniel Lyons (New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), p. 190.

separation between the two⁷¹. It is to be noted that the popes managed to play a great part in the rechristianisation of the society, aided by their renewed prestige following the hostile persecution of the French Revolution and of Napoleon⁷².

4.1.3 The Educational Scene

Illiteracy and poorly educated masses seemed the common phenomenon at this time of history. The advance of public education in Italy remained slow and difficult throughout the rest of the country, especially at the primary level.⁷³ In a data collected from a number of factories shows how 1 in 5 working young persons was attending, or had ever attended, school for any length of time. What is more interesting is the fact that about 40% of young people below 20 were totally illiterate.⁷⁴ But after the stagnation of the early decades of the 18th century, particularly after 1830, there was a new interest in culture and in providing schools for the masses.⁷⁵

4.1.4 The Political Scene

Two major political events had a large impact on Italy, the unification of Italy and the end of the temporal powers of the papacy. The prevalent mood from 1815-1848 was one of 'restoration.' Liberal ideas were propounded, while simultaneously movements and societies – often secret societies – were promoted in the name of democracy with much more radical

⁷¹ Braido, p. 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.19.

⁷⁴ Carlo Ilarione Petiti di Roreto, "Su lavoro dei fanciulli nelle manifatture" as cited by Lenti, p.10.

⁷⁵ Braido, p. 18.

political and social objectives. The *Carbonera*, the *Federati*, the Student League, the 'Young Italy' and the 'Young Europe' of *Giuseppe Mazzini* were some of such movements⁷⁶.

4.2 DON BOSCO'S YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK AND HIS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Poor and abandoned youth remained the heart of Don Bosco's pastoral initiatives. His passionate love for the young grew from his pastoral experience with the youth in the prisons, the by-products of the historical scenes of Don Bosco's time. No sooner enrolled at the *Convitto*.⁷⁷ Don Bosco began to visit the prisons, where for the first time, and with a shock, he came face to face with the pitiable state in which the many young people detained there found themselves. Recalling such experiences in 1874 he writes in his 'Memoirs of the Oratory':

I saw large numbers of young lads, 12 to 18 years of age, fine youngsters, healthy, strong and alert of mind. But how sad to see them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul. I was horrified [...] what shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prisons, within a few days of their release⁷⁸.

The deep impressions from such visits and a constant dialogue with Fr. Cafasso, his confessor, Don Bosco began to form a plan, a system of education that would empower the young towards reconstruction. To effect and to evolve such a system, Don Bosco chose to establish oratories. Don Bosco called his work the work of the "oratory," adopting the term used by Philip Neri (1515-1595). By oratory, Don Bosco meant to indicate a place and an apostolate wherein boys, adolescents, and young men could gather for the ultimate purpose of prayer, i.e. Sunday and feast day Mass, confession, communion, preaching and catechism. He used variety of means to make piety attractive to these youngsters, including games, outings, schooling, an

⁷⁶ Braido, p. 13.

⁷⁷ The term *convitto* means a residence hall where one learned to be a priest. Today this could be understood as the theological institutes.

⁷⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 182.

employment service and a hostel.⁷⁹ Don Bosco's oratory became a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends met and enjoyed themselves (C 40). The oratory was not something that was invented by Don Bosco; it was in existence for hundreds of years⁸⁰. But the ingenuity of Don Bosco consisted in being able to transform the common understanding of 'oratory' as a house of prayer into an educational ambient where an 'educational space' for growth was created through reason, religion and loving kindness. As the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales would say:

Don Bosco handed on to us his preventive system as a means for carrying out our educational and pastoral service.

This system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness. Instead of constraint, it appeals to the resources of intelligence, love and the desire for God, which everyone has in the depths of his being.

It brings together educators youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue (C 38).

Oratory remains as always, a point of reference of Don Bosco's work. Reconstruction of the young towards a responsible social and religious living became the objective of all his establishments. Oratory is therefore taken not as something identified with a specific structure or institution, but rather with a specific pastoral standpoint for assessing our present works or those to be taken up in the future⁸¹. What began with a simple catechism lesson in 1841 was to become the cornerstone of his educative system, the "Salesian Educative Method."

4.3 REASON, RELIGION AND LOVING KINDNESS - DON BOSCO'S PREVENTIVE METHOD

Don Bosco's interest in education amidst the existing socio-politico-economic scenes and

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁸⁰ Francesco Motto, "The Oratory of Don Bosco: The Origins," *ANSmag*, IV/48 (Rome: 15 January 2000): 4.

⁸¹ Egidio Viganò, "Reading the Founder's Charism again at the Present Day," *Acts of the General Council*, 76/352, p. 24.

various other challenging youth realities of his time had to go beyond classroom education. Despite the fact that there were already other 'oratories' in existence⁸², Don Bosco's vision of an educational process on behalf of his 'youth in danger' in his activities was more comprehensive, more humane, and more enlightened than that of his contemporaries. It embraced the whole human person: Or as he repeatedly wrote, the end product of his preventive system was to create a "good Christian and a responsible citizen."⁸³ He envisioned the need to reconstruct the young person as a whole. His was to give identity to the young who had lost their identity due to the existing historical circumstances. His was to help the young become responsible towards oneself and towards one's own society. As the "Declaration on Christian Education" of Vatican II would define:

True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share.

Due weight being given to the advances in psychological, pedagogical and intellectual sciences, children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical moral and intellectual qualities. They should be trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty, overcoming obstacles with unwavering courage and perseverance.⁸⁴

In 1877 Don Bosco wrote a letter in which he explains that the practice of this system was completely based on St. Paul's words who says: "Love is patient and kind. ... Love bears all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4 -7)."⁸⁵ This seemed very much the echo of the words of his dream at the age of nine in which the personage, interpreted as Mary herself, seemed to have

⁸² In Turin Fr. John Cocchi was considered as the father of the Oratory. Cfr. Motto, "The Oratory," p.4

⁸³ Michael Ribotta, "Tough Love is not the answer - DB's View on Punishment," *Journal of Salesian Studies*, VV1 (Spring, 1995), p. 82.

⁸⁴ Vatican II, "Declaration on Christian Education - *Gravissimum educationis*," 28 October 1965, in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Mombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), p. 643.

⁸⁵ For a complete text cfr. "Writings of Don Bosco," *The Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* (Rome, 1984), pp. 246-253.

given the methodology of work: "not with blows, but with meekness and charity will you have to gain these friends of yours."⁸⁶

With the complexity of the existing social realities, rethinking the Salesian educational system and rewriting it in a way fitting to such realities is indeed a challenge that lies ahead of every Salesian. In a world of youth brimming over with humanity and generosity, the Salesian method needs to move from being a mere 'preventive system' to a 'reconstruction project.' Salesian presence in Africa is no exception to this. In order to be able to think in terms of 'reconstruction project,' we need to take into consideration the existing situation of our presences.

4.4 SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY TODAY

After having exposed a bit the historical and social circumstances that led Don Bosco to found a religious order to be educators and evangelizers of the young, we shall now delve into the Salesian reality today in Eastern Africa.

⁸⁶ Memoirs, p. 18.

Situation Analysis of the young among the Salesian houses in Eastern Africa⁸⁷

Situation of the Young	Salesian Response
<p>Socio-Economic Scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty (15) - Famine (5) - Unemployment (8) - Slum dwellers (6) - Gap between the rich and the poor (3) - Materialism & hedonistic mentality (11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holistic Education of the young (21) - Self-reliant programmes in our centers of work (10)
<p>Educational Scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High education fees (6) - Cultural mix-ups - Western fashions (3) - Students are too much stressed by the school syllabus (4) - Lack of enough secondary schools (5) - Lack of facilities in the schools (3) - High rate of school drop outs (8) - Lack of role models (7) - More information oriented education than educating the young (6) - Young Girls poorly educated (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More vocational Training Centers to be introduced (7) - Value based education to be stressed (13) - Education to critical consciousness (6) - Involvement of our past pupils in our centers of education (3)
<p>Religious Scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people are confused about the different sects in the society (15) - Young people seem lost at the growth of secularism (7) - Young people are very enthusiastic in their religious life (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Catechism and evangelization to be stressed (12) - Individual faith to be stressed (8) - Interreligious dialogue to be encouraged (4) - Walk together with the young (6)
<p>Political scene:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people seem ignorant of political systems (11) - Some are very much attracted to political ideologies (3) - Young people fall victim to political mess ups (5) - Lack of good leadership and role models (11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education to be stressed (30) - Challenge to be responsible citizens (12) - Education to peace and justice issues (6) - Educate to know ones own rights (4) - Women participation in political life (1)

⁸⁷ The Table presents the responses of various Salesians obtained through a questionnaire. The objective was to find out about the situation of the young in our centers and the way we respond to them. The questions were distributed by hand, post and through e-mails. The responses were summed up under various headings. Hence, the headings do may not portray the exact words of the respondents. But they fall under a given subject. The numbers within parentheses indicate the number of respondents who envisioned the situation of the young under the corresponding theme. The total numbers within the brackets do not tally with the total responses received. This is because, each of the respondent had the freedom to express as many number of points as he/she wanted.

Despite the historical time difference between Don Bosco and us, the situation of the young people at risk seems pretty much the same. The sad faces of the young might have changed. The language of the youth could sound very much modern and secular, but the fact is the majority of our young people continue to live below the poverty line. Poor educational facilities and the high cost of higher education lead to a high incidence of illiteracy. Statistics show that the number of youth that drop out of schools and colleges has been on the increase in recent times. The high percentage of children in need (Street Children) and the AIDS orphans has become a challenging reality to be faced.

The young, who are poor, abandoned and in danger, have always had a prominent and a special place in the heart and life of the Salesians, from Don Bosco to the present day. After Don Bosco, the Salesians, being a group of people committed to the cause of the youth, have spread everywhere and have established educational institutions such as technical and agricultural schools and youth centers following the educative principles of the preventive system.⁸⁸ The Salesian Province of Eastern Africa is no exception in this venture, for it too empowers the young, especially the marginalised (the materially poor, street children, displaced young people, those orphaned by AIDS and victims of addiction). Thus, in the charismatic style of Don Bosco⁸⁹ various institutes and Salesian presences have mushroomed.⁹⁰ While the new and innovative programmes and services in these centers are commendable, yet we need to critically see whether they are relevant to the times and the changes that the young people experience in Eastern Africa. Do we involve the young in a process of education that frees their creative potential, enabling them to risk involving themselves in the world and the society with a

⁸⁸ Cfr. Antonio Domenech, "Opening of the Work," in *Street Children: International Meeting held from 7-11 December, 1998* (Rome: Don Bosco Publications, 1999), p. 14.

⁸⁹ Cfr. "Vision Statement" , in *PCI: Foundational Documents*, Nairobi, 22 April 1998, (*pro Manuscripto*), p. 10. PCI refers to the First Provincial Chapter of the Province of Eastern Africa.

⁹⁰ After 20 years of service to the young, the Province of Eastern Africa has at present 10 parishes, 10 technical schools, 5 formal high schools, 4 youth centers (full time), 3 "Children in need" rehabilitation centers, 2 formation houses and 2 aspirantates. For further details, cfr. *The Directory of the Province of Eastern Africa (pro Manuscripto)*, 1999-2000.

critical sense of judgement and belonging? Or do we concentrate ourselves in setting up structures which are success - oriented and activity - centered? As Salesians, it is not enough to be open to the signs of the times. We need to read and rewrite anew these signs according to the present circumstances and place.

4.5 RETHINKING THE SALESIAN METHOD TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTION

With the situations constantly changing all around us, the priorities of our educational system need also to change according to the emerging new contexts. With the new economic, social and cultural factors that bring about a new configuration of societies, new educational programs need to be set into motion towards reconstruction in Eastern Africa.

4.5.1 'Creative fidelity' in our Education today

Speaking of the challenges for the Salesian family in the new millennium, Fr. Hubert Pinto, the vice provincial of Eastern Africa, says that if we are negligent we could be left behind by the significant changes taking place around us. In his opinion Salesian apostolates in Eastern Africa should undergo a great change in adapting to the changing realities⁹¹. Amidst such challenging situations our response has to be one of creative fidelity. That is to say, while we go back to Don Bosco in fidelity to his original spirit, we should not repeat in a servile way what he did, but move forward with creativity and constancy in the youth ministry today. As the Special General Chapter put it:

... the Don Bosco of the oratory, faithful and dynamic, docile and creative, firm but at the same time flexible, stands out as a model of behaviour for all (his followers). They are invited to act as he did, rather than repeat in the servile way what he did; ... they are called upon to understand the spirit which inspired his work; as he himself so

⁹¹ Hubert Pinto, "Challenges Facing Salesian Family in 2000," *Salesian Family Bulletin* II/1 (Jan-Feb 2000): 5.

simply declared: "I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me, and as circumstances demanded" (SGC, 153).

With creative fidelity as our challenging response, the newness in our educative method should aim at:

Creating a Sacred Space: Education through reason, religion and loving kindness should lead the young towards 'responsible living-together.' This refers to the way we relate with and to one another, respecting and promoting each one's dignity and self-esteem. This requires an 'ethic of intention'⁹² which recognises that we are responsible for the effects of our actions. In this 'responsible living-together' creating a sacred space would mean helping the young person appreciate ones own identity and be able to respect and revere the dignity and the identity of other individuals in the society. Our educational centers should go beyond being mere intellectual treasuries. The key of our education should be to enable the young to eventually emerge from the tightly circumscribed world of the *domus*, from the world defined by the walls of the home, into the neighbourhood, and then into the town or city, and into an ever-widening sphere that comes to one's attention bit by bit⁹³. They should become centers of moral, spiritual and intellectual reconstruction to build the society that is being torn apart by individualism, a capitalistic mentality and poor leadership role model.

Developing a Critical Consciousness – through awareness and engagement: Creating a sacred space in the individual should lead to an active involvement in the lives of the other individuals and the physical universe. This is to be enhanced by a web of responsible

⁹² The term is taken from Peter Kanyandago, "Violence in Africa: A Search for Causes and Remedies," in Mary Getui and Peter Kanyandago (eds.), *From Violence to Peace* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 1999), p. 34. Kanyandago quotes from Roll May who talks of 'ethic of intention' in his book *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Source of Violence* (New York: Norton and Co., Inc., 1972).

⁹³ Warren, p. 35

relationships created in and around the individual. This requires an awareness, on the part of the individual, of how the world works. That is to say, our education should encourage the young to live fully and consciously in the society and not merely to exist or get themselves submerged into the social reality. Paulo Freire would describe such an existence as 'semi-intransitive consciousness.' A person in such a state of consciousness cannot comprehend the problems situated outside their sphere of biological realities. Their sphere of perception would be limited and they would be impermeable to challenges situated outside the sphere of biological necessity⁹⁴. Education to create a critical consciousness would mean a formative process which constantly moves towards reconstruction of a social reality and sees every aspect of it as open to critical examination of its fitness or validity. In such a process, no aspect of reality is closed to questioning, and every aspect is open to the possibility of reconstruction.

Enabling Participation in the human struggle in the arena of public affairs: The growth of new religious sects and religious movements is a common phenomenon we witness in the African continent today. While religion is available at a throw-away price in the market place, the challenge to incarnate the individual's religious beliefs into their daily life struggle still remains an 'utopian' dream. As educators, one of the challenges that is right ahead of us is to enable the young to participate in the human struggle in the arena of public affairs. Young people should feel responsible for the way society functions and be active and effective participants with God in the struggle to humanize life.

Helping the young become Gospel artists: The feeling of 'newness' had gripped every person as we marched towards the year 2000 and beyond. There was a feeling that the old ways were no longer working properly and that we needed new technologies, methods, paradigms. Living

⁹⁴ Cfr. Paulo Friere, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (NY: Seabury, 1973), p. 17.

in a 'techno-driven' society, our education today should prepare the young to become Gospel artists. Artists who create new and imaginative ways of incarnating and participating as 'good Christians and honest citizens' of the world. That is to say, education through reason, religion and loving kindness should lead the young to have within themselves an integration of faith, personal integrity, genuine empathy and as integrated persons, the capacity to participate and effect the social reconstruction. Thus the young would not only be able to be open to the signs of the times, but also they would be able to rewrite them anew according to the gospel values and in the context of their daily living.

4.6 YOUTH MINISTRY IN OUR RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

To impart such type of an education, we need to have a breakthrough in our Salesian Youth Ministry. As Salesians, we need to become youth ministers rather than youth workers. As youth workers, we busy ourselves with activities: tournaments, picnics, seminars and even occasional prayer services. Besides, as workers we speak in terms of time and money, and therefore, we make ourselves available to the young only at particular hours and periods. Whereas as youth ministers, we accompany the young in a process of growth modeled on the image of the Risen Lord on the Way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). In this episode, one sees clearly various phases that are required in our youth ministry: Speaking on the paradigm shifts in a postmodern youth ministry, Fr. Sagaya Gnana selvam sdb⁹⁵ shows various breakthroughs needed in our youth ministry today. In his opinion, we need to move

- From 'mission' oriented YM to 'missionary' oriented YM: In a 'mission' oriented youth ministry, the young person remains at the receiving end. He/she

⁹⁵ Fr. Sagaya Gnana Selvam is a professor of philosophy in the Salesian Philosophical institute at Moshi, Tanzania.

has nothing to offer. Where as in a 'missionary' oriented youth ministry, the youth minister is a catalyst who effects change and empowers the young towards liberation and responsibility in the society, to their peers in particular.

- **From Fossilized YM to Pluralism in YM:** In Selvam's opinion, with various changes in the situations and the needs of the young in this postmodern era, mere multiplication of the stereotypic Salesian presences would not suffice the reconstruction project. We need to be creative and pluralistic in our approach.
- **From Intellectual teaching to Cultural education:** Selvam challenges the educational institutes which could be merely information based, examination oriented. He says that we need to adapt a Liberative System of education which is dialogue based, conscientising and discipline promoted as a means of self-liberation. He goes on to speak of how culture plays a vital role in this liberative education. Culture here refers to the sum of the social, economic, political aspects of a group of people in a particular time. It is especially, in the African context, he says, that we need to make cultural interventions in our institutions besides the trade skills that we may offer. In that way, in his opinion, we would not continue to educate an elitistic bunch who become exploiters but a liberated lot who value all that is deeply human.
- **From problem solving ministry to Heuristic accompanying:** The Youth minister, together with the young people, constantly searches for a meaningful way of responding to the variety of situations in the society.

- From dualistic piety to Holistic Spirituality: Here Selvam speaks of a salesian youth spirituality that stems from the daily experiences of the young. From being aware of the continuous presence of God in our lives and the lives of the young, and in the history of the world.

4.7 SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATING THE SALESIAN WAY

The challenge to educate our young people to responsible living-together calls for commitment and concern on the part of the educator. Young person becomes the subject and the agent of our educational system. The prime aim of our education should be that of reconstruction of the African soil in which youth become the agents of reconstruction. Going beyond mere intellectual knowledge, young people should be able to comprehend the social factors that deconstruct the society and be able work towards effecting change in the society. In order that the young people might pursue and commit themselves to the reconstruction project we suggest the following factors to be taken care of in our centers of education:

4.7.1 Educating the Young towards the Appreciation of the African Identity:

A "Salesian Educational Project" should have Africa's cultural⁹⁶ identity as its starting point. "A sense of identity," in Magesa's words, "that is necessary for the proper exercise of one's responsibility and right."⁹⁷ Young people in our centers must be able to know, love and

⁹⁶ The term here refers to people's way of life which is communal in nature - based on human solidarity, interpersonal relations, the need for others in order to be himself or herself - "I am because we are."

⁹⁷ Laurenti Magesa, "Theology of Democracy," in Magesa and Nthamburi, *Democracy and Reconciliation*, pp. 126-127.

appreciate their own cultural values and life-styles. That is to say, in enhancing the holistic education that entails the total formation of the young – physical, emotional, social and religious – a Salesian pedagogy should help the young understand ones traditions, customs, conventions, folklore, arts, literature, songs and dances of the African community. This calls for a challenge to incarnate Don Bosco into the African soil. As a young missionary province, the Salesians of Eastern Africa have a great responsibility in making themselves at home in the cultures of the local peoples and to understand them well, so as to incarnate and gratefully accept and respect whatever is consistent with the Gospel values.⁹⁸ In order to be effective in this incarnational life style, the type of structures we put up, the style of life we live – the way we talk, dance, behave, dress, eat – should enable the young to be proud of being who they are: “A community of interdependent individuals.” The focus of attention in our apostolic activities is to go beyond the establishments of ‘structures’ to forming ‘youth-communities.’⁹⁹

4.7.2 Salesian Youth Peace Networks

The rampant socio-politico-economic and religious violence prevalent in the African continent challenges the youth ministers to form the young to be agents of peace and reconciliation. Reconciliation understood not as mere God-man relationship but the one that includes human, personal and social dimensions within a network of relationships in which a God-man dimension of reconciliation is experienced.¹⁰⁰ While youth have become the most affected population by the existing conflicts in Africa, our apostolic centers should be able to channel their dynamic energies and their quest to transform the society. The basic belief of a

⁹⁸ PC1: foundational documents, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Cfr. *Resource Material and Guidelines for an Educational and Pastoral Plan in Salesian Oratories and Youth Centers*, Youth Pastoral Document No. 5 (Rome: Department of Youth Pastoral Work, 1980), p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. Shole, Toh. *Youth Peace Training Manual*, p. 52.

youth minister in this should be that "without youth there won't be any peace."¹⁰¹ For, as Desmond Tutu would say, "In times of crisis, God uses young people."¹⁰²

Training young people to be agents of peace and reconciliation could be achieved through various workshops, awareness training programmes, youth meets, youth forums which are to be included along with the normal curriculum in our centers of education. Formation of youth drama groups on issues of peace and reconciliation and composition of various songs and audio-visual programmes could be used to raise awareness in such issues. Another important aspect to be kept in mind is to help the young people to get involved in various other youth groups that are already working towards the same mission. A sort of "Youth reconciling Youth" programme in line with the 'peer ministry' spoken so much about in the Synod for Africa. This could be achieved through formation of 'Youth Peace Networks' within the Salesian institutes and with those outside the Salesian circle. Above all, we need to educate the young into a 'culture of peaceful coexistence' that nurtures individual's inner peace and society's reconstruction project.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

GENERAL CONCLUSION

To a pessimist the African continent faces a “future shock” with a possible extinction of its people. The biased reporting of the Africa by the world media would tend to confirm this.¹⁰² An optimist, on the other hand, would go to the other extreme of imagining Africa as a continent “full of hope” with innumerable natural resources and human potentialities. While “optimism and joy” (C 17) should be the hallmark of our outlook towards an Africa in the future, yet the emergence of a Theology of Reconstruction as a paradigm for the transformation of the society challenges us to work towards the African Renaissance from a realist’s perspective. Both the so called Africa that was destroyed by the “historical past” and the socio-economic, political and religious scenario that are being destroyed in today’s Africa, need to be reconstructed today. Reconstruction of Africa will be possible only through “acceptance” and “forgiveness” of the past and the present, both by the indigenous themselves (African leaders and common citizens) and by those outside (the West - the colonial powers in particular) Africa. The formation of Israel into a ‘nation’ in the Mosaic and post-exilic period and the transformation into a ‘new Israel’ in the Messianic era serve as a model for a reconstruction project in Africa.

While reconstruction is a project that is to be realized by every individual in society, we have focused our attention on the role that young people could play in rebuilding the African landscape. The very natural disposition of the young, who long for social justice and peace, awakens every youth minister to lead the youth with sure competence and wise foresight to be true citizens of the world founded on a deep faith in Jesus Christ. As Salesians, the challenge is even greater.

¹⁰² Cfr. Baffoun Ankomah, “Reporting Africa,” in *New Africa*, 387 (July/August 2000):16-23.

It is significant to note that more than hundred years ago Don Bosco used to attribute great importance to the human aspects and historical conditions of the individual: to his freedom, his preparation for life and for a profession, the assuming of civil responsibilities in an atmosphere of joy and generous commitment to his neighbour.¹⁰³ As modern educators, every Salesian should be able to read the signs of the times and rewrite anew in the emerging values which are attractive to the youth: peace, freedom, justice, communion and sharing, advancement of women, solidarity, development and urgent ecological demands.¹⁰⁴ In order to be able to form the young to be agents of reconstruction, the era of the youth is to be viewed not only just as a 'time of transition' but as a real "time of grace" that is waiting to put into use all its youthful dynamism towards the good of the society.

Youth are indeed the pulse of the society. As presented in section three of our essay, youth possess the zeal and the courage to work towards reconstruction of what has been destroyed and still being destroyed in the society. The emerging Theology of Reconstruction, as discussed in section one, becomes the launching pad to activate the mind of the young towards this reconstruction project. As Salesians, following the charismatic style of Don Bosco, we are challenged to engage along with the young to work towards reconstruction. After having discussed much about Salesian Pedagogical Project, I would like to propose the following shifts that I think we need to make to be able to involve our young people in the reconstruction project.

¹⁰³ "A Master in Education." Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Reverend Egidio Viganò, Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales for the Centenary of the death of St. John Bosco," (Rome, 31 January 1998), p 9. For a complete text of the letter cfr. *Acts of the General Council*, 69/325 (Rome: March-April, 1998), pp. 11-37.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

(i) From “Structures” to “Youth-Communities”

Following the Directives of the department of Youth Pastoral Documents, No. 5,¹⁰⁵ I think we need to make a shift from forming “structures” to forming “Youth Communities.” That is to say our centers of education should not be looked at as just mighty structures where a few individuals try to come together and manage to live in a community. Instead, a young person who walks into our center feels welcomed because he/she is part of a community where people share joys and sorrows as friends, where one experiences an environment the content of which satisfies one’s quest for social transformation. An ambient where the young person feels responsible for the community and lives critically his/her call to be an honest citizen of the world.

(ii) From Being Called “Salesian Pedagogical System” to Being Termed “Salesian Educational Project.”

I propose to change the term “system” to “project” because of the fact that in a system life is governed by rules, regulations and time-tables. In a system various programmes and activities would be the focus of our youth ministry and not the holistic formation of the young. Referring to what was discussed previously on creative fidelity, in order to be able to create a sacred space, cultivate a critical mind, and help the young become a Gospel artist, we need to view our ministry as a project rather than as just a system of education. A project where the ‘individual parts’ have an important place to play in constituting the ‘whole.’

(iii) From Being a “Youth Worker” to Being a “Youth Minister.”

One might wonder what is the difference between a youth worker and a youth minister. Not

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. *Resource Material and Guidelines for an Educational and Pastoral Plan in Salesian Oratories and Youth Centers*, Youth Pastoral Document No. 5.

wanting to repeat what has already been said in 4.6. the goal and the aim of ministry to our young people should be that of leading them to Christ. It is in this accompaniment of the young by the youth minister that the young person feels challenged to imitate “Jesus in the Messianic era.” In this regard, the resurrected Christ accompanying the disciples to Emmaus serves as a model for our youth ministry. The Risen Lord on the Way, accompanies those two “young” men whose hopes had been shattered (Lk 24:15-24). In this episode we see a process that takes place towards a heuristic accompaniment. He builds a deep relationship with them, he challenges them (Lk 24:25-26), breaks to them the Word of God (Lk 24:25-27), and without imposing Himself shares the Table-Fellowship with them and finally enables them to experience Himself as the Christ (Lk 24:28-32). What then follows is a “Peer-Ministry.” The young men go back that very night to share their faith-experience (Lk 24:33-35).

(iv) Formation “Salesian Peace Networks”

The situation of war and violence in most parts of Africa challenge the Salesians to offer various methods and ways to live in “peaceful co-existence.”

Engaging youth in a reconstruction project consists more in doing action than mere theoretical argumentations. The reflections presented in this essay are only the beginning of a long journey that needs to be taken and theologically to be well founded. Young people in our centers need to see and experience individuals involved in reconstruction projects in the society. Every Salesian, in this regard, is challenged to become a ‘role model’ to the youth in our centers of education: a kind of “Be rather than Appear to be” experience that challenges the young to become craftsmen/women of a new humanity.

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APPENDIX 1: A SITUATION ANALYSIS¹⁰⁶

SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO AND THE YOUTH

Name (Optional): (Please tick): **SDB/FMA** **Age:**
Years:

Country of Origin: **Year of Profession:**

Office of service in the community: (tick where necessary)

Provincial/Mother Provincial Rector / Mother Superior V.Rector/
Novice master/Novice Mistress Dean of students Liturgical Animator
Any other (kindly indicate):

Please Note:

⇒ When we speak of “young people”, we refer to preadolescents, adolescents and young adults, varying in ages between the early teens and 25 years. However, “youth”, is not merely an age group; it is a transitional stage in life having its own specific characteristics.

+ Go through the following steps one by one. Keep your answers short and in perspective

- i. What comes to your mind (e.g. words, pictures, phrases, ideas, symbols) when you hear the term “Youth”?
- ii. What do the youth in our centres want or hope for most?

¹⁰⁶ Appendix 1 was the model used as a questionnaire for the situation analysis of the young in our centers of education

As followers of Don Bosco, we are called to respond to the needs and challenges of the situation of the young in our centers of education. To be able to do so, kindly reflect on the following questions and enter your answers in the columns given below:

1. What are the principal needs and challenges of the situation in which you work with your young people?
2. What could you do to respond better to these needs and challenges?

Our Situation: Its needs and challenges	Salesian Response
A. The Socio-economic scene	
B. The educational scene	
C. The religious scene	
A. Political scene	

APPENDIX 2: EDUCATION STATISTICS¹⁰⁷

A: Trends in Educational Enrolment, 1963 – 1995 (in 000's)

EDUCATION	ENROLLED 1963	ENROLLED 1995	MALE/FEMALE RATIO	1963-95 ANNUAL GROWTH (%)
Primary	892	5.545	1.02	5.7
Secondary	30	632	1.18	9.5
University	0.571	44.91	2.79	13.6
Teacher Training	4	16.878	1.05	4.5
Technical Training	1	8.148	-	6.6
Polytechnics	-	7.927	3.219	-

B: Projected Demand for Education, 1997 – 2001 (In Millions)

EDUCATIONAL	AGE YEARS	1997	1999	2000	2001	% INCREASE BETWEEN 1997 AND 1999
Primary	6-13	6.03	6.25	6.36	6.46	7.1
Secondary	14-17	2.72	2.82	2.85	2.89	5.9
Tertiary	18-22	2.95	3.16	3.25	3.34	13.2
Total	6-22	11.71	12.24	12.47	12.68	8.3

¹⁰⁷ SOURCE: National Development Plan, 1997 - 2001