*ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE SALESIAN ORATORY*

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Music is one of the invincible elements of a Salesian house. It brings joy and enthusiasm among the young people. It generates peace and harmony in the minds of people which will in turn enable them to establish peace and harmony in the society. It also creates a positive impact of happiness in a person who listens as well as one who plays it. Good evening respected fathers and my dear brothers. My heart is bubbling with joy as I stand before you to share my short reflections and findings on the role of music in the Salesian oratory.

In many of Don Bosco’s dreams, he speaks of heavenly voices of melodious choirs and of heavenly harmony. Like every good Italian he loved singing. Moreover, he himself possessed a fine tenor voice. As a young student at Castelnuovo, he learned to play violin, piano and organ which enabled him to compose hymns for the first boys of the oratory. In 1845, with the help of two priests, Fr. Michael Chiatellino and Fr. Nazi, who were musicians and organists, he began to teach vocal music and plain chant. Later the instrumental music joined the singing at the oratory. When the boys of the oratory used to play in the Fillippi meadow, the roll of drum and the blast of a trumpet were a good way to get attention from the boys when he wanted to speak to them. For Don Bosco, music was a means for attracting boys and it was part of the recreation.

In the oratory he taught piano and organ, though he had never been a student of them himself. He gave importance to both instrumental as well as vocal music. The function of instrumental and vocal music in the Preventive System is related to Don Bosco’s concept of education through joy. He gave ample opportunities for the boys in music, whether it be school, oratory or professional schools. He particularly gave a special importance to musical band as well. Music contributed the atmosphere of festivity in both religious and secular solemnities. It was part and parcel of religious rites, processions, outing and picnics etc. Don Bosco’s idea of music can be summarized into a simple quote: “A house without music is like a body without soul.” He realized that without singing and playing music a gathering can become a body without soul.

Music was considered as preventive means. It infused joy and enthusiasm in the young people. There are three motives with which Don Bosco started music in the oratory. First of all, it was employed to prevent from the dangers to which they were exposed and to lead them to religiosity and morality. The second motive was to help the parish priest to the singing in the churches when they returned to their own native places. The third motive was to fight idleness among the young people.

In 1855, Don Bosco organized a band among the artisans. He demanded good conduct from them and did not hesitate to suspend it temporarily in 1859 because of disobedience. In 1876, the band was invited to take part in the inauguration of the railway at Lanzo. The famous photograph taken in 1870, gives us the clear picture of the oratory band.

Don Bosco used to take his young singers to various parishes in the city. The young singers, by their attractive singing of Gregorian chant and church music brought the faithful back to the church. In order to stress the importance of music in the oratory, he also celebrated the feast of St. Cecilia, the patroness of music. For Don Bosco, singing was an external manifestation of internal faith and love of God. The singers were told to guard against pride which could cause displeasure among their companions. He also warned the boys never to open their mouth to show off the pomp of their voice but to think of praising god with devoted songs.

In don Bosco’s vision, music is prayer. The beloved of God is the one who praises him through songs. Music touches the heart of man and if rightly used is the most suited to express the religious dimension of man because it can help in the integration between proclamation of the word of God, the celebration and life. Music and singing are an essential part in the process of education. Besides its joyful dimension, Don Bosco put to use fully the religious and pedagogical dimension of music in the oratory.

Don Bosco was convinced of the fact that music was an effective tool and powerful tool of education. In his time, he could find only few musical compositions. Hence, he asked Fr. Cagliero to prepare a number of compositions both profane and sacred.

Bishop Bertolini in a good night talk to the artisans expressed his admiration for what he saw at the oratory. He said, “Go to Turin and Don Bosco’s oratory will show you that sacred rites are stupendous, that singing carries you to heaven, that eight hundred boys practice their faith and piety in a truly edifying manner.” Don Bosco encouraged the boys to organize their own band so that Turin has a band made up of good Catholics and they performed it in various occasions both in religious ceremonies and in the public. Music helped to discipline the boys. At the oratory there were singing classes, Gregorian chant, learning instrumental music etc. Besides singing he also gave piano and organ instructions and instrumental music to the delight of many boys.

When we analyze all these incidents and factors that took place in the life of Don Bosco, enables us to realize that his ultimate goal was to seek good and to please God in whatever way possible. The famous quote: “sanctity consists in being cheerful,” sounds apt when we study the role of music in the oratory because this is what Don Bosco wanted his boys to acquire in their life- the spirit of being connected to God in all their activities, even it be games or recreation.

So, as sons of Don Bosco, it is our responsibility to promote the educative value of music in the lives of the young people. It brings lot of joy and enthusiasm among them. It relaxes one from all his worries and anxieties. It also infuses peace in the inner dwellings of the heart. By instigating this, we teach that even a single note of harmony can bring happiness in the lives of the young people.

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