



## Seven Themes

**1. Salesian Anthropology** (Life and Dignity of the Human Person) Francis and Jane were convinced that God is passionately in love with every human being and desires to be in a deep relationship of love with every individual. The love of God is the source of human dignity, which is the foundation of Catholic social teaching. The more we recognize

that God is in love with us, the more we become aware that God is in love with all people at every stage of life, regardless of their circumstances, from conception to natural death. Only when we claim ourselves to be loved by God and recognize that God loves all of humanity as much as ourselves, will we be able to recognize what diminishes our humanity and work to overcome that. In a world that can be calculating and impersonal, the recognition



LIVE JESUS +

## A SALESIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Salesian tradition has much to offer today's Church as we struggle for a more just, peaceful world. Resources for justice are found in the writings of Saints Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal, Leonie Aviat, and the founder of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Fr. Louis Brisson. In addition to the writings of these holy men and women, the witness of their lives offers us ample material to reflect on the power of God's love that inspires people to recognize God's presence in their neighbors and to work for a Church and society where all human beings can flourish. The lives of our Salesian saints were their attempts to "live Jesus" in the circumstances of their own times, and the following themes are the Salesian tradition's way of articulating for today topics that were close to the heart of Jesus. These themes are presented as parallels to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops "Themes of Catholic Social Teaching," which can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>"<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>.

that all people are created in love and for love transforms the way we relate to all people.

**2. Salesian Friendship** (Call to Family, Community, and Participation)  
Our relationship with others reflects our growth in relationship with God. Despite the possibilities for communication offered by modern technology, many people feel alienated from others, and

this alienation diminishes our human dignity. Friendship by its nature draws people out of themselves in love and gives people energy to do things in the service of God's people in the areas of economics, politics, law, and every aspect of life. Friendship played an important role in the lives of both Francis and Jane. Noted spiritual writer Henri Nouwen suggested that the relationship between Francis and Jane has much to offer people today in their struggle for authentic human community: "In our distrustful, fragmented, and fearful world constantly exploding in violence and destruction, friendships such as those lived out by Francis and Jane expressed in [their] letters point the way to healing, reconciliation and new life." Jesus' circle of friends was expansive, though it offended some people's sensibilities, prompting his critics to ask his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt 9:11). Authentic friendships present ideals for all human relationships to emulate on the individual and communal levels. Jesus and the



Salesian saints offer models for an expansive love that brings reconciliation and peace to communities.

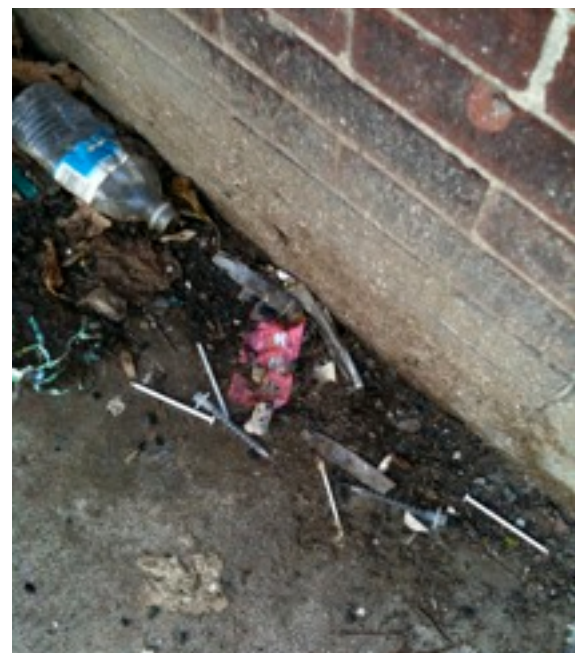
**3. Salesian Discernment (Rights and Responsibilities)** Francis suggests that God makes God's will known in two distinct but related ways: God's signified will, found in the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church; and the will of God's good pleasure, which we learn from the circumstances in which we find ourselves. These two wills are never contradictory. The will of God's good pleasure does not mean that society as it stands today clearly reflects God's will, e.g., some people are poor and others wealthy—at the expense of the poor. Rather, the distinction Francis makes is an invitation to act in the concrete

circumstances in which we find ourselves to give flesh to God's signified will, which lays out all that people need in order to thrive as human beings created in the image of God. All people have a right to those things which are necessary for human thriving and a responsibility to ensure that others' rights are protected as well. How this balance plays out in concrete circumstances may differ, but decisions must be informed by a discerning heart that has been formed in the Gospel. People will improve their discernment as they are drawn closer to God through prayer and the sacraments.

**4. Salesian Hope (Option for the Poor & Vulnerable)** Leonie Aviat served young



women who were working in the textile factories in Troyes, France. She did this in recognition that part of what it means to be a human being is to have hopes for the future. Fr. Brisson challenged St. Leonie as she began her work: "We have a great responsibility in this work, and on you depends the fulfillment of hopes based on it." For many poor and vulnerable people, structures of injustice prevent them



from the fulfillment of their hopes. Our Biblical and Salesian traditions challenge us to take the legitimate hopes of the poor and vulnerable seriously and to work with them to overcome structures of injustice that prevent them from the fulfillment of their



hopes. While all people have genuine needs, Francis follows the Gospel in emphasizing the priority of the needs of the poor, “God’s will is found in serving both poor and rich, but a little more in service to the poor. The indifferent heart will choose the latter.”

**5. Salesian Enterprise** (The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers)

In whatever situation we find ourselves, we are called to be co-creators with God in our work. All work has dignity because it is an opportunity for us to share in the creative ac-

tivity of God. Since all work participates in this loving activity of God, all work has dignity, regardless of the labor involved. Francis writes, “Be just and equitable in all your actions. Always put yourself in your neighbor’s place and put your neighbor in yours, and then you will judge rightly.” While the economy and the language of Church teaching have changed drastically from Francis’ time to our own, the dignity of the human person has not. Thus, we speak today of just wages for all workers and workers’

rights. The foundation for these teachings is rooted firmly in our Salesian tradition in the common humanity shared by all people.



**6. Salesian Compassion** (Solidarity) One of the most striking aspects of Jane de Chantal’s life was the tremendous pain which she encountered. She dealt with the loss of her husband, three children, her friend and spiritual director Francis, as well as undergoing a lengthy period of feeling



God’s absence in her spiritual life. Despite all of this pain, Jane was able to open herself to the sufferings of others and recognize that all human beings depend on God’s grace. Her own suffering allowed her to relate to other people in pain and to minister to their particular situations. The Gospels note that many of Jesus’ actions spring from an experience of compassion for people who are suffering (e.g., Matt 20:34; Mark 1:41). All of us have experiences of pain in our own lives, but we are not called to isolation as a result of these experiences. We are called to enter into the pain of others and to ease each other’s burdens, regardless of the differences between us that might lead to separation.

**7. Salesian Stewardship (Care for God’s Creation)**

Francis and Jane lived long portions of their lives in the beautiful city of Anney, which helped form Francis’ famous statement, “We pray best before beauty.” This experience of the beauty of creation confirmed what they knew from Genesis: all of creation is the work of God and is an invitation to worship the Creator behind creation. Today, human behavior has damaged much of creation, and the effects of this behavior have been detrimental to all of creation, though the poor bear the brunt of the negative impacts on creation. When all of creation becomes an invitation to prayer, the way in which we interact with creation is transformed and all humanity can experience the wonder of God’s creation.

