Course Description

As a prelude for understanding the pastoral contribution of St John Bosco (1815-1888) and the various branches of the Salesian Family, students unpack the Christian concept of charism especially with reference to vocation and mission. The course begins with a survey of biblical concepts and follows the development of the theology of charism. The emphasis then shifts to consecrated life. Methods for identifying and rediscovering (re-founding) the charism of the founder will be explored. [3.0 units].

Format and Tools for Assessment

The course will develop through class-time lectures and group discussions based on assigned readings.

In addition to attending lectures and actively participating in class discussions, your progress in this course will be assessed on the basis of one reflection paper (5 pages), a short research paper (10 pages) and a class presentation (20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for feedback from the rest of the class members). Topics and due dates for class assignments and presentations are decided on the second day of class.

Text


Scheduling

SP2130 is slated to meet on Tuesdays and Fridays during the first two morning periods (8:10-11:00) during the first half of the semester. There are no class meetings during the second half of the Fall Term. A commitment in Rome necessitates my absence during the second half of the Fall Term, and therefore instruction times have been adjusted to fulfill the required hours. During the first class meeting, we will firm up the instruction calendar and due dates for assignments.

My office hours are set for Tuesdays, 11:15-12:15.

Joseph Boenzi SDB
Course Outline

Introduction: Why speak of Salesian Identity?

To launch our discussion of charismatic theology, we raise issues connected with identity formation. You will learn to identify criteria for describing identity, and to zero in on charismatic or spiritual components in the experience of Christian people.

Unit 1: Biblical Foundation for a Theology of “Charism”

In the second half of the 20th Century, Catholic theologians recovered a Theology of Charism. This was at the insistence of Vatican II, especially with regard to the renewal of Religious Life in the Church. Religious were invited to speak a new, biblical and theological language. This served as the key in their return to the source, that is, the Gospel, and to the spirit of the founder.

In St Paul’s letters, charism is a key term used to describe the fundamental Christian experience of the Holy Spirit’s Presence. Through a rich diversity of gifts, the Spirit builds on human capacities to make individuals and communities aware of God’s call (vocation), prompting total dedication (consecration) and an outreach to others, beginning with the building up of the community, but leading to bringing Good News to many others (mission). Charisms are a universal phenomenon.

In the course of this unit you will compare the Pauline and Vatican II descriptions of Charisms, and to reflect on them as “spirit” and “fruit” of the Spirit in the way they impact different forms of life, for the building of the ecclesial community. You will also explore theological principles for an ordering of charisms.

Unit 2: Founding Charism

In order to better understand charismatic and spiritual experience in Salesian history, it is important to clarify our terminology. You will look at founding charism and the issue of developing charism.

There are several possible approaches to interpret what is called the founding charism of an institute and the development of that charism. In this unit you will discuss and trace the historical approach, the experiential approach and the hermeneutical approach for an interpretation of the Salesian experience.

You will learn to objective criteria that will enable you to identify the Salesian charism and spirit. Your task will be to explore the complimentary roles of charism and spirit as experienced by individuals and their communities or groups. As a learning outcome, you will gain skills in clarifying issues of leadership, and in identifying appropriate individual and collegial styles.

Unit 3: The Founder and Founding Charism

In the third unit you will study the concept of Founder as it is used in Church documents, both in juridical and historical-theological literature. You will explore the theological, charismatic sense of founder. As a learning outcome, you will clarify the meaning of spiritual experience in church documents. You will be able to identify essential elements of the founding experience in communities and movements that endure.
You will learn the theological notions behind the concept of *founding couples* and examine the experience of founding as an expression of Church.

Unit 4: Don Bosco: Founder of an Apostolic Family

Don Bosco’s charismatic and spiritual experience was first documented in the beatification process. It was immediately apparent that this was a complex experience. He not only founded a religious community of men, whose life and mission he guided and shared. He also founded communities of which he was not personally a member.

In this unit you will identify concrete experiences that marked Don Bosco as a Founder. You will examine the impact of the founding experience on questions of identity, significance and enduring value over the course of time and in changing cultural environments.

Unit 5: Developing a Charismatic and Spiritual Salesian Experience

*Charismatic elements* that cannot be transmitted remain *living aspects* of the “original experience.” You will examine the theological notions behind affirmations that a specific charism and spirit continues through the work of the Holy Spirit. You will learn how the Church speaks about the impact of charisms on personal and community experience. You will learn about forming, shaping, and developing creative responses to charisms.

In this unit you will also discuss the Salesian “constellation,” and identify ways in which the Salesian charism and spirit can foster Christian discipleship. You will identify and discuss issues of inculturation and acculturation, as well as life-long formation.

Unit 6: Salesian Charism: Dimensions

Whatever the common and differentiated experiences, it is not possible to speak of continuing and developing a religious charism without vocational links with the Founder. You will examine the ways in which Salesian life can represent a particular evangelical perception and vocation. You will be able to discuss Apostolic Consecration and Lay Mission as complementary.

In this unit you will look at the form of mission that the Salesian charism launches, both in terms of evangelical service and spiritual methodology. You will unpack the implications of the family-like and apostolic styles of communities that invite collaboration and animation. You will learn viable components of the Mission that transcend different forms of communities and lifestyles as embraced by the Salesian charism and spirit.

To conclude this unit, you will discuss how the Salesian charism has been and can be lived in community and as a personal, individual response.

Unit 7: Salesian Spirit

In this final unit, you will examine the relationship between the Salesian charism and what the earliest generations of Don Bosco’s followers called the “Salesian spirit.”
You will uncover the theological distinctions between *charism* and *spirit*: how they are related and ways in which they can complement one another (as an invitation and a response).

Conclusion:

In a rapid conclusion, you will scrutinize the vocational elements of Charism and Spirit, in a general and then in a Salesian context.