SALESIANS AND LAITY:  COMMUNION AND SHARING

IN THE SPIRIT AND IN THE MISSION OF DON BOSCO

*INTRODUCTION*

*THE EVENT OF GRACE OF 12 APRIL 1846*

*"There was a shed there, belonging to Joseph Pinardi.  Come and we will draw up a contract.*

(John Bosco, Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855, Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, pp.256-7).

[1]

*A happy anniversary*

The happy event of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's arrival at Valdocco, celebrated during the General Chapter, made us more attentive to our origins.

We are struck with wonder at the marvels of the Spirit, but provoked by them as well.  It seems almost as if Don Bosco is inviting us to enter the world he himself created, which then developed around him: a world of communion in spirit and mission.

There he is, surrounded by a huge crowd of youngsters, in the middle of a meadow which he must leave without any idea of where to go or what to do.  And then suddenly arrives a certain Pancrazio Soave, with a suggestion from a Mr. Giuseppe Pinardi: there is a place where he can gather the boys together, a modest shed which can become a chapel and around it a strip of land for a playground.  On the following Sunday two women will come forward with the first donations to help him.  Later Mamma Margaret will arrive,,.. and there will be others as well.

It is the story of a love which is contagious and spreads, drawing many people into its light and strength, a Family, a Movement!

We Salesians, the successors of those first boys who wanted to stay with Don Bosco for ever, find ourselves in the company of many lay people, men and women of our time, who feel the same kind of call and ask to be able to work with the heart and manner of the *Father and Teacher of youth.*

To enter that circle of light and strength is what we propose to do through our Chapter reflections:

- starting from the present situation of the relationship between SDBs and Laity (first part);

- proposing a rich dynamism stemming from Don Bosco's charism (second part);

- which projects us towards the future through concrete commitments for sharing in his spirit and mission (third part).

We want to celebrate the memory of that event with grateful praise:

[2]

To you, Father, our praise is due

for Don Bosco

the trials that tempered him

and the signs that guided him;

for those who have shared

his indomitable zeal

men and women, religious and lay,

in every time and place;

for the humble beginnings at Valdocco

and for every educative environment

called to be a revelation

and gift of your love;

for the immense ranks of young people

who invade our life

and disturb our heart

prompting it to imitate that of the Good Shepherd.

To you, Father, our praise is due:

With Mary

our powerful Helper

in the Holy Spirit

through the Risen Christ.

Amen

*"On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of its rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry.*

My God, I exclaimed, why do you not show me where you want me to gather these children.  Oh, let me know; show me what I must do. (Memoirs, p.255)

FIRST PART

SALESIANS AND LAITY TODAY

THE SITUATION

CHAPTER 1

Elements for an understanding of the situation        (nn 3 - 18)

CHAPTER 2

Situation of the relationship between SDBs and Laity  (nn 19 - 31)

CHAPTER 3

Perspectives and prospects                            (nn 52 - 56)

CHAPTER 1

ELEMENTS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION

**1. The horizon: together in spirit and in mission**

**for the service of the young**

[3]

**The beginning and the model**

*At the beginning of salesian history we find Don Bosco's love of predilection for poor youngsters and his concern for the working classes living in densely populated areas.  Animated by the charity of the Good Shepherd he gathered around himself a large number of other persons because the new condition of the young, as it seemed to him in the city of Turin, needed a new and immediate response.*

So was born the *Valdocco Oratory, a true 'laboratory' or workshop in which Don Bosco, other priests, adult laymen, youngsters and some women, first among them Mamma Margaret, lived the original and genial style of predilection for the young known as the preventive system.  This system, lived first at Valdocco and then later at Mornese and other places, became a true spirituality, bringing educators and pupils together in the same movement towards holiness.*

It is a spirituality which lives in a quite special manner in the heart and activity of the members of the Salesian Family and of a vast movement of persons, as a gift to the Church for the salvation of the young and for the holiness of its adherents.

[4]

**Secular and prophetic dimension of the charism**

The mission to the young and the poor has a particular *secular dimension "because it is a charism that has been raised up in the Church for the world" (AGC 350, p.16).*

The charism of Don Bosco, precisely because it is educative and ranged on the side of culture, creates a singular harmony with tasks proper to lay people.

It is for this reason that on becoming a mission it extends beyond SDB communities and the works themselves.  Mission and works, in fact, are not the same thing, even though the work may be necessary as a setting for the convocation and formation of the vast movement of those who work for the young, within and outside salesian structures, in the Church and in the institutions of civil society.

This mission has also a *prophetic dimension because of its significance with regard to educational and social problems and because of the new perspectives of existence which it opens up.  Evangelizing by educating and educating by evangelizing become a message of hope, light and leaven, since it does not reach immediately every individual, nor does it cover materially every space and activity in human life (cf. Vecchi Report n.297).*

Attention to secular values was so much alive in Don Bosco that it led him to invent an *original figure of the consecrated layman, the salesian coadjutor brother; the latter develops in himself a genial propensity to be an apostolic ferment within secular realities taken up in their autonomous consistency, on account of which the salesian community, "enriched by its lay dimension, can meet the world in a way that is apostolically more efficacious" (GC21, 178).*

[5]

**Efficacious mediations: CEP and PEPS**

The mission is one and only, but it can be realized in different ways, as many in fact as are the historical, geographical, religious and cultural situations and contexts in which young people are living.

The *salesian educative and pastoral project (PEPS) is the historical mediation and the practical instrument used in all latitudes and cultures of the same mission.  The project therefore is not just a technical fact but a cultural horizon for constant reference, and is demanded by the necessary inculturation of the charism.*

It is specified and realized in every salesian work by a community which we call the *educative and pastoral community (CEP).  This is the group of people (youngsters and adults, parents and educators, religious and lay, representatives of other ecclesial and civil institutions, including also those belonging to other religions, and men and women of good will) who work together for the education and evangelization of the young, and especially those who are poorer.*

**2, The context: World and Church**

[6]

**Incarnation of the charism**

The salesian charism, raised up *in the Church for the world, must become incarnated in the different cultural situations in order to express its powers of service to the young and the poor.  In contact with the different cultures it can illustrate its vitality and acquire new and enriching characteristics.*

*2.1  In today's world*

[7]

**A new scenario**

After the events which marked the end of the East-West conflict, the '90s presented a new economic, political, social and cultural scenario, and some of its tendencies have a particular influence on our life and activity.

[8]

**Primacy of economic factors**

The economic and political system followed by the new liberal ideology increases impoverishment, injustice and social imbalance in the greater part of the world, with the result that big trans-national economic groups make enormous profits and bring about the exclusion of the poorest parts of the earth, with a consequent increase in new forms of want.

The absolute priority given to the economic factor provokes grave consequences: the elimination of economic frontiers, the difficulty of defending social gains of the workers and elbow room for small productive units, unemployment, fall in income, the need to emigrate, limitation of expression and possibility of action on the part of ethnic minorities and groups living in various ways on the fringe of society.

*Progressive economic and social exclusion, moreover, provokes forms of "anthropological impoverishment", which appear as a widespread feeling of inferiority affecting social classes and entire peoples, culturally oppressed by the dominant ideology ("culturicide").*

The massive and incessant presentation of different models creates modifications in mental processes and criteria of evaluation, increases the difficulties of building a human and Christian identity, and amplifies uncertainty about the future.  At the same time the new possibilities for information, intercommunication and action bring about a different structure of society and public life.

*Economic globalization and the new groupings of countries in blocks can have social and cultural consequences of kinds that are still uncertain and difficult to foretell.*

[9]

**Ambivalence of communication**

The emergence of a global culture, on a massive scale and with a pluralist character, conditions the perception one has of the world and the Church, and even earlier of the very sense of life.

*The challenge of interpersonal communication is made more difficult by the weakening of cultural values, and by the proliferation of languages and growing forms of incommunicability.  Communication passes through new channels: multimedial languages, means of social communication, access to information, cybernetics.  All this provokes modifications of mentality and calls for new ways of learning.  And these need new abilities and qualifications.*

The power of knowledge, modern and post-modern codes, learning to work in groups, access to information, the critical use of the means of social communication, are some of the factors which require of Salesians and laity greater competence and continual updating.

[10]

**Family and education**

The family and the traditional agencies of education seem to lose their privileged position of former times with respect to the maturing of the individual.  Nevertheless the fundamental importance of the family in the field of education is still acknowledged.

In the new cultural situation a subjective interpretation of sexuality is being spread abroad; new forms of family organization are appearing as affective nuclei, to the detriment of the traditional model of marriage and the family.  This renders uncertain and problematic educative processes, the integration of educative factors and the very educative capacity of adults.

In this family situation, the question put by Fr Egidio Viganò makes us think: "We have to ask ourselves: can an educator at the present day form the person of his youngsters without the deepening, clarifying and reliving of family vales?" (AGC 349, p.6).

[11]

**Youthful discomfort**

The uneasiness tends to become deeper because of the shortcomings of the institutions (especially in the family, school, Church etc.) and of their difficulties in communication in the languages of the young, and in coping with their superficiality and the absence of values.  In some contexts the youthful misgivings are caused by new and old forms of poverty, the lack of prospects in life, of social opportunities, and by ethnic, cultural or religious forms of racism.

We detect in all this a *sign of the times and hence an appeal from God to renew our educative mission.*

[12]

**The presence of women**

In every setting of social life, the woman is acquiring an important presence which fosters the recognition of her rights.  In the Church, the woman feels the call to take up a role of participation and shared responsibility.

In every field attention is being given to specifically feminine elements, because of the contribution they can make to a better quality of life and an enrichment of values at every level.

[13]

**Multiple facets of the religious phenomenon**

We note the continuation of a process of secularization which involves not only specifically religious matters but also fundamental aspects of life: family, education, moral conscience, customs, cultural expressions.  In some contexts it almost seems that anything divine is being totally eclipsed.  And at the same time we are nevertheless assisting at a new sensitivity for spiritual values and the seeking of new forms of relationship with the Transcendent, especially among the young.

On the other hand the *religious phenomenon is taking on multiple facets, some of them uncertain and frequently ambiguous.*

Emerging also is a widespread religious indifference, especially in what regards institutional aspects, with a tendency to privatization.

This hunger for the spiritual draws many persons, especially among the young, towards sects and movements which offer intense experiences which are nonetheless problematic, because they lack an integral vision of the person and of an objective content of truth.

We find parallel manifestations of religious syncretism, of superstitions and other expressions with an esoteric and reincarnationist slant.  Particularly alluring at the present day seems to be the movement called *New Age.*

Alongside all this one notes a demand for interior reality and a thirst for the spiritual, attention to ecumenical dialogue, the eagerness for prayer meetings between the great religions for justice and peace in the world.

[14]

**Signs of hope**

The new economic, social, political and cultural scenario, gives us a glimpse nevertheless at world wide level of tendencies of substantially positive value, even though they must be redeemed from the historical ambiguity with which they are presented

We note, in fact, the *emergence of new transversal sensitivities which concentrate the attention of the world community and mobilize its energies.  The vast list of mega-events, with which the United Nations are sealing the closure of the twentieth century, are a proof and sign of this.*

These are supranational events which indicate, as path to be followed in the future, some presuppositions for the taking up of a new ethical, social and political standpoint.  They constitute a practical perspective for a "global social response" which can redeem personal respect, communal participation and social justice in face of the uncertainty of the present moment in history.

These appear, therefore, as obligatory points of reference which give consistency and legitimacy to the so-called new social and political subjects: the child, the young person, the woman, the individual, the family, non-government organizations, social and ethnic minorities, the excluded, etc.

This new sensitivity extends, in fact, to the most harrowing problems of humanity: the recognition of the dignity of the human person, education, demographic policy, ecology, development, unemployment and social exclusion, peaceful living together in pluriethnic and plurireligious societies, and peace.

It is within this conflictual and ambivalent frame of reference that the Church, like the Congregation, strives to identify the great objectives and to work out relevant practical strategies, so as to be a source of solidarity and hope.

*2.2  In the Church*

[15]

**The new way of the Church**

In this world context on the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Church is living ever more consciously the *new ecclesiological atmosphere born of Vatican II, replanning her presence in the contemporary world, with an intense effort at inculturation and active involvement on the part of all her components.*

The starting point is the self-understanding which the Church has of herself as the People of God, called to be leaven in history.  Within this People the protagonism of the **Laity is becoming ever more evident as a sign of the times.**

It is especially the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici which authoritatively asserts the secular identity of the lay person, as the subject of evangelization with full rights within the People of God.  At the same time, reflection and pastoral practice are reconsidering the figure of* **ordained ministers to recover the genuine aspect of the pastor: he is the one who is at the service of all vocations so that they become transformed into ministries; he thus builds up ecclesial communion, while educating all to share the mission for the salvation of the world.  The Apostolic Exhortation** *Pastores dabo vobis has given a new impulse to the ordained ministry, placed at the service of a Church which is wholly ministerial.*

**Consecrated persons too in the post-conciliar process, of which the most recent stage is represented by the Apostolic Exhortation** *Vita Consecrata, have managed to clarify their identity in the Church and to mature the conviction that their charism can be shared with the laity.  For this reason the latter are invited "to share more intensely inn the spirituality and mission of these Institutes" (VC 54), thus beginning "a new chapter, rich in hope, in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity" (ib.).  The same Exhortation recognizes that communion and collaboration with the laity is one of the fruits of the doctrine of the Church as communion (ib.)*

[16]

**The challenge of the New Evangelization**

The progressive impoverishment taking place in the world, the spreading of a post-modern culture, and the recognition of emerging cultures in general when compared with the message of Jesus and the reflections of Vatican II, have led the Church to make a qualitative pastoral option in the *New Evangelization.  It is characterized by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, by human advancement and the inculturation of the Gospel, in the perspective of an option for the young and the poor.  This obliges the Church herself to a process of conversion, so that poverty and freedom may become signs which render credible the Gospel of the beatitudes.*

In the spirit of the New Evangelization - which demands new enthusiasm, new methods and new expressions - the Church has experimented in the last ten years with a strong social commitment, thanks to the prophetic appeal of so many Christians, to the Magisterium and Episcopal Assemblies in various continents.

A new style is spreading of being Church.  It is moving towards man, sharing his joys and hopes (GS 1); it is respectful of cultures, has at heart humanity's future, justice and peace, the family, life and ethical values, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, politics and economy, young people and education.

The New Evangelization therefore appears as a global project of new missionary commitment, a concrete response to the appeal of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio.*

[17]

**Path of the Salesian Congregation**

The Congregation feels as its own the concerns and hopes of the young and of the Church, of which it wants to be an efficacious sign while serving the world to which it has been sent.

Motives of joy for the Congregation at the present day are:

\* its missionary expansion in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia;

\* the participation and sharing of Don Bosco's charism and mission by innumerable lay people, in and outside salesian works;

\* the presence of lay volunteers in some sectors of the Salesian Movement;

\* the earnest desire in many SDBs for a deeper spirituality, a growth in the quality of pastoral work for youth and a greater integration in the pastoral work of the local Churches.

The Congregation also feels the effects of secularization and other ambiguous aspects of the contemporary world:

\* the falling off, drastic at times, in the number of vocations (especially of Brothers) in many traditionally Christian countries;

\* the spiritual superficiality which, to the extent that it accepts forms of an easy life, provokes a cooling off of pastoral thrust and the inability to penetrate the world of the young;

\* the presence of symptoms of individualism, manifested in personal projects without reference to the communal project;

\* the little exploitation of the educative and apostolic energies of the laity, and especially women, due to a lack of knowledge of the theology of the lay state and a certain difficulty in understanding the feminine ethos.

The Congregation in its recent General Chapters, beginning especially with the SGC, has acquire an ever greater awareness of itself and of its mission in the Church and in the world.

At the same time, as regards its mission among the young and the poor it is committed to the involvement in a single vast movement of persons, especially lay people, attracted by the charism and spirituality of Don Bosco.

[18]

GC 24

If on the one hand the GC24 constitutes a significant stage in the process of renewal, on the other it wants to be a point of departure: the Salesian Congregation intends to approach the Third Millennium with a new look, involving in its spirit and mission the greatest possible number of men and women who, by educating and evangelizing, want to work with it for the Kingdom.

CHAPTER 2

SITUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SDBs AND LAITY

**1. Desires and realizations**

*1.1  Positive aspects of the relationship*

[19]

**New awareness in the SDB community**

The Provincial Chapters revealed a notable convergence about the *need for a deep relationship at an operative and existential level between SDBs and laity.*

There has been a positive outcome almost everywhere.  The Provincial Chapters have produced unexpected results.  Many lay people were involved at local and provincial level in sharing with the SDBs a reflection on the theme of the GC24.

The salesian community is ever more aware that it has *a precise role and task of animation and formation with respect to the Salesian Family and the lay people with whom it shares the mission.*

In various contexts of the Congregation significant experiences are reported,  Many communities are slowly rediscovering their task and, after a first period of uncertainty, have found positive results after entrusting areas of responsibility to the laity.

To the extent that this new sensitivity is growing and emphasis is given to the process being followed by the community and by individual Salesians, *there is an insistent call for a more decisive change of mentality, so as to reach a welcoming acceptance of the presence of lay people and a new attention to women, recognizing and accepting the values of complementarity and reciprocity.*

In some countries in which women are relegated to a subordinate role, it has been found that their involvement is not only an innovation but has also a prophetic element.

[20]

**Settings for closer relationships between SDBs and laity**

Reflection in common, a shared project and relationship with the laity are positive experiences, especially in the so-called new presences, as a prompt response to the problems raised by youth unease, emargination, etc.  It is in such settings as these that are being developed the best forms of lay participation and volunteer work.

Relationships too are closer in parishes, schools, oratories and youth centres open to the neighbourhood.  Here too there is increasing space for the laity.

In the missions lay protagonism is a consolidated fact.  It would be useful however if more thought could be given to their systematic formation.

Because of its educational significance, a special mention is due to the commitment of parents and the role of the family in many of our foundations; this is sometimes expressed in the form of associations recognized also at provincial and national level.

[21]

**Progressive involvement of the laity**

*The involvement of the laity in the salesian spirit is a progressive process towards communion.  More often than not it begins with a more or less chance contact with Don Bosco and his work.  From this develop many attitudes, ranging from an empathy roused by a first contact with Don Bosco, his environment and the salesian style, to an interest in getting to know more about the charism; from the assumption of the values and form of life of the Salesians to communion in the spirit through the discovery of a vocation.*

This is the manner in which the discovery and growth of their vocation happens for many lay people; it is a call to live lay values in a Christian and salesian vocation: an offering of time, energy and competence for the mission.

[22]

**Participation of the laity in the mission**

Participation in the salesian mission also appears as a gradual and progressive variegated reality: from the simple obligatory presence of one who does paid work, offering skill and nothing more, or one who is a member of a salesian parish, to collaboration for motives of work or free choice, and to the shared responsibility of one who takes on with us the common mission.

The process of involvement leads to communion in spirit, to shared responsibility, and then to sharing of the salesian mission.  Communion and sharing, involvement and shared responsibility, these are the two faces of the same medal.

[23]

**Variety among lay people**

In sharing the mission to the young and poor, the Salesians enter in fact into a relationship with a great variety of lay collaborators: Catholics who are fully conscious of their identity, Catholics who practise their religion more or less constantly, non-Catholic Christians, those belonging to other religions, adherents of religious groups which may be Christian but with fundamentalist tendencies, and laity who are agnostics or religiously indifferent.

In all parts of the world there are more than a few lay people who share the commitment for the young as members of a structured group of the Salesian Family.

All those who do so, through love of the young and of Don Bosco, are consciously or unconsciously members of a "vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young" (C 5).

[24]

**Commitment of the young**

Throughout the Congregation there are ever clearer prospects of a broad panorama of a youth commitment which manifests new sensitivities and promising perspectives.  This new season of youth involvement in the salesian mission takes its rise from the discovery of a category of animation lived as a modern reincarnation of Don Bosco's shrewd perception of *"the young as missionaries of other youngsters".*

At the present day numerous young people are committed with the SDBs in oratories, youth centres, schools, ecclesial communities, parishes and mission centres.  They are catechists, group animators, representatives of categories, in charge of various pastoral, cultural, artistic. musical and liturgical initiatives.

Many provinces have invested time and resources in the formation of the young.  Classes and courses for youth animators, forms of coordination at local, provincial and national level, youth consulting groups and committees, teams for youth pastoral work, publications of various kinds as means of linkage, annual meetings, youth festivities, are all initiatives that have begun and are continuing in many parts of the salesian world.

[25]

**Significant contribution of women**

The new forms of the salesian mission and the progressive discovery of feminine values, the openness of the community to the locality and to the local Church, and not least the diminution of salesian personnel in our works, have opened up many educative and pastoral opportunities for women in the salesian mission.  Hence the new climate following Vatican II has led to a greater involvement of women in the activities of the SDBs

The presence of women in our traditional educational environments, especially in schools and colleges, as well as in parishes, oratories and more recent educative and pastoral settings, and with tasks of high responsibility, has enriched the practical realization of the preventive system; it has created a more natural and serene affective atmosphere, with specifically feminine traits at the level of sensitivity, relationships, and manner of thinking and acting.

The assimilation, nevertheless, of the values of feminine complementarity and reciprocity is a slow process.

Significant help in this direction comes to us from the FMA.  In several contexts, in fact, different forms of sharing in pastoral work has been going ahead for some time, with full respect for the specific identity of each group.

[26]

**The Volunteer Movement**

The Volunteer Movement is a widely spread reality among young people and adults, and is of great relevance at the present moment in history.  It is felt in the Congregation, in the Church and in society, as a new style of a life of "openness to others".  It is a privileged and practical means of meeting lay persons who are formed and motivated.  This is a challenge which the laity - Christian or not - raise against rampant injustice and selfishness.

The manner of realization of the volunteer movement is of various kinds:

- within one's own country or province, or outside it abroad;

- short-term or long-term (for a period varying from at least a month to several years);

- in approved projects financed by public bodies, or outside them (sponsored by private organizations: communities, provinces, local entities, non-government organizations, etc.).

The volunteer movement frequently constitutes a significant vocational outcome and a valid endorsement of the educative process followed by young people with SDBs, and of the plan to provide other openings for youth in pastoral work.

The young animators, in fact, show themselves sensitive and solid with the world of poverty and youth emargination: the needy in general, street children, youngsters at risk, drug addicts.

Availability for service leads to various kinds of volunteer work and other committed life choices.  Youthful creativity and verve in this field is a challenge to us and stimulates us to extend the already consolidated experiences.

The youth volunteer movement sometimes requires that the young people remain in the salesian community.  Experiences in this area are generally positive.  After a period of direct contact with the salesian community and mission, more than a few young people have opted for the salesian life.

Moreover, in recent years many of our communities have lived experiences of activity in missionary territories with young animators.  In the verification of such experiences it has become clear that the first persons to benefit from them have been the young volunteers themselves.

There are places too where the arrangements for conscientious objectors allow military service to be replaced by a gratuitous and well defined period of commitment to educative or social service, especially in favour of the young.

[27]

Lay management and the Provincial Project

The Provinces fulfil their mission through activities and works animated normally by a local salesian community.  In recent years, however, various provinces, after a careful evaluation of the situation have decided to entrust some activities or works to the management of lay people, within the project and responsibility of the province itself.  There have also been cases in which certain activities or works of education originally set up and managed by lay people have been absorbed into the provincial plan and responsibility.  In some of these the salesian community is present, while in others it is not.

In some cases the relationship between SDBs and laity is recognized by law: as for instance the 'partenariato' and 'tutela' in Italy.

The term *'partenariato' indicates the kind of participation, present in some of our works, regulated by a contract in which the lay person is normally placed on the same level as the religious as far as the assuming of responsibilities is concerned.*

The *'tutela' is a particular kind of 'partenariato'.  Responsibility for the organization, management, pedagogical and didactic matters are completely in the hands of the laity.   The SDBs remain as guarantors before the local Church of the Catholic and salesian ethos of the school.*

[28]

**Motives for making a choice**

The reasons which have prompted certain provinces to make particular choices are many:

- the new ecclesiology of communion which recognizes and fosters the dignity, vocation and mission of the  "Christifideles laici";

- the availability of prepared lay people to take part in the mission of Don Bosco with direct responsibilities;

- the need to render Don Bosco's charism present in a particular area;

- urgent youth problems of an area;

- requests of local Churches, educative agencies, or other institutions;

- the desire not to close an activity or work which is valid and appreciated, through lack of qualified SDB personnel.

[29]

**Formative and organizational requirements**

These situations have created new formative requirements to enable lay persons to guarantee the salesian identity of a work or activity, and to help the Salesians to recognize the involvement of the laity in Don Bosco's spirit and mission.

Such situations clearly require new organizational models; the normal ones, though corresponding to many concrete circumstances, can no longer cover all salesian activity.

The salesian community itself must seek adequate criteria to guarantee the charismatic identity of these works managed by lay people, and also draw up new practical guidelines.

*1.2  Resistances and difficulties in the relationship*

Alongside the many signs of a positive growth in the relationship between SDBs and lay people, the Provincial Chapters do not conceal the fact that difficulties and problems persist.

[30]

**Difficulties of the SDBs and of communities**

The communities do not always have the necessary flexibility in their lives to accept stimuli and innovations coming from  lay people.

In some situations a defensive attitude may prevail, which makes the laity feel held back, so to speak, in their apostolic intentions.  In others, the community as a whole fails to establish significant relationships with the laity.

In addition the availability for accompanying and animating them meets difficulties because of the reduced numerical presence of the SDBs, many of whom are absorbed to a considerable extent in organization and administration, and especially because all this can lead to insufficient significance of the SDB community.

In the matter of difficulties in relationships between SDBs and lay people, some provincial chapters pointed to different cultural horizons and levels of life: a different perception of the values of life as lived by the salesian community and by the laity in their families, social and economic conditions, especially in developing countries, and notably different social levels.

[31]

**Difficulties prevalent among the laity**

Some difficulties noted by the laity in relationships can be attributed to differences in the manner of interpreting the concept of education, with a resultant lack of knowledge of the consecrated life and of pedagogical and didactic formation.

Sometimes it is economic matters that create between Salesians and lay people difficulties in dialogue, attention and reciprocal understanding, and so compromise the sharing of the mission.

[32]

**Difficulties of young people**

The relationship between SDBs and young lay people is not always rich and deep.

The young would like the SDBs to be less occupied in organizational matters and to have more time and tranquility for meeting and guiding them.

On the other hand the SDBs sometimes complain that the commitment of the youngsters is lived more as a simple experience, more like a parenthesis, and does not become a premise for more demanding options.

Many difficulties arise none the less from the fact that what the SDBs expect does not coincide with what the young people offer or are able to offer.

Sometimes in fact the prevalent factors are the limitations arising from the youth condition itself: the volubility, inconstancy and fickleness typical of their age.

[33]

**Slow integration of women]**

The integration of the woman brings with it modifications to the institutional culture and pastoral activity, it incorporates new aspects and specifically feminine values and provokes a new understanding of the male identity.  This can be a source of difficulty for both the SDB and the woman, both of them called to work in the same project.  We must be aware that here we have a problem which touches not only on ideas but on affectivity, relational ability and habits, with evident consequences on the formation of the Salesian, and also on the particular style of the presence of the woman in our environments.  We must recognize that there has not yet been sufficient opportune reflection on this reality.  The presence of women in our works is sometimes more a consequence of cultural and social situations than of reflexive and commonly agreed options.  It may be useful also to point out that the presence of women in our works sometimes becomes prevalent, among both the educative and pastoral agents and those to whom our work is directed.  In some cases this preponderance could develop into a problem of 'feminization' of salesian work.

[34]

**Problems of the Volunteer Movement**

The experience of the volunteer movement is not without its problems either.

The more serious ones are found in developing countries but, though in different forms, they are present also in experiences lived in one's own country also.

It should be noted in the first place that the volunteer does not always keep up a close relationship with the community from which he came, nor is there sufficient communication between the communities sending and receiving him, either in the preparatory phase or in those of the experience itself and the return.

Particularly important are the problems of the volunteer on his return:

  a) a *juridical and economic problem:* insurance and place of work, health aspect etc.  The volunteer frequently finds it difficult to obtain employment, especially in the case - as is desirable - of a work in continuity and harmony with the experience he has gained and with his fundamental life-choices;

  b) a problem of a *vocational and apostolic kind:* insertion into the local, provincial and ecclesial educative and pastoral plan.  Sometimes the community is not sufficiently sensitive to the cultural riches which the returning volunteer brings with him and wants to offer to his new environment;

  c) *psychological and affective problems:* acceptance on the part of the community as an expression of appreciation of the experience made and concern for his reinsertion at family, apostolic and working level and in volunteer groups, possibly linked with the Salesian Family.  Particular attention needs to be given to affective links and bonds of friendship which the volunteer has developed on the missions; in this too he needs the follow-up and help of the community.

*1.3  The relationship between SDBs and laity in particular situations*

[35]

**Plurireligious and pluricultural contexts**

In some parts  and contexts of the salesian world, one may note an impressive fact: the considerable presence of lay people of different cultures and beliefs who take part in our mission.  This is especially the case in Asia and Africa, where such people may even form the majority, but it is possible that their number will increase even in traditionally Christian countries.

In many of them, what is particularly striking is the contribution they offer, their strong sense of belonging, and the esteem and veneration they have for the figure of Don Bosco and the salesian mission.

[36]

**Variety of situations**

Even among Christians there are members of other denominations and those who call themselves Christian but belong to various sects.  Some, unfortunately, prove to be indifferent or even hostile; and finally there are still others who are persons of good will who are respectful of our faith.

Cultural and religious pluralism conceals unsuspected riches and can facilitate an exchange of gifts with mutual advantage.   But it can also give rise to a facile syncretism, and can become the cause of tensions, hostility and even of violence, as sadly happens in present day society.

Despite all this, there is a craving in the human heart for unity in diversity, to reach a convergence and move ahead together.  Among our collaborators there are those who feel very strongly aspirations of this kind and ask to be more closely associated with us in the sharing of the mission to youth.

Some of them have a vivid desire to feel themselves part of our Family, but find difficulty because of tensions arising from different lines of thought, of living their life and giving to it an ultimate meaning.

[37]

**Towards unity and belonging**

Despite all this, there is a craving in the human heart for unity in diversity, to reach a convergence and move ahead together.  Among our collaborators there are those who feel very strongly aspirations of this kind and ask to be more closely associated with us in the sharing of the mission to youth.

Some of them have a vivid desire to feel themselves part of our Family, but find difficulty because of tensions arising from different lines of thought, of living their life and giving to it an ultimate meaning.

.

[38]

**Provocations and responses**

These different and problematic situations raise certain questions:

– What kind of relationship should we set up between SDBs and lay people of this kind?

– How can we make of the CEP, the PEPS, and other initiatives, occasions for contact and growth, for mutual enrichment, and a means of greater efficacy for the mission to youth?

– How can we ensure the salesian identity of our works and activities?

– How can we give them recognition in the Salesian Movement?

These are questions which constitute a real challenge for salesian communities.

**2. The practical manner of communion and sharing: CEP and PEPS**

*2.1 The process so far*

[39]

**Common operative model**

In the CEP is manifested in a particularly intense and visible form the communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco between SDBs and laity.  As an operative model this is recognized everywhere to some extent as valid and as the only practicable model in present conditions, i.e. “the Salesians as the animating nucleus, the involvement of the laity and shared responsibility with them, and the drawing up of a possible plan, adapted to the needs of those for whom we are working, to the forces available and to the local context”.

But the effective role of the Salesians in such a scenario varies greatly.  In many works they do succeed in forming the nucleus referred to; in others they are already becoming an accompanying presence which constitutes a guarantee; in others they provide support and guidance but in a less direct manner.2

The mission therefore is not realized by the salesian community alone: a vast movement of persons take part in it: “We realize in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living  experience  of the Church and an indication of God’s plan for us”.3

[40]

**Problems emerging**

The provincial chapters have reaffirmed the task of the salesian community to be the animating nucleus of the CEP,4 and have noted a positive growth of the awareness of communities in this respect.

But recent changes have brought to light some innovations and open problems:

– the animation of the CEP cannot be referred to the salesian community alone, but must also have the support of lay people;

– the process of shared responsibility must be followed by all the salesian community in the animation of the CEP, and quantitative and qualitative inconsistencies must be overcome;

– solutions must be sought for the establishment of a clear institutional relationship between the salesian community and the participation of lay people in the decisions of the CEP, and in particular between the local council of the salesian community and the organisms sharing responsibility in the CEP;

– the manner must be established as to how the salesian community can be the animating nucleus in works in which there is an agreement with a public body, and also in associations which have juridical recognition even before the State, with their own statutes and councils of administration.

[41]

**The course of the CEP**

The realization of the CEP, even in its early stages, has given positive results: the work of the SDBs has been shared to a greater extent; functions and tasks properly belonging to lay people have become clearer, and the youngsters themselves have felt the benefit of an enrichment of the educative presence.

The articulation of the various organisms and councils has improved, thereby permitting a more active participation and integration of the laity.  Their shared responsibility and involvement is increasing especially in youth centres, associations and groups with varied interests.  This is due to a growth in the sense of belonging to the CEP and of sharing in the educative commitment by its various components.

In some contexts the presence of persons of other religious faiths seems not to have created serious obstacles to the educative process.  Sometimes, in fact, it can enrich the CEP.

[42]

**PEPS: medition of the mission**

Since the GC21 the PEPS has been recognized as necessary for the realization of the salesian mission.  Educative and pastoral projects are always better understood, in every latitude and culture, as a realization of the salesian mission in history.  It is important also to emphasize that the laity have expressed the desire for greater involvement in the realization of the PEPS.

The elaboration, realization and verification of the PEPS provides an opportunity for growth in the mentality of living and working together.

Educative and pastoral communities which have drawn up the PEPS now live it as a criterion and guide for shared action, as a verification for their activity, as a practical instrument for animation, and as a privileged means for the ongoing formation of SDBs and laity.

[43]

**Formation through activity**

The use of the new operative model has highlighted the need for updating and greater competence.  But it has also been found true that the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the CEP.  When realized in the best conditions this has also demonstrated the originality and fertility of reciprocal formation.

Some communities have gone further still; they have organized special meetings for exclusively formative purposes, and have also launched experiences of involvement in initiatives of a religious character (prayer, retreats, celebrations) for all the members of the educative community.

2.2 Difficulties of realization

**[**44]

**A difficult beginning**

In the launching of the CEP some difficulties have been found on the part of both SDBs and laity, due sometimes to civil legislation and the lack of a clear understanding of the relationship between the salesian religious community and the educative community.  It needs to be emphasized that relations between the religious community and the CEP reflect also the internal changes within the religious community itself: the numerical diminution of the Salesians, the increase in fields of intervention, rhythms of life, age and health.  Present experiences are therefore varied in nature: some positive and forward-looking, others slow and somewhat resistant.

[45]

**Apprehension of those who are consecrated**

The maturing in the period following Vatican II of the lay vocation challenges the SDB identity from the specific standpoint of consecration.

In some SDBs one notes sensitivities which give rise to concern:

– sometimes the Salesian feels he has to live a double life: of consecration when living community life, and of the laity in his professional work, no different from lay people;

– it seems to some that lay persons can now do everything or nearly everything that the consecrated person does, while still remaining a lay person;

– others think that the good they can do as consecrated religious in a community which “limits” their activities, they could do more efficaciously outside, as committed laymen;

– and finally there are here and there still attitudes of clericalism shown in the difficulty of thinking in the key of the educative community or in the resistance in entrusting to lay people tasks of decision-making and coordination.

In addition there are lay people who feel somewhat at a loss with regard to certain SDBs: rather than consecrated persons they seem at times more like entrepreneurs or administrators preoccupied about efficiency.  One wonders whether they have done away with all differences between the two.  We need to find a more mature balance.

If on the one hand the present discovery of the lay vocation can seem to be a reaction against the supposed superiority of those who are consecrated, as being more competent and responsible in educative commitment and the only true bearers of the charism, on the other hand the insistence on the vocation of the lay person must point to the identity of those who are consecrated as a specific and dynamic force for the education and animation of the CEP.

[46]

**Communication nd involvement**

The present situation of the CEP is an indication of the insufficiency  of communication, of involvement and of the full sharing of responsibility.

Mutual openness between SDBs and laity sometimes reduces merely to interpersonal communication, which lacks the support of institutionalized communication within the CEP.

This situation detracts from the proper sharing of responsibility in planning, and the personal acceptance by all, SDBs and laity, of the consequences of concrete programmes.  It has not yet been possible to involve all members of the CEP in the exploitation of the competence and ability of lay people and to make them share responsibility for educative experiences and for Christian formation.

Cooperators too, and other lay people in our works who are members of groups of the Salesian Family, have not yet found in the CEP an adequate integration of their vocation.

[47]

**Lack of the PEPS**

The PEPS is not yet present in all salesian works, and its absence is an obstacle to SDBs and laity successfully working together.

Sometimes the PEPS is drawn up by some member of the community, and hence it runs the risk of remaining just a theoretical document, little known to the laity and to the components of the CEP in general.  In consequence it becomes in no way a point of convergence and reference for daily collaboration.

And then there are salesian communities too who find it difficult to accept the task of being a centre of communion and participation.  In these cases the PEPS is not used in a systematic manner and pastoral work is considered a task only for the Salesians or pastoral animators and not one for the entire educative community.

3. Forms of communion or sharing and belonging:

The Salesian Family and Salesian Movement

[48]

**Salesin Family**

Don Bosco “founded not only the Society of St Francis de Sales but also the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators”.5

These groups and others born later make up the Salesian Family.6

The unity of the Salesian Family increases with the understanding of the common mission starting from the specific vocation of each member.

The work of the postconciliar period has left us a precious heritage of goals achieved: the publication of the official documents for each branch of the Family for the animation and life itself of the associations; the Common Identity Card; the participation of lay people in the GC24, a visible and prophetic sign of a formation process to be carried out together.

But the change of mentality needed to reach recognition of the common responsibility required for confronting the mission to the young has not been assimilated by all because, among other reasons, vocational discernment has not always been carried out within the various component groups with attention to the role of the lay faithful.

There are still environments in which a certain paternalism weakens the autonomy of the laity, and inadequate formation compromises the sharing of responsibility in the mission.

[49]

**The Salesian Movement**

It would be an impoverishment and an excessive simplification were we to reduce the area of influence of the person and message of Don Bosco to the Salesian Family alone.

From the very beginning of salesian work, in fact, a vast movement of persons and groups, men and women of different conditions of life, grew up around Don Bosco.7  Subsequent history shows that the movement has been marked by a spiritual convergence and a shared objective of education, with so broad an approach as to involve also those outside the Christian category.

The Valdocco model has overcome cultural and territorial limitations, and the objective of “good Christians and upright citizens” has been spread far and wide.  Today the salesian presence is embodied in widely different contexts, characterized by pluricultural and plurireligious settings, thus realizing a wide range of collaborations.

If we are looking for images to enable us to understand all this, we could say that just as an echo belongs to the sound that makes it, and every flow of water refers back to its source, every branch to its root, every ripple (even the weakest and most distant) is concentric with its starting point, so it is with those who “work for the salvation of the young” in Don Bosco’s name.

The Salesian Movement is not a structured reality with a precise organization.  Above all else it is an awareness, a mobilization, an affective and effective belonging in view of the good of the young.

Although not everywhere are the SDBs and Salesian Family aware of the richness and vast nature of the radiation of Don Bosco’s charism, the latter is well known to those who want to be involved in educative processes.

Of this there are two visible indications:

a. the youthful and social volunteer movement undrstood as an offering of time, dedication and commitment, of support and service in pastoral work and human advancement;

b. the dialogue and educative involvement now existing in every continent, with varying cultural and religious intensity, in an interactive process of exchange of gifts and of ecumenism.

[50]

In this broad context of the Salesian Movement is inserted the variegated reality of the Friends of Don Bosco: sympathizers, admirers, benefactors, collaborators, advisers, believers and non-believers, and non-Christians.8  With different shades of meaning they present the following identity:

– they reveal an attitude of empathy for the figure of Don Bosco, his spirit and mission;

– they express a personal attachment to Don Bosco;

– they intend to collaborate in various ways in initiatives of good, sharing in this way in the salesian mission.

It is recognized that the Friends of Don Bosco are inserted in a wider movement than the present reality of the Salesian Family.  Their insertion in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco is diversified, with a variety of degrees and attitudes, after the fashion of concentric circles: for some it is a matter of direct involvement, for others of indirect participation.

[51]

Since the centenary of 1988 and the GC23, the SDBs, Salesian Family and Salesian Movement have been sharing a true and proper process of communion and sharing.

In this the young people form the most sensitive and reactive part, willingly entering the Movement so as to live the salesian option for the service of youth.

Even though the same objectives and degree of sharing have not been achieved in every province, everywhere attempts have been made to establish with the SDBs a new kind of encounter, able to open up vocational outlets and to develop with young people frontiers with the indifferent and those at a distance, in response to new demands and challenges.

The Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) has received official recognition from the Holy See and takes part in meetings of the “Consilium pro Laicis”.

It is a movement with an educative character offered to all young people and with a missionary slant.  The more sensitive members are aware that they are bearers of a precious patrimony for the Congregation, and ask to be helped in the discovery of the project of life and in the choice of a process which will make them strong in spirituality and witness.

The animating force of the SYM is not, in fact, its organization but the salesian youth spirituality: it is in this that all groups converge.

For this reason spirituality requires a constant effort at formation.  Particular attention needs to be given to the vocational guidance of the young so that they become inserted into the ecclesial and social world with options and commitments which are a response to problems of the present-day world.

CHAPTER 3

PROSPECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

[52]

From the present context of the Church and of the relationship between SDBs and Laity, there arise certain prospects which call for a fundamental doctrine for shaping our activity, as significant openings to a future of innovations and charismatic fertility.

1. Broadening involvement in the spirit and mission

[52]

Today the mission requires the mobilization of all the forces of the Salesian Family and of the vast Movement of persons who surround Don Bosco, to face up strategically to the present social, cultural and religious situation with its many facets through an adequate service, in the context of the local civil community and of the particular Church, which are the ordinary settings for educative activity.

The relationship between SDBs and Laity makes the Salesian grow as a prophetic sign of the newness of the Kingdom: his consecration bears witness to the primacy of God, and celebrates the love of the Father in the human heart and in history.

The same relationship promotes in the Salesian a change of mentality and opens him to a new style of communion and sharing.

With regard to the SDBs the laity express the

desire to feel them nearer, more concerned about animation and coordination, more involved in their accompaniment.

The same young people press the Salesian to introduce them to the problems of life and to link them up with the neighbourhood and the local Church, associating them with the mission and giving them responsibility.

The presence too of the woman helps SDBs not only to interpret the feminine ethos, but to live a more complete educative relationship: in fact the man and the woman help the boy and the girl to discover their own identity, to accept as enriching their own specific nature to be offered as a gift in reciprocity.

Young confreres receive more efficacious help when, from the period of their initial formation, they are introduced to experiences of collaboration with lay people both at a directly practical level and in the process of the elaboration of the PEPS.

2. Encouragement of a new style of communication and shared responsibility

[54]

To be together at certain important moments, to give more time to informal meetings and to sharing, enlivens the family spirit, fosters reciprocity and intensifies collaboration.

A new style of communication is needed if one is to be efficacious in facing complex challenges like inculturation, the new contexts and the youth condition.

Openness to dialogue, to what is new, to the rich qualities and talents of our collaborators will increase the ability to give new responses.

This new style enables the lay person to take on real responsibilities with respect to the mission.  Commitment is a determining factor in some cases, especially among the young, for vocational discernment and the choice of a life of consecration.

Thanks to these stimuli, the Salesian becomes aware of the primacy of God in life, of the prophecy of the Kingdom, witnessing to communion, a worker of salvation in the midst of the young, and a guide in spiritual life.

Already Fr Egidio Viganò, in convoking the G24, had said: “To tackle the theme of the laity means to speak of the salesian community to itself, of the reformulation of its services and commitments, of its manner of being and working.  Testimony of fidelity to God’s gift, received and expressed on the part of a religious community more attentive to the requirements and shared responsibility of the laity, cannot fail to involve, from the standpoint of identity, the primacy of spirituality”.1

3. Development of a process of formation in common

[55]

Mission, inculturation, dialogue, communication, all demand a new style of formation for facing present circumstances, for responding to the young and for sharing responsibility with lay people in the mission.

The laity ask in the first place for the elaboration of a plan of formation for their spiritual and charismatic preparation.  Secondly they note that formation to communion and sharing should be realized by both parties together.

At the same time we have to face up to the changed youth condition; together we have to address the vast plurireligious and pluricultural contexts; together we must live the fruitfulness of the CEP and the efficacy of the PEPS; together we have to find new initiatives like the volunteer movement or other significant experiences.

The conviction is also increasing that the field of daily commitment is the place for authentic growth: the web of relationships created by a lively and efficient CEP becomes a setting for intense ongoing formation, touching on human, pedagogical and salesian aspects.  These relationships are a vehicle for messages, they prepare us to use new languages, they foster a more attentive listening to what the world and youth culture are saying, especially when the CEP promotes youthful protagonism.

[56]

Sensitive to the provocations which reach us from our world, and especially to those of the young, in the light of God’s gifts and of the vocation to which we are called we are conscious of our limitations, and so we pray:

With humble hearts

we confess, O Father:

our inability to meet the challenges

of the world of the young,

and the frailty of a faith

which does not dare to hope;

the fading of an ardour

which does not prompt us to seek new ways,

and the many fears which hold us back

from the mutual exchange of gifts;

our tiredness and omissions

and our poverty of every other kind.

But with serene trust and confidence

and celebrating the power of your grace

we dare to ask you for:

mature faith

love for the young

apostolic courage

renewed creativity

salesian optimism

the will for communion

and patient charity.

*"The good man seemed to be beside himself with joy at having a church in his house.*

*Thank you, my good friend, for your kindness and good will.*

*I accept these generous offers, provided you can promise me that I can come here next Sunday with my boys".  (MO, p.256-7).*

SECOND PART

SALESIANS AND LAITY

MEMORIES AND PROPHECY

CHAPTER 1

SDBs and Laity in the world and in the Church         (nn 57 - 68)

CHAPTER 2

Radiation of the charism                              (nn 69 - 86)

CHAPTER 3

Spirit and Mission to be lived together               (nn 87 - 105)

CHAPTER 1

SALESIANS (SDBs) AND LAITY IN THE WORLD AND IN THE CHURCH

**1. Called by the Father to work in his Kingdom**

[57]

*"To me", wrote Don Bosco on his arrival at Valdocco, it seemed truly to be the place of which I had dreamed and seen written: Haec domus mea, inde gloria mea".  And he went on to emphasize the solicitude in granting the faculties "to have sung Masses, to make triduums, novenas and retreats, to admit to confirmation and holy communion, and to certify that all those who regularly attended our programme had fulfilled their Easter duty".*  From the entire story it is easy to deduce that "to be Church" and make the "experience of Church" is at the heart of Don Bosco's plan of education.

The opening at Valdocco on Easter Sunday 1846 became the sign of the special linkage between on Bosco's Oratory and the Resurrection Community.

The salesian mission was to be at the service of the great project of communion which began at the creation and reached its fullness in Christ's Easter victory.

[58]

**Created to live and build communion**

Man was created *"in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1,26) and is called to exist in a relationship which manifests the gift of the Trinitarian communion present in his heart.*

This gift is also a commitment (cf. Gen 1,28).  Life is a call to grow in communion with God and with others, to develop one's personal resources and transform the world and nature into a dwelling place worthy of the human family.

This communion is expressed in the first place in the relationship between man and woman (cf. Gen 2,18) who have equal dignity and responsibility.  It is a matter of a reciprocal and complementary relationship lived especially in the family, the fundamental subject of society, a community of persons which renders visible and communicates the gift of communion.

[59]

**In acceptance of creation and of history**

*"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1,31).  Created realities have an intrinsic goodness, their own autonomy and consistency.*

Humanity responds to the initiative of God, who calls it and collaborates with it for the transformation of the world through work, science and technology, in the development of society through politics and economics, in the pursuit of justice and solidarity among different peoples.  Of this the witness of great men and women is a sign.  Such a project manifests the unity of all human beings who come from the same Source and have the same final End.  God truly loves the world and involves everyone in working together to build it in unity and peace (cf.GS 92).

[60]

**In a process of reconciliation**

In the history of humanity sin destroyed the original unity, shattered interpersonal relationships, changed God's truth into lies and brought death into the world (cf.Gen 3,1-24; Wis 2,24).

Nevertheless the final word is not sin and man's death, but love and the life of God (cf.Gen 3,15).  From the initial shipwreck of humanity began the long and still unfinished story of human adventure, which is at the same time both profane and salvific.

Fragments of salvation are particularly evident in the different religions.  These manifest the force of humanity in seeking God, a search prompted by grace and having its definitive fullness in the mystery of Christ (cf. LG 16, NA 1.2).  God's presence and action can also be seen in persons of good will and upright conscience.

This is an invitation to us to collaborate with them and with believers of different religions in building a world which is more human, just and fraternal.

**2. Called by Christ to be signs and instruments of communion and participation**

[61]

**The incarnate Christ, realization of communion**

By the incarnation the Son of God became inserted in the human family, lived as a workman among the people of the time, assuming their culture and religion, and becoming similar to us in all things but sin.  In this way he sanctified human bonds, and in the first place those of the family, and gave value and new dignity to all created realities which became means and instruments for communion with God.

Jesus Christ broke down all barriers and gave preference to the poor and lowly as a characteristic of his evangelizing mission.

By his Easter victory he was constituted the firstborn of all creation, and through him God rebuilt the original communion among all things, those of earth and those of heaven (cf.Col 1,17.20).

[62]

**The Church, sign and instrument of communion and participation**

This new reality is anticipated in the Church, which has the mission to proclaim and construct the Kingdom of God.

Its fundamental vocation is to be united to Christ (cf.Jn 15,5).  From this bond stems communion amongst all (cf.Eph 2,14-15), the intensity of which is conveyed by the biblical image of the Body of Christ and the People of God (cf.LG 7 and 9).  It is a communion which is born in Baptism and Confirmation, and nourished in the Eucharist (cf.1 Cor 12,13).  But it is a fragile communion: personal and communal sins can weaken it to the point of rupture.  The sacrament of Reconciliation gives it new life and strength.

[63]

**The Church, leaven of the Kingdom in human history**

The Church, animated by the Spirit, is able to recognize him and serve him wherever he is manifested, so that all human reality may meet with salvation.  Communion and mission are deeply linked to one another, to the extent that communion represents the source and at the same time the fruit of the mission (CL 32).

All members of the Church without exception, each in line with his particular vocation, are called upon to take an active and responsible part in this mission.  All, by the depth of their faith, the fraternity of communal life, the riches of their charismata and the dynamism of their commitment, proclaim the Kingdom and render it present.

[64]

**The Church and the secular mission**

The Church is in the world and for the world.  It takes up secular values, purifying them and raising them through the newness of the Passover.  Truly *"the Church has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members" (CL 15).*

In this time of deep transformations in culture and society, believers are called to unite with all men of good will to develop the seeds of the Kingdom which are present everywhere: signs of the Holy Spirit who is working in creation and in history.

**3. Unity and diversity in the common mission**

[65]

**Richness of the Spirit's gifts**

The Church receives from the Risen Christ the Spirit of the Father which makes her a participant in the life of the Trinity, unifies her in communion and ministry, and adorns her with various charisms and gifts.  The Spirit prompts the Church to open herself to the world and to cultures so as to transform them by the force of the Gospel, and renews her in the different phases of inculturation, finally leading her to perfect communion with her Spouse (cf.LG 4).

Through the action of the Spirit, the ecclesial community is an organic community, characterized by the presence of different and complementary vocations, charisms and ministries (cf.1 Cor 12,4-7).

They are at the service of the growth of the Body of Christ in history and of his mission in the world.

[66]

**Plurality of ministries**

All in the Church are consecrated and sent out in virtue of Baptism and Confirmation.  Nevertheless the ordained ministry and consecrated life presuppose a specific form of consecration in view of a particular mission.

The *lay faithful, through the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation are called to be signs of the Kingdom in the world, dealing with temporal matters and ordering them to God.  The secular character is the distinguishing element of their Christian existence (cf.LG 31).  They live the common vocation to holiness in work, in the family, in politics and economics, in science and art and in social communication, with a commitment to human advancement and evangelization.  The lay Christian is therefore a member of the Church in the heart of the world and a member of the world in the heart of the Church (cf.Puebla 103).*

The *ordained ministers, in addition to the fundamental consecration deriving from Baptism and in virtue of the anointing of the Holy Spirit received in the Sacrament of Order, are marked by a special character which conforms them to Christ the Priest (cf.PO 2).  They are stimulated by the charity of the Good Shepherd to give life to the sheep (cf.PO 13) and to build an ecclesial communion animated by the Bishop, who presides over it.  The ordained ministry is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful.*

*Consecrated persons who embrace the evangelical counsels receive a new and particular consecration which, without being sacramental, commits them to making their own the form of life of Jesus which he proposed to the disciples (cf.VC 31).  Religious life manifests in a particularly rich way the evangelical benefits and the purpose of the Church, which is the sanctification of the human race (VC 32).  Their life of communion becomes a sign for the world and orients it to belief in Christ (cf.VC 46; 51).*

[67]

**Reciprocal and complementary nature of the man-woman relationship in Christ**

The new rapport with God in Christ provokes an innovation in the deep relationship between man and woman.  The innovation is made visible particularly in the vocation to marriage, becoming a sign of the intimate union between Christ and his Church (cf.Eph 5,32).

In the ecclesial setting the mutual relationship between man and women is of vital importance.  There seems to be an urgent need for allotting more space to the woman in social and also ecclesial life (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to women).*

[68]

**Mary, Icon of the Church as Communion**

Let us turn our eyes to Mary.

She has been called to a particular communion with the Trinity who willed that she should be the Mother of the Word to give him to the world.  The Church looks to her on its pilgrimage through time.  To her Don Bosco turned from the moment of his dream at the age of nine, by her he was educated and became a man totally for God and totally for the young.

CHAPTER 2

RADIATION OF THE CHARISM

[69]

*"We heard with our own ears, O God, our fathers have told us the story of the things you did in their days, you yourself, in days long ago" (Ps 43).*

In the plan of salvation which God carries out through the Church, we Salesians contemplate the charism which the Spirit has brought to life and spread through Don Bosco.

Through the mediation of Mary, the Lord called him to take care of "the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger" (C 26); and he did not leave him by himself, but made him the Father of a great family and the guide of a host of youngsters.  For this reason his story is our story also.

As we look at Don Bosco our ability for discernment becomes enlightened, and our desire increases to say to lay people what he himself said to the young Michael Rua: "We shall go halves in everything".

**1. At the origins**

[70]

**Don Bosco's youth and adolescence**

From his boyhood Don Bosco was a great communicator and animator, able to create groups and associations and involve their members, making intelligent appeals to the energies of all of them.  At Chieri, where he was esteemed by his companions as the leader of a small circle, he founded the Society of Joy, and during the holidays extended the concept to Morialdo, where he founded another society with the same name.

[71]

**The experiences at Valdocco**

With equal determination, as a young diocesan priest he did something similar with the group of collaborators of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.  He fostered participation and the sharing of responsibility by ecclesiastics and laity, men and women.

They helped him to teach catechism and other classes, assist in church, lead the youngsters in prayer, prepare them for their first communion and confirmation, keep order in the playground where they played with the boys, and help the more needy to find employment with some honest patron.

Meanwhile Don Bosco took good care of their spiritual life, with personal encounters, conferences, spiritual direction and the administration of the sacraments.

[72]

In the apostolate the primary collaborators were the boys who had lived with him for some time and shared with him service of their neighbour in the most abandoned.  Those most closely attached to Don Bosco carried out this service among their peers through the various Sodalities: those of the Immaculate Conception, the Blessed Sacrament, St Aloysius and St Joseph.

Everyone followed the example of Don Bosco; he in turn pointed to St Francis de Sales, principal patron of the Oratory, as a model of apostolic dedication and loving kindness.  Such examples attracted some of the youngsters even to truly heroic acts of virtue.

On 18 December 1859, he started up with some of them the Society of St Francis de Sales.  This was a religious community which from its very first years showed itself open to the values of the world, taking on a secular dimension manifested in a specific manner by the presence of salesian coadjutor brothers.  These helped in particular to link the salesian community with civil society, and especially with the world of work.

Don Bosco did not fail either to make good use of the advice of the liberal minister Urban Ratazzi, who was responsible for laws hostile to the Church, but who nonetheless showed him the politically correct way to found a new religious society whose members would preserve all their civil rights.

[73]

In the first draft of the Constitutions Don Bosco foresaw the existence of Salesians who could belong to the Salesian Society while living in the world, without professing the three vows but striving to put into practice that part of the Regulations compatible with their age and condition.  But since he was unable to succeed with this plan because of the juridical difficulties of the time, the Saint founded the Pious Union of Cooperators which he considered "of the greatest importance" as "the soul of the Congregation" (cf. SGC 733).  His Regulations were approved on 24 June 1876.  At the same time, at the suggestion of Carlo Gastini, Don Bosco founded the Past-pupils Association to share in the salesian mission in civil society by the fruitful application of the education they had received.

Even earlier he had set up the Archconfraternity of the Clients of Mary Help of Christians (known now as ADMA), erected on 5 April 1870 by a Brief of Pope Pius IX.

[74]

**Feminine collaboration**

Despite the attitude of reserve and detachment from the feminine world which Don Bosco shared with the clergy of his time, he developed a style of simple and delicate cordiality to women with whom he came in contact.

Their presence was essential for the life of the Oratory.  There was Mamma Margaret, the first cooperator and mother of the Oratory, with whom Don Bosco shared the running of the house.  Later there was the mother of Don Rua and of Michael Magone.  Other women of Turin society collaborated with him.  They gave Don Bosco a hand, helped him financially in domestic activities, and smoothed the way for him to reach government officials.

It became clear in this way that for the realization of a family atmosphere the presence of women was extremely useful.  They were able to provide complementary interventions which enriched the educative relationship and gave a particular tone to salesian loving kindness.

The prospects offered to Don Bosco by the Marchioness of Barolo of working for poor girls subsequently led him to do something for the girls as well.  After meeting Don Pestarino and the group of young women of Mornese, led by Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Don Bosco perceived the possibility of realizing for the benefit of girls what he had had at heart for some time.  He was happy to recognize the plan of God who by a singular design of grace had instilled the same experience of apostolic charity in St Mary Domenica, involving her in a unique manner in the foundation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (cf. C-FMA 2).

[75]

**A common patrimony**

Without any doubt there grew up around Don Bosco a vast movement of persons and groups, of men, women and youngsters, of the most diverse conditions of life, who shared with him some elements which became authoritative point of reference: a *spirituality modelled on that of St Francis de Sales; a well-defined mission - the salvation of youth and especially those poor and abandoned; a dynamic project of education and evangelization: the preventive system (of which Don Bosco tried also to write a version adapted to the laity); an environment, in which the original contributions of each one became fused into a common purpose: the Oratory, characterized by a climate and typical style called the family spirit, where each one felt welcome, valued and helped to give and to receive.*

From the beginning, Valdocco was *"a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves" (C 40).*

Don Bosco went ahead, not without tensions, enlarging the frontiers of the mission for poor and abandoned youngsters with the opening of new works both in and outside Italy.  Beginning in 1875 he organized missionary expeditions to Latin America, which have continued year by year.

His famous *dreams provide almost a detailed panorama of the vast areas he covered with his mission: lands from Valparaiso to Beijing, by way of Africa.*

**2. In the salesian tradition**

[76]

**In continuity**

From Don Bosco right down to the present day, the idea of the laity and the awareness of their role has become, albeit slowly, something ever more vigorous in the Church and the Congregation.

Vatican II, in particular, set out in a new way the role of the laity in the Church and in the world.  To his appeal the Salesian Congregation makes every effort to respond with a growing involvement of lay people.

**The Cooperators**

From the time of Don Bosco to the Special General Chapter there were no outstanding changes in the understanding of the vocation of the Cooperators.  The GC19 and especially the GC20 (SGC) brought about a radical change of mentality.  They can no longer be seen as simple benefactors or executors.  They must be recognized rather as full sharers in the responsibility for the salesian mission and points of reference for lay people in the broad salesian movement.  This was the sense in which their new Regulations for Apostolic Life were approved in 1986.

[78]

**The Past-pupils**

From 1898, with the intervention of Don Rua, the past-pupils of the individual houses have accepted the invitation to form associations on the model of the Valdocco Oratory.

In July 1909 the Statute of the International Federation was drawn up, and received a considerable impulse during Don Rinaldi's period as Rector Major; in Don Ziggiotti's first years it became a World Confederation: a civil association which gathered together past-pupils without ethnic or religious distinction.  Recently have been added the women past-pupils of our environments, recognized in the new Confederal Statute as members with full rights.  This statute clearly defines the identity of the past-pupil and opens up new horizons in the field of the salesian mission.

[79]

**Secular Institutes**

In 1917 some girls of the FMA Oratory in Turin expressed to Don Rinaldi the desire to consecrate themselves to God while remaining in the world; they called themselves the Zealots of Mary Help of Christians.  Later they became the Cooperator Oblates of St John Bosco, and today they are the Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV).  In 1965 the Turin diocesan authorities recognized them as a Pious Association, and in 1971 as a Secular Institute of diocesan right.

In 1978 they were recognized as a Secular Institute of pontifical right.  The kingpins of their vocation are salesianity, secularity and consecration.  The Rector Major and his Council have declared them to be members of the Salesian Family in the strict sense.

After the GC23 a similar male group has begun to develop with the title Don Bosco Secular Institute (DBS).

[80]

**Other lay groups**

Don Bosco also started up the Association of Clients of Mary Help of Christians, involving them in the spirituality and mission of the Congregation by commitments readily realizable by the majority of simple people.

Recently another group has been formed, made up of women only, the Association 'Damas Salesianas'.

[81]

**Common elements in the Salesian Family**

The groups belonging to the Salesian Family *"participate in a true spiritual kinship and apostolic consanguinity" (Common Identity Card, art.10), characterized by the sharing of the same salesian spirit and some basic elements, usually listed as follows:*

- rooted in the mystery of Christ and entrustment to Mary;

- sense of Church;

- union with God and style of prayer;

- pastoral charity for the mission to the young and the poor;

- alertness to the challenges of the new evangelization;

- the grace of unity;

- the ascesis of kindness;

- optimism and the joy of hope;

- work and temperance;

- the spirit of initiative.

*(cf. Common Identity Card, art.18 ff.)*

[82]

**The Salesian Bulletin**

Don Bosco saw the Salesian Bulletin as an instrument for linkage, animation, formation and involvement of large numbers of lay people who looked kindly on his work.  Today the Bulletin is published in numerous editions in the different geographical areas of the world, and represents a very valuable instrument of communication for a fuller sharing of the salesian spirit and a more updated involvement in the educative and evangelizing mission of the Salesian Family and Movement.

**3. Lines emerging**

[83]

**Involvement of apostolic forces**

Though conditioned by the ecclesiology of his time, Don Bosco and the Salesians have propagated the charism, trying to involve all sorts of persons in the education of the young.

Thinking back over recent times:

- The GC19 looked at the laity with prudence, accepting some externs as teachers and choosing them from the best of the Cooperators and Past-pupils.  The key posts in the educative structure were reserved to Salesians.

- The SGC rethought the salesian project and mission in the light of Vatican II, seeking *"a wide grouping of apostolic forces linked together in the unity of a family" (SGC 152).*

- The GC21, drawing inspiration from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi, put before the salesian community the challenge of evangelization.  The community was always considered as the animator of the CEP in the realization of the PEPS.  In it the Salesians and lay people were both evangelized and evangelizers.*

- This openness was confirmed and extended by the GC22, in the definitive text of the Constitutions (C 5.47).

- The relationship between SDBs and Laity matured significantly in the GC23, focusing on the education of young people to the faith.  The SDB community became responsible for the animation and formation of the CEP and of the Salesian Family (GC23 235), with the specific task of drawing up the *Lay Project.*

[84]

**Lay animators**

The persons who from Don Bosco onwards have shared in the salesian mission, felt the need for a spiritual convergence, in the awareness of having received a gift which they must pass on to others.

A big number of them felt it their duty to give embodiment to the charism with Don Bosco and the times.  They shared the objective of education, and laboured generously to prepare young people to take a worthy place in society.

For many, the involvement and shared responsibility involved also the objective of evangelization, thus fully realizing the project of the preventive system.

Among these there are some young people who commit themselves in various ways to animation for the benefit of their peers.  In this way there has grown in recent years the Salesian Youth Movement and in particular the new experience of the Volunteer Movement.

[85]

**Lay friends of Don Bosco**

Don Bosco always had many friends, scattered all over the world and in the most varied environments.  Their number has not decreased with the passing of time, nor has the bond become weaker between them and our Father and Founder.

They want to keep Don Bosco's spirit alive  and ensure the extension of the salesian mission.  They offer themselves to help the Salesian Family to know the real situation of youth, and to try to respond to the challenges they present.  These friends are enthusiastic and want to collaborate, making available their time and financial possibilities.

[86]

**Lay people outside the structures**

Thanks to the determined efforts of so many lay people the salesian mission has passed beyond institutional limits and is spreading beyond salesian structures and works.  In this way it comes in contact with other ecclesial realities, with civil society and especially with youngsters in difficult situations, dialoguing with cultures and popular traditions.  In consequence the charism is spreading everywhere.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPIRIT AND MISSION TO BE LIVED TOGETHER

**1. At the roots of our unity**

[87]

As we have recalled the beginnings at Valdocco we have met not only Don Bosco's pastoral heart but also his ability to involve others.  Thanks to the support of ecclesiastics and lay people, a church, dormitories and playgrounds all became a reality.

This is something that invites us to renew our oratorian heart and prompts us to deeper communion with all those who, in structured or personal ways, want to advance Don Bosco's charism.  Together, we humbly place ourselves with watchful attention at the service of humanity, committing ourselves with fresh enthusiasm to give authenticity to our vocation, so that the salesian mission may give ever more fully its contribution to the Church and to the world.

[88]

**The spirit which has been given to us**

For this purpose we are called to share in the Salesian Family with all the lay people, not only in the carrying out of  daily work but primarily in the *salesian spirit, to become sharers in the responsibility for the mission in our works and beyond them.  This spirit, as presented by the Special General Chapter (SGC 85 ff,) is an ensemble of aspects and values of the human world and Christian mystery which becomes our particular style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, centred on pastoral charity.  Don Bosco attracts kindly feeling and stirs up the participation of committed lay persons.  He invites us to make with them a spiritual pilgrimage which, based on the salesian spirit shared at different levels, can reach an option of faith and a spirituality which is lived and communicated,*

The communication of such a spirit belongs in the first place to those who are consecrated: "In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate the most precious gift of the spirit" (VC 55).

We are aware that this is a true and proper school of holiness.  One grasps at once the richness of the salesian spirit when, in terms of practical life, it becomes a spirituality.  Of the latter we must now look again at some of its principal characteristics.

**2. Elements of the spirituality**

**2.1  Preferential love for the young, especially the poorer ones**

[89]

**Meeting God in the young**

Sharing the salesian spirit and mission means in the first place feeling oneself involved in the option for the young.

"We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life" (GC23, 95).  In this educative service, both Salesians and laity experience the contemplative dimension of their faith, and are able to discover the action of the Spirit in the heart of the young (cf.C 95).

Sharing in the heart of God, the disciple of Don Bosco has a better understanding of the importance and urgency of his own vocation to render present to the young Christ's love for them.  Prompted by this love he dedicates himself totally to their integral education (cf.SGC 91).

Hence, work for the young, and especially for the poorest of them, is the identity card of the salesian vocation, the most involving element of our charism, the starting-point for a process of greater and more profound sharing in the salesian spirit and the preventive system.

[90]

**Pastoral charity**

To realize this vocation, SDBs and laity open a cordial dialogue with all persons of good will who want to improve the situation of the young, and especially the poor ones, in today's world.  Following the example of Don Bosco, they choose for themselves and propagate among others charity as the means and fundamental method of the mission.  In this work they give added weight to the important values of salesian spirituality, like generosity, solidarity, simplicity, gratitude, fidelity, joy and optimism even at dark moments, expressing in this way the paschal dimension of Christian life.

**2.2  Spirituality of relationship: the family spirit**

[91]

**Don Bosco, man of relationships**

The first gift Don Bosco gives to his disciples is that of a serene and welcoming human relationship. His self-control allowed him to give himself to others with extraordinary efficacy, and to give gradually to relationships a pastoral and sacramental content.  The quality of educative encounters was always foremost in his mind.  "Let all you speak with become your friends", he used to say, and "to be a friend of Don Bosco meant everything at Valdocco: spiritual commitment, interior happiness, collaboration in education, family joy.  He was convinces that the salesian spirit "must animate and guide all we do and say".  He is forthright about this in his letters to Don Cagliero and Don Costamagna in August 1885: "The preventive system must be our distinguishing characteristic. (...) Charity, patience, kindness (...) This holds for the Salesians among themselves, with the pupils and others, externs or boarders".  "Study how you can make yourself loved", he murmured to Don Rua, leaving him what seemed a final message and indicating to him the secret of the art of the Good Shepherd.  At the end of his life therefore, he handed on as a deep conviction and precious legacy, the intuition he had received in his dream at the age of 9 years,  And in his predilection for the 'relational virtues' as the bearings for educative dialogue and practical collaboration, Don Bosco proved an excellent disciple of St Francis de Sales.

[92]

**A need of today's men and women**

Today people bewail a widespread absence of relationships, and loneliness gives rise to more fear than death itself, especially among the young and the aged.  The human sciences describe man as a being of relationships.  He is immersed in them from the time he leaves his mother's womb.  A positive relationship builds him up and makes him happy; a negative one can depress and even destroy him.  In any case rapport is at the heart of every educative approach, of every effort at collaboration, from family harmony to the efficacy of a pastoral and educative community.  *"We must be brothers to men at the same time that we want to be their pastors, fathers and teachers.  The right atmosphere for dialogue is friendship, or rather service" (Paul VI, Ecclesiam suam).*

[93]

**The salesian response: loving kindness**

What we hear from the laity and from young people convinces us of the great desire there is for rapport; and that in the Congregation there are numerous experiences which provide grounds for hope that we can grow in this direction, giving full expression - together with lay people and primarily in their regard -  to the rich values of salesian loving kindness and the family spirit which stems from it.

It can run the risk of being downgraded to the level of a purely technical instrument, latching on to another person, young or adult, and manipulating his personality.  For this reason it must be so filled with charity that it becomes transformed into an expression of authentic relational spirituality.  Its fruit and sign is the serene chastity, so dear to Don Bosco, which governs affective balance and oblative fidelity.  Strengthened and purified in this way, educative rapport is expressed in the personal encounter, builds a formative and stimulating environment, encourages group processes, and accompanies vocational maturing.

**2.3  Commitment in the Church for the world**

[94]

**The force of "da mihi animas" and the New Evangelization**

"*"Da mihi animas" just about fills the whole life of those who take their inspiration from Don Bosco, indicating rapport with God, relations with one's neighbour, and intervention in history with a personal contribution.  It concerns contemplation not less than action, the will to do good, and the determination to find the necessary means.*

As Salesians, we express the significance of our existence by the ardour of our pastoral charity.

At the present day one perceives a cultural crisis of notable proportions, the challenge of the *New Evangelization.  The heart of the response to it is the inculturation of the Gospel: this indeed has become a pressing obligation for the Church.  Salesians and laity alike are called to become ever more aware of the setting in which they have to work: culture and education.*

[95]

**The challenge of contemporary culture**

Today we are witnessing an increased social, civil and political sensitivity.  It obliges all who follow Don Bosco to give the same attention that he did to movements and cultural changes.  In this way the *politics of the Pater noster become the projection of a society renewed through work carried out conscientiously and with competence, cultural elevation and joyful faith, so as to make all men equally children of the same Father.*

In this task the renewed consciousness of the laity evokes the responsibility of all men of good will.  Some things are urgently required: the family as the 'sanctuary of life', respect for the dignity of the person and his rights, the spreading of a culture of solidarity and peace, human advancement leading to more just living conditions, and the defence of ecological balance.  The direct insertion of lay people into public life must be reasserted and sustained; it must be lived with a spirit of service, to give growth to justice and fraternity, directing attention to the poorest and most abandoned. (cf.CL 42)

[96]

**Together towards a new apostolic commitment**

The discernment of cultures as a human reality to be evangelized demands a new kind of collaboration among all responsible for the work of evangelization.  Salesians and lay Christians are called upon to give effect to the force received in baptism: faith; to entrust themselves to him with an attitude of unwavering certainty: hope; and to give as a sign that they belong to him the availability towards all, which is charity.

We are committed to seeing to it that the faith proclaimed, lived and celebrated to the full, becomes culture: authentic cultural values, assessed and assumed in the light of faith, are necessary for the incarnation of the same culture of the evangelical message.  To fulfil this task the CEP becomes "an experience of communion and a place of grace, where the teaching programme contributes to uniting into a harmonious whole the human and the divine, the Gospel and culture, faith and life" (VC 96).

In this new panorama, inspired by the Word of God and the social doctrine of the Church, one can continue with the evangelical innovation which gives central place to the salvation of the person, to service, and to orientation towards the Kingdom.  For the Salesians it is an invitation to deepen the radical nature of their 'sequela Christi', and for the laity to progress in the synthesis between acceptance of the Gospel and practical activity.

The programme of life condensed in the beatitudes which present the values of the Kingdom and of the 'Our Father' can be proposed also to those who belong to other religions.

**2.4  Spirituality of daily life and of work**

[97]

**Daily life the place for meeting God**

Don Bosco proposed to his first collaborators, as he did also to the boys of the Oratory, a manner of living the Gospel in depth, without detaching themselves from life: *living in the presence of God.*

Daily life constituted for Don Bosco the natural setting for the perfecting of all men, the place of response to the human and Christian vocation, and for us Salesians also the religious vocation.

Intuition of the value of daily life leads us to exploit with the laity the whole of creation as a gift of God: life, nature, material things produced by man, interpersonal relationships.

In solidarity with the world and its history (C 7), we share with the laity the joys and difficulties stemming from the social context in which we are inserted, seeking together to find in it the signs of God's will.

[98]

**The gift of work and the professions**

Don Bosco taught his boys to use their time in tasks useful for personal or communal life in a healthy, educative and creative form.  He himself was an example of a life totally dedicated to work, and he wanted his Salesians to be characterized by the spirit of enterprise and hard work.

Looking back on this experience, we see in Valdocco a true school of work: it developed a pedagogy of duty which educated to this practical form of living the spirituality.

Work, when perceived as an integral part of God's plan for all men, leads us to defend the dignity of all work and of man as its subject.  This awareness exploits the combined and individual endeavours of Salesians and laity for the education of the young.

From us, in line with the characteristics of our specific vocation, is demanded a professional approach, i.e. the greatest possible perfection in our own work.  This implies the generous acceptance of the toil involved, the constant commitment and ongoing formation that goes with it.  Discipline and sense of duty become for us our path of ascesis, the concrete measure of our spiritual maturity.

**2.5  The preventive system: constant listening to God and to man**

[99]

**A pedagogical approach continually renewed**

We are convinced that the principal contribution to the changing of the world for the coming of the Kingdom is commitment to education.  "There is no doubt", as Pope John Paul II affirmed, "that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the spiritually mature man, i.e. man fully educated, man able to educate himself and others".  The main original contribution we can offer to the cause of education is the preventive system.  Its permanent vitality is shown in the ability to respond to the most diverse challenges.  In the multiple situations in which it operates, it needs continual reunderstanding.  The urgent need for this was indicated by Fr Egidio Viganò when he spoke of a new preventive system.

The essential element of such newness is the *sharing between SDBs, lay adults and young people in an educative and pastoral praxis always in dialogue with the discoveries of science and with the various contexts in which we are working.*

[100]

**Central elements of the preventive system**

To guarantee fidelity and success we need to reconsider the original intuitions of Don Bosco.  He was convinced that *"this system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness" (MB 13 919).  We are called upon to look in a new way at the three fundamental elements he indicated.*

**a) Reason**

To Don Bosco's way of thinking reason is synonymous with fairness and persuasion, seen in opposition to repression and imposition.  It helps to evaluate everything with a critical sense and to discern the authentic value of earthly realities, respecting their autonomy and secular dignity.  It enables the great endeavours of mankind to be discovered and shared, in the continual and laborious process of personalization and socialization.  More by deeds than by words Don Bosco has shown us that at the root of his system of education there is a solid humanism and a genuine appreciation of the reality of created things.  This makes of the preventive system an *open system, rich in human hope and able to come to grips with the different cultural situations.  For this reason it implies a particular attention to contexts, a previous assessment of the youth situation and an effective arrangement of educative interventions through the elaboration of the PEPS.  This enables a balanced educative process to be set up, avoiding the double risks of 'minimalism' (fear of suggesting anything new) or of going to the other extreme of rushing ahead too fast and imposing weights that cannot be borne.*

**b) Religion**

*Religion, understood as faith which has been accepted and given correspondence, represents the meeting point between the Mystery of God and the mystery of man, linked with the frailty of his history and culture, but also quickened by God's sure call.  The awareness of such a reality invites us to imitate God's patience, meeting young people and laity "at their present stage of freedom" (C 38).*

If on the one hand we must recognize that *missionary territory now includes every part of the world, on the other we must be ready to find ways of education to the faith which are gradual and specifically aimed.*

In Christian contexts it is still possible to realize the preventive system with a certain completeness and help the lay faithful, adult and young, to discover the countenance of Jesus.  Listening to the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and especially the Eucharist and Penance, commitment to charity and witness, the happiness of living beneath the gaze of a loving Father, are still possible educative objectives to be proposed without undue hesitation and within a serenely ecumenical approach. (cf.GC23, 68-71).

In secularized contexts, where culture seems mute and incapable of speaking of the Father of Jesus Christ, it will be necessary to educate the invocations of transcendence and the great demands arising from the sense of life and death, pain and love, without concealing the beam of light which comes to us from our faith (cf.GC23, 76.77.83).

In the contexts of the great monotheistic and traditional religions, the first educative dialogue will be with the lay people who are nearest, to recognize with them the grace present in such religions, encourage their desire for prayer, and exploit the fragments of the Gospel and of educative wisdom present in the culture, life and experience of the young people (cf.GC23, 72-74, 86).

Often we find ourselves working with youngsters and lay people, with men and women of good will, who do not manifest any specific religious attachment.  In such cases the preventive system aims at finding and welcoming the spark of truth deposited in every human heart, in fostering the "dialogue of life" - especially "in the concern for human life" and "in promoting the dignity of women" - "which prepares the way for more profound exchanges" (cf.VC 102).

**c) Loving kindness**

This is expressed as unconditioned acceptance, constructive and positive rapport, sharing of joys and sorrows, and the ability to manifest educative love by signs.  In addition to inviting each educator to be cordially and faithfully present among the young, it commits the community to the creation of an authentic family spirit.

It also expresses the pastoral charity which promotes a new educative culture by "offering a specific contribution to the work of other educators" (VC 96).

Together with those lay people who take their inspiration from Don Bosco, we have an explicit duty to seek the best ways and means for transplanting his geniality into public life, in the world of culture, of politics, of social life.  This can then give life to the new education which opens the way to the new evangelization.

It will be necessary to give special thought to strategies for installing the preventive system in families, helping them to shed light on modern problems and aspirations, and to create an environment of joy, dialogue and solidarity, transforming them in this way to authentic "domestic churches".

**3. A pedagogy for living together in Don Bosco's mission and spirit**

[101]

**Formation together**

The realization of communion and sharing of the spirit and mission of Don Bosco implies for us, SDBs and laity, that while respecting the laws of the Church (cf. CIC 241,1), we renew our formation processes.

A change of mentality is needed: *grow together, form ourselves together.*

Don Bosco recommended to the lay Cooperators: "Let us be united among ourselves and with the whole Congregation.  Let us be united by having the same end in view and using the same means to attain it.  Let us unite as a single family through the bonds of fraternal charity" (Sal.Bulletin, January 1878).

We believe that from this new method will depend in large measure the results we hope to achieve.

[102]

**Pedagogy of the oratorian heart and of the mission**

The first step that we SDBs and laity have to take is that of getting to know and appreciate each other, as regards both what we have in common and how we differ.  The point of convergence is the oratorian heart and the style of the Good Shepherd.  This is the deep source of unity for all who are called to work with Don Bosco.  The salesian spirit, lived with sensitivity and various accentuations, should nevertheless be made known to all in its essential elements.  But theoretical reflection is not enough.  With Don Bosco we believe that working together offers us the most opportune methods for formation together.  In sharing the mission, every individual, every CEP and every salesian group gains a concrete experience of the preventive system, and acquires the ability to learn from life (cf. C 119).

[103]

**Let us share a process of formation**

The commitment to shared formation must become a process open to all, adapted to the rate of progress of each individual and respectful of the riches of every vocation.  Particular processes, drawn up together, must also be set up progressively from time to time.  These will provide more detailed experiences, content and objectives, in line with particular situations (cf.GC23, 109-110).

We think it important to cultivate in such processes the following *attitudes:*

- an attentive awareness of our manner of behaviour in relationships and communications;

- patience in listening, and willingness to give way to the other;

- the deliberate giving of trust and confidence;

- willingness to enter into the logic of exchange of gifts;

- readiness to make the first move in welcoming others with kindness;

- assumption of the daily discipline which gives value to being together;

- promptness for reconciliation.

As we carry out this process together we develop at the same time certain methods which help us to grow in spirituality and in salesian praxis:

- the Word of God placed at the centre of our own existence (cf.GC23, 146);

- the experience of daily life as the concrete space for meeting with God (cf.GC23, 162);

- the knowledge and practice of the preventive system in all its components;

- the assimilation of salesian values through experience of its various phases: living, reflecting, communicating and celebrating (cf.FSDB, c.IV, n.130 ff.; The Salesian Brother, n.188 ff.)

[104]

**Shared holiness**

22 April 1996 saw the closure at Turin, to the great joy of all present,  of the first stage in the process of the recognition of the sanctity of Mamma Margaret.  This fact makes us think of the holiness that was lived at Valdocco with a particular profile. Some of those who shared the life of the first salesian community have already had their witness to holiness recognized by the Church.

This is evidence that at Valdocco there was a particular kind of atmosphere: holiness was built up together; it was shared and mutually communicated, in such a way that the holiness of some cannot be explained without the holiness of others.

The goal of a formation realized in common with Don Bosco, which the Church and today's young people expect from us Salesians and lay people, is the gift of our holiness - not only our personal holiness but that too of the CEP and of the Salesian Family: a shared holiness (cf.C 25).

[105]

**Memories**

With joy we have recalled our rich tradition from the origins to the present day - a gift of the Spirit for our mission

We have done so:

- to celebrate the wonders the Lord has done;

- to preserve them in mind and heart as Mary did;

- to repeat "da mihi animas" as time passes by;

- as we share with the laity an oratorian heart;

- to extend the charism beyond every frontier;

- to sustain everywhere the hope of the young;

- to return to Valdocco and set out from there once again.

*I ran right back to my boys.  I gathered them round me and began to shout in a loud voice: "Great news, my sons!  We have got a place for our Oratory, a more reliable one than we have had until now.  We shall have a church, a sacristy, classrooms and a place to play.  On Sunday, next Sunday, we shall go to our new Oratory, which is over there in Pinardi's house".  And I pointed the place out to them.  (M.O. p.257)*

THIRD PART

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

CHAPTER 1

Areas of commitment                                (nn 106 - 148)

CHAPTER 2

The educative and pastoral community               (nn 149 - 179)

CHAPTER 3

Some particular new situations                     (nn 180 - 186)

CHAPTER 1

AREAS OF COMMITMENT

*INTRODUCTION*

[106]

The GC24 offers to the SDBs new perspectives for living the mission at the present day.  It wants to give rise to deep convictions and foster new styles of procedure.  To this end it believes that it is its duty to tread the signs of the times in the present strategies of evangelization and education.

After considering the social and cultural reality of a world which is becoming ever more secularized and smitten by multiple forms of youthful poverty, the conciliar theology of communion and of common responsibility in the mission of the Church, the growth in esteem for the spirit of Don Bosco, and the commitment by an ever growing number of lay people to live it in the world, the GC24 intends:

**- to fix attention on the new relationship between SDBs and laity, and hence on the consequent demand for a change in mentality and style of life, in a common process of holiness and commitment;**

**- to oblige local and provincial communities to realize this new relationship in interacting with various groups of lay people, especially with the members of the Salesian Family, of which the SDBS are and must feel themselves to be an integral part (cf.C 5);**

**- to indicate Provincials and Rectors as primarily responsible for this task in their own communities;**

**- to render participants in this project the other members of the Salesian Family, especially the FMAs and Cooperators, urging them to share the common charismatic responsibility;**

**- to give priority to the CEP as a setting for life and activity, convoking it and giving it a structure within a shared PEPS;**

**- to promote the Salesian Movement, in which are involved youngsters (SYM), their animators, volunteers, families, collaborators and friends of Don Bosco;**

**- to indicate the coming six years as the time for giving effect to the operative decisions here set out, entrusting to the provinces the task of studying how they can be applied in the various local situations;**

**- to provoke and coordinate exchanges of ideas and experiences at local, provincial and world level.**

In practice the new rapport between SDBs and laity will be realized through processes and strategies which are interdependent:

- Convinced and sincere INVOLVEMENT by both SDBs and Lay people,

- which matures into concrete and effective SHARED RESPONSIBILITY,

- with the necessary reciprocal and transparent COMMUNICATION,

- qualified by an adequate FORMATION of a mutual and complementary nature.

**1. Broadening the involvement**

[107]

From the beginning of his apostolic activity, Don Bosco incorporated in his mission many lay people in so close an involvement that he had in mind a Congregation of religious with vows and a common life (Salesians) and of lay people (extern Salesians) linked to the same mission of service to the young according to their possibilities.

Today the involvement of the laity in the educative and pastoral mission of Don Bosco is a well known fact, even if in most cases it is a matter of a presence which is prevalently professional or fortuitous and which should mature into a conscious option.  There is an urgent need to broaden and qualify the involvement of lay people who are willing to become part of this vast movement of persons working for the salvation of the young, inside and outside salesian structures, in the Church and civil institutions (C 5).

**1.1  Objective**

[108]

**To pass from a simple acceptance of the laity to an effective exploitation of their particular contribution in education and pastoral work.**

**1.2  Guidelines**

[109]

**Responsibility in involvement**

The commitment to broaden the involvement is of all those who, in fact, at different levels and under various headings are already sharing the spirit and mission of Don Bosco.  An entirely special responsibility attaches to the SDBs, because of their identity and the task given them by the Founder of being animators of the Movement which from him took its origins.

[110]

**Communal witness**

The will of the SDB community for openness and involvement is expressed in the first place through the communal witness of salesian spirituality and the ability to welcome, follow up, and see to the formation of all who intend to live Don Bosco's spirit and mission.

[111]

**Towards greater sharing**

Particular attention must be given to lay collaborators, to members of the Salesian Family and especially the Cooperators, to those belonging to the Salesian Movement, and to the parents of the youngsters and their families.  The sharing of educative ideals should be fostered through direct experience of responsibility in the CEP and through organic plans for ongoing formation.

[112]

**The youngsters**

In addition to being those to whom our work is directed, young people are active subjects and protagonists in the measure in which they grow in the sharing of our mission.  Nowadays new fields of involvement are being opened to them, such as the animation of youth groups and the volunteer movement.

[113]

**Lay people of other religions and non-believers**

Lay persons too of other religions, those practising no religion, and non-believers all deserve our attention.  Starting from their availability for involvement, they are called to grow in a valid, albeit only partial, sharing of our educative and social objectives.  This sharing should be fostered also with all those who work for the benefit of youth.

[114]

Attention to the forms of communication

Of considerable importance for involvement is the careful presentation of the image of the mission to public opinion and the spreading of its motives and values, not only by means of adequate information but especially by practical and meaningful ways of being present in the locality.

**1.3  Practical commitments**

[115]

**At local level**

The local community should foresee a *programme of involvement with fixed means and deadlines for its actuation, adapted to different situations and persons:*

a. together with the laity it should promote a knowledge of the characteristic traits of the salesian spirit and the typical elements of the lay state, through study, discussion and practical experience of sharing in significant moments of life in common: days of formation, fraternal gatherings, shared meals, festivities and celebrations, moments of prayer and of reciprocal exchange of views;

b. exploit the indispensable contribution of parents and families of the youngsters in a continual and effective manner, fostering the setting up of committees and associations which can guarantee and enrich the educative mission of Don Bosco by their participation;

c. promote the significance of the work in the local Church and neighbourhood, through adequate means of information, with experiences of occasional or systematic participation with other persons and groups who share with us the commitment to the formation of the young, and especially those who are poor.

[116]

**At provincial level**

The Provincial with his Council should:

a. stimulate a knowledge of and contact with lay people who live and work with Don Bosco's spirit outside our structures;

b. programme with them some times for exchange of ideas, encouraging their commitment of service in favour of the young;

c. study, in association with the relative organisms of the FMA and the Cooperators, the possibilities and means most likely to favour the involvement of the laity in the common mission.

**2. Promote the sharing of responsibility**

[117]

The full and responsible involvement of the laity in the mission of the Church and the Congregation brings about growth in shared responsibility.  This means respecting those tasks which correspond to the lay vocation, and helping each one to feel committed in educative and pastoral work.

It is not sufficient that there be facts or situations in which lay people are involved, but there is need for a conscious acceptance on the part of the SDBs of the necessity of promoting shared responsibility.  It is a question of creating or intensifying a new rapport between SDBs and laity, respectful of the identity and functions proper to each without confusion of roles.

Shared responsibility, expressed in dialogue, in team work, in the organization of structures and adequate organisms and in the search for financial resources, should be promoted at every level.  It is manifested especially in the CEP and in organisms of government and animation.

**2.1 Objective**

[118]

**To promote experiences, attitudes, practical processes and structures of shared responsibility which foster communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco.**

**2.2  Guidelines**

[119]

**The CEP and the PEPS**

The proper and efficacious setting for the exercise of shared responsibility of the laity in the same mission that goes back to Don Bosco is the CEP, in which SDBs and laity have an experience of communion and sharing as they draw up, actuate and verify the PEPS

[120]

**Process of active participation**

The exercise of shared responsibility is a process of the whole of the CEP, which puts at its centre young people and their needs.  All its components engage in the process of discernment, playing an active part in seeking solutions from the standpoint of the educative and pastoral project.

[121]

**Leading points**

For this purpose it is indispensable to promote:

a. a serene and progressive dialogue on the content and motivations of the educative and pastoral work, encouraging moments of fellowship between SDBs and laity;

b. work in groups, to plan objectives, times and practical methods of communication and discussion, including also the financial report and the budget for the following period;

c. the necessary integration between the demands of the educative and pastoral activity and those of family, social and political life, especially of the laity, using in the best way all the forms of collegial management already prescribed by the institutions or by law;

d. the clear attribution of roles and functions between SDBs and laity, according to the time available, the different vocations, professional competence and levels of spiritual maturity, with particular attention to the younger members of the laity  and to the members of the Salesian Family (cf.AGC 350, p.54).

[122]

**The volunteer movement**

A significant form of shared responsibility with lay people, and especially the younger ones, is the volunteer movement.  Educative service carried out full-time for a defined period, while inserted in an SDB community or a community of volunteers, in one's own province of origin, some other province or on the missions, represents a very meaningful experience for lay persons who are sharing in Don Bosco's project.

**2.3  Practical commitments**

**At local level**

[123]

*The SDB community should:*

a. exploit, as instruments for formation to shared responsibility, the internal structures of the SDB community: the community council, community day, and assembly of the confreres;

b. consolidate the CEP: make sure that all its members play an active part in the elaboration, actuation and evaluation of the PEPS; guarantee the proper functioning of the collegial organs of participation (councils, teams for guidance and coordination, administrative and economic organisms); see to it that the laity participate in decision-making (pedagogical and pastoral perspectives, new mission fields, financial implications, constructions and restructuring); foster, according to the circumstances, the assuming of directive responsibility by competent lay people;

c. promote openness to educative and pastoral initiatives started up by lay groups of the Salesian Family and, as far as possible, give them the necessary help.

[124]

As regards the volunteer movement, the local community should:

- be open to encouraging those who ask to have an experience of the volunteer movement either at home or overseas;

- follow up the volunteers who provide service in our work, attending to their formation, helping them to share in the life of the community, and guiding them in the practice of educative responsibility;

For those who return after service abroad:

- help them to acquire a proper psychological and affective balance through fraternal welcome into the family, ecclesial and social environments;

- keep in mind the financial aspect, helping them to get back into the world of work, and giving priority if possible to commitments in harmony with their life choice.

To all volunteers:

- offer the vocational possibility of concrete adherence to one of the groups of the Salesian Family (SDB, Cooperators, FMA, DBV, DBS, etc.).

**At provincial level**

[125]

  The Provincial with his Council should:

- arrange meetings and encounters with Salesians and laity responsible for the various sectors of activity, to programme and evaluate together the process of educative and pastoral action;

- set up the general framework of norms and criteria for the smooth functioning of activities, relationships between SDBs and laity, and initiatives promoted by them;

- study, and if necessary promote, the realization of projects together with groups of the Salesian Family or other lay groups.  For this purpose they should foster the constitution and efficient functioning of the local council of the Salesian Family, in which will be studied together the needs of young people of the area, and common projects will be drawn up;

- try out, where possible and convenient, different forms of management, e.g. entrusting some salesian works to lay administration, always in a manner which safeguards their salesian significance.

[126]

With regard to the volunteer movement, they should:

- help confreres and communities to recognize its importance for the salesian mission;

- draw up and give effect to a provincial plan which, in line with the guidelines of the document "The Salesian Volunteer Movement", will include detailed proposals for insertion in the educative and pastoral project, for the preparation of volunteers, for following them up during their period of service, and for welcoming them and using their experience on their return;

- keep in mind the problems following the ending of their service, and in particular the return home of those who have been working abroad;

- foster periodic meetings between them and other young persons or adults, for spreading the culture of the volunteer movement;

- help them to make a critical assessment of their experience, and replan their life in the light of the new elements they find in themselves and in the new environment which welcomes them;

- promote contacts with the communities in which the volunteers have given their service, so as to ensure the continuity of the experience.

**At world level**

[127]

*The Rector Major with his Council will:*

a. promote the sound functioning of world organisms of animation and coordination between the different groups of the Salesian Family for the purpose of sharing responsibility, keeping always in mind their autonomy and the common mission;

b. verify, with the other members of the Family, whether it be opportune to set up a world consulting body for the Family;

c. make known initiatives and experiences of collaboration between Salesians and laity.

**3. Exploit communication**

[128]

The broadening of involvement and the promoting of shared responsibility demand a capacity and exploitation of communication, both in SDB communities and in the relationships between SDBs and laity; there is a great desire and expectation for the activation of relationships capable of involving the life and experience of individuals, groups and communities.

Exploiting communication means that we have to be aware of the new cultural situation in which we find ourselves; we are witnessing, in fact, a massive invasion of means and messages which create mentalities and condition behaviour.

Communication is indispensable for the mission, and in the salesian style it calls for presence and apostolic dedication in the educators, the obligation to develop vital relationships with persons and groups who share with us the educative and pastoral mission of Don Bosco.

**3.1  Objective**

[129]

**To exploit communication in all its forms and expressions: communication at interpersonal and group level, the production of messages, critical and educative use of the means of social communication.**

**3.2  Guidelines**

[130]

**Communication: interpersonal and between groups**

Attention to the quality and growth of communication, within and outside salesian communities, develops attitudes and the ability to listen, openness, flexibility and empathy for staying with the young as educators and communicators of the faith.

Communication within the CEP, the Salesian Family and with other groups becomes an efficacious opportunity for maturing together in the capacity for rapport and sharing, so as to live the values of the preventive system.

[131]

**Evangelizing and educating means communicating**

Of its nature the Christian faith is communicative: it means listening and responding to the Word, through the mediation of human language.  The inculturation of the Gospel and the evangelization of cultures require an effort to enter into communication with the values of time and place.

Education of its nature implies relationship and communication.  The preventive system, with its appeal to the intelligence, the heart, and the desire for God present in every young person, presupposes a capacity for listening, for dialogue and for respect for the young.  The active and animating presence (*assistance) of the SDBs and lay educators in the midst of the young is an excellent form of educative and evangelizing communication which the youngsters themselves are waiting for.*

[132]

**Communication, production of messages and educative use of the means of social communication**

To become communicators one must attend to two aspects: the maturing of adequate cultural and spiritual attitudes, and the acquiring of critical and technical capacities which make possible an efficacious communication.

In this sector lay people can carry out a specific task.  They, in fact, can single out and elaborate messages which better respond to the new culture and to the present needs of youth and of people in general.  Often their language is better suited to the ordinary situations of life.  In particular, those among them who have a specific professional ability can become valuable collaborators of Don Bosco's mission.

**3.3  Practical commitments**

**At local level**

[133]

*The SDB community must:*

- foster the communication and sharing of the educative and pastoral experiences of the confreres;

- programme moments of formation of SDBs and laity to interpersonal, communal and social communication, and to the languages of youth;

-live the community day and other encounters as occasions for the concrete practice of growth in interpersonal communication.

[134]

*The CEP should:*

- cultivate a style of interpersonal communication which is more open and ample, making use of the languages and positive messages of modern culture carried by the mass-media.  This requires a physical, affective and cultural presence there where the laity and young people live, through the rediscovery of the significance and practice of salesian assistance;

- use the means of information which already exist (Salesian Bulletin, ANS, Provincial Newsletter, etc.) and others which may be possible, as instruments fostering communion and sharing between SDBs and laity.

[135]

For the purpose of promoting greater knowledge and communication between the Groups of the Salesian Family, the Rector and those responsible should:

- sensitize the SDB community to the significance and value of the Salesian Family;

- promote meetings in common for all the Groups;

- encourage initiatives which express the unity of the Family in the local Church and area.

[136]

At provincial level

a. The Provincial with his Council should foster and verify the quality of communication within the province and outside it, between confreres, with groups of the Salesian Family, with ecclesial communities and civil and social institutions, between groups of provinces and with the General Council.

b. Without detriment to what is laid down by the GC23 259, the provincial delegate for social communication, in agreement with the Provincial, will collect together a team of SDBs and qualified lay people, for the purpose of exploiting social communication for the education and evangelization of the young and the poor.  The team will draw up a provincial plan for animation, formation and consultation in the area of social communications, foreseeing suitable structures and instruments.

[137]

**At world level**

a. In the course of the next six years, the Rector Major with his Council will study a practical plan for the promotion, coordination and exploitation of Social Communication, as a significant field of action which has a place among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission (C 43).

b. In the same period the Councillor General for Social Communication will offer to the provinces practical guidelines for the drawing up of a provincial plan for developing collaboration and shared responsibility between SDBs and laity in the same field.

**4. Qualifying the formation**

[138]

The participation of the laity in the salesian spirit and mission constitutes for the SDB community a challenge which must be met by an adequate formation to the new requirements.

Such formation implies in the first place that the community be aware of the new aspects of the relationship between SDBs and lay people, and take steps to give effect to it in a process of mutual enrichment which renders communion visible and makes educative and pastoral work more efficacious.

The culture of participation and sharing involves a valid formation together.  The formation processes, which see SDBs and lay people simultaneously givers and receivers, will be the more efficacious the clearer is the vocational identity of each, and the greater the understanding, respect for and exploitation of the different vocations.

The formation aims at rendering the individuals capable of living at the present day the experience of their own life with maturity and joy, of fulfilling the educative mission with professional competence, of becoming educators and pastors, and of being solidly animators of numerous apostolic forces.

**4.1 Objective**

[139]

**To plan processes of qualified formation so as to realize the common educative and pastoral mission**

**4.2 Guidelines**

[140]

**Ongoing formation carried out together**

Ongoing formation should be thought of as a process of giving and receiving, with the following precise objectives in view:

a. *To render the SDBs and laity capable of:*

- a renewed understanding of their own vocational identity and their specific roles;

- understanding and living salesian spirituality, which is the grace of unity and synthesis between consecration and the lay state, faith and life, religious option and educative commitment;

- being protagonists in the mission and agents of cultural change;

- updating qualifications so as to react positively to new cultural situations and new educative challenges;

- animating a wide educative setting, accompanying groups and orienting individuals to become integrated into contexts;

b. *to throw light on the values of the lay state as a vocational setting, in reciprocal relationship with the other ecclesial vocations, and with particular attention to:*

- the family vocation and the educative and formative responsibilities of parents;

- the cultural, social, political and economic context on which the laity live and work;

- the values of femininity which confer a novelty and a stimulus to deeper study on the mission to the young and on salesian spirituality

This formation continues even when lay people leave our works; as past-pupils or past-collaborators we still accompany them so that they may take into the Church and their local areas the mission and spirit of Don Bosco.

[141]

**Towards vocational discernment**

The culminating point of the journey of faith is the vocational choice.  This requires help and friendship in the individual spiritual guidance of both young people and adults.  For this reason the local SDB community, the privileged setting for the suggesting and follow-up of vocations, is open to forms of welcoming young people and the promoting of experiences of the volunteer movement and of educative and pastoral service, which can lead to significant vocational options in lay life, the ordained ministry or in consecrated life.

[142]

**With a precise process of initial formation**

The processes of discernment and initial formation must bring to maturity the conviction that to be an SDB at the present day means entering a Family, becoming part of a vast Movement, in which lay people play an active part, both in participation in the salesian spirit and in the sharing of educative and pastoral work, and also in shared responsibility in view of the mission.

Keeping in mind the different nature of the SDBs and the laity, and the times needed for human, affective and apostolic maturing, the stages of initial formation should have contents and experiences of reciprocal and complementary formation for the common growth.

[143]

**Vocational promotion in the Salesian Family**

The common vocation unites the Salesian Family in a spiritual relationship.  Every group is enriched through the mutual exchange of the different ways of living the same charism, and brings to the Salesian Family its original contribution.  The awareness of its own particular call, with all that this implies and the prompt and joyful response to it, helps in sharing the ideals themselves of the salesian charism.

With joy we pass them on to others, thus providing vocational guidance at the same time.

**4.3  Practical commitments**

[144]

**At local level**

Every SDB community should make of the CEP the primary setting for the formation of SDBs and laity together:

- by promoting in dialogue and shared responsibility with the lay members of the CEP a programme of combined formation.  Such a programme should foresee study sessions, times of prayer, moments of relaxation, the drawing up of aides, practical experience, and even a practical and formative methodology;

- by qualifying the process of elaboration of the PEPS as a practical instrument for reciprocal formation.  This project should be verified each year, assessing the quality of the response given to the needs of those for whom we are working and the realization of communion and of shared responsibility in the educative and pastoral area;

- by fostering, through attentive communication, professional, educative, pastoral and salesian updating, applying for the purpose such measures and adaptations as may be necessary and opportune.

[145]

**At provincial level**

Using the service of a group formed of lay persons and SDBs, who are committed and experts in information, youth pastoral work, the Salesian Family and social communication, each province shall review and revise the Lay Project called for by the GC23, and complete it with a programme for formation of SDBs and laity together, not later than the next Provincial Chapter.  Such a programme should provide:

- contents, experiences and periods dedicated to formation;

- definitions of roles, relationships and manner of collaboration between SDBs and laity;

- coordination between the various sectors and structures of animation;

- the role and interventions of the Provincial and members of the provincial council in formation activities;

- the availability of centres, groups and structures of provincial animation.

The SDBs must retain their specific commitment, which is also a priority and a privilege, of responding positively to the demand for and the right to formation and animation which  reach them from the lay members of the Salesian Family, so that such members may become in due course animators and formative agents, in their families, in their environments and places of work, in the ecclesial community and in society.

[146]

During the next six years, each Province should:

- invite the members of the Salesian Family to make a responsible commitment to a unified pastoral work for vocations, with special attention to vocational guidance and the putting forward of the various forms of Christian vocation (lay, ordained ministry, consecrated life), and specifically those of the Salesian Family;

- continue its efforts for the setting up of centres of the Cooperators and Past-pupils.  For this purpose careful preparation and formation should be given to the Delegates and Assistants of the various groups of the Salesian Family;

- offer provincial and local programmes of formation, together with opportune accompaniment, also to past-pupils and other lay people who, outside our own environments, want to live and work according to the spirit of Don Bosco.

[147]

**At world level**

The Councillor General for Formation will instigate a revision of the *Ratio in line with the directives of the GC24.  In particular he will take care that in initial formation:*

- there are presented the contents and values of the lay state; that young confreres are enabled to grow and mature together, and acquire the ability to be formative agents and animators of the laity, so as to promote lay vocations;

- there are presented, not only as a matter of information but also as something vital and of experience. a knowledge of and encounter with various groups of the Salesian Family, and in particular the Cooperators, the DBV and the Past-pupils;

- that the *Common Identity Card of the Salesian Family, the* Constitutions of the FMA and the DBV, and the *Statute of the Past-pupils, be diffused and made known;*

- particular attention be given to the affective maturity required for collaboration with the lay people and with the world of women.

[148]

The General Council will promote and sustain, through the UPS and other Salesian Universities or Centres of Spirituality, studies, experiences and courses for the formation of formation guides, in which SDBs and laity will be formed together, (without contravening the norms of the CIC or of the Holy See).

Particular attention must be given to the spirituality of St Francis de Sales and to the preventive system of Don Bosco.

CHAPTER 2

THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY

**1. The consecrated community the soul of the CEP**

[149]

The green Pinardi meadow is an indication of the infinite youthful horizon.  The heart of Don Bosco envisaged the poor and abandoned youngsters as the future of humanity and the hope of the Church.

To this meadow, thronged with youngsters, Don Bosco called the greatest possible number of persons, ecclesiastics and lay people, young and adult, men and women, to stay with him.

Staying with Don Bosco meant staying with the youngsters and offering them all that we are: heart, mind and will; friendship, professional approach and presence; sympathy, service, self-donation.  But from some Don Bosco asked still more than this.  He asked them to stay with him always, to commit themselves full-time to the young with all their very existence and to dedicate their life by vow to following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ, in a faithful service to God and youth.  They are the Salesians SDB.

[150]

Don Bosco wanted consecrated persons at the centre of his work, persons oriented to the young and their holiness.

He wanted his religious to be a precise point of reference for his charism: with their total dedication he could give the solidity and apostolic thrust needed for the continuity and worldwide extension of the mission.

The consecrated Salesian, to respond to the great love of God, perceived as a love of predilection, becomes its bearer to the young, especially the poorer ones among them (cf.C 2); he becomes the Don Bosco of the present day who can say in all truth: "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life" (C 14).

The religious manifests "with respectful sensitivity and missionary boldness that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education, never disparaging human values but rather confirming and elevating them" (VC 97).

**1.1  Prophecy in action**

[151]

It is not only what they do but what they are that qualifies religious. "They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world" (VC 20).

The Salesian SDB, by his very life, translates the Gospel into language accessible especially to the young: through the values of consecration he raises questions and indicates possibilities of sense; through his dedication he proclaims that the secret of happiness is to lose his life so as to find it again; through his style of life he makes attractive the spirit of the beatitudes and proclaims the joy of the Resurrection; through his living in community he becomes an image of the Church, the sacrament of the Kingdom.

He lives in a way that makes it clear that youngsters and laity who share responsibility become identified not so much with him as with the vocation he lives as a member of the community, which is the bearer of the charism and salesian spirituality and this in turn is the nucleus of the CEP.

  1.2 **Evangelical radicality**

[152]

Consecrated life starts from a deep experience of God (cf.VC 73), which calls for a fidelity similar to that of Christ and is reflected as a school of holiness.  This attitude is translated in the CEP and amongst the young as a capacity for listening, respect and admiration.

"Within the Church consecrated persons have a specific duty.  They are called to bring to bear on the world of education their radical witness to the values of the Kingdom" (VC 96).

"The consecrated life truly constitutes a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren" (VC 22).

The profession of the Evangelical Counsels, as well as being an expression of the following of Christ, has also a pedagogical content of human growth and is a paradigm of the new humanity.

\* Through *obedience the religious makes himself available full-time for God's educative project and expresses a process of growth among the young and in the CEP;*

- he does not ascribe absolute value to his own will, but rather submits to other values perceived as of greater worth: the community, the Church, society;

- he seeks always the will of God in the signs of the times and in circumstances, to indicate it to his confreres;

- he is docile to the Spirit and makes known to the young and to the CEP "the secret unfolding of history" (VC 96);

- it disposes him for planning (PEPS) and for working with others.

\* *Chastity is the specific witness which proclaims and educates to love, in a society threatened by sexual consumerism, in which fidelity in family relationships and bonds of friendship are fragile, where love is often lived only as personal satisfaction, and where the free giving up of one's own life for others becomes ever less intelligible.*

Chastity lived as an evangelical dynamism marks out a process for the growth of human and Christian values: balance, self-control, freedom, joy, maturity, and a valuable stimulus for education to the chastity proper to other states of life (cf.VC 88)

\* *Poverty is before all else an imitation of the radical choices of Christ.  For this reason the consecrated person:*

- tends towards the outcasts, the poor, the working classes, the young;

- lives with them the same precarious existence, not taking refuge in the security of structures, of a regular stipend, of power and dominion;

- bases his security solely on God's sufficiency, the true riches of the human heart (cf.VC 90);

- as animator and educator in the CEP, he applies this dynamism so that justice, solidarity and charity may triumph, that solutions may be found to the hunger and sufferings of the poor, and that activities and the organization of volunteer work may be developed (cf.VC 89. 27).

  1.3  **Community of consecrated persons**

[153]

The Salesians live these great values in community, thus making visible the mystery of communion which constitutes the intimate nature of the Church and becomes leaven for the Kingdom.  Because of its value as a sign and instrument the consecrated community fulfils a valuable function with respect to the CEP; it helps it to become itself an authentic experience of Church in fraternal communion and in the service of the young.

  1.4  **The lay component in the SDB community**

[154]

Within the religious community we find the figure of the salesian brother, "the genial creation of the great heart of Don Bosco" (Don Rinaldi).  He combines in himself the gifts of consecration with those of the lay state.  To his consecrated brethren he recalls the values of the creation and of secular realities; to the laity he recalls the values of total dedication to God for the cause of the Kingdom.  To all he offers a particular sensitivity for the world of work, attention to the local environment, and the demands of the professional approach associated with his educative and pastoral activity.

*From the SDB community to the CEP*

[155]

Don Bosco was led by God to form a community of consecrated persons which would be a leaven for a multiplicity of services, the spiritual animation of those who wanted to dedicate themselves to education, and a guarantee of continuity in the mission to the young.  But right from the outset Don Bosco had brought in lay people who had contributed to the definition of the project, enriched its educative efficacy and spread the charism.

In this way there came into being what we now call the CEP, of which the consecrated community is the animating nucleus.

**2.  The CEP: its nature and functions**

[156]

In accordance with the indications of C 47, in all its works the salesian community sets up the Educative and Pastoral Community.  This is:

- a *community:*

because it involves in a family atmosphere young and adults, parents and educators, so as to become an experience of Church;

- *educative:*

because it helps to mature the potentialities of the young in every aspect: cultural, professional and social;

- pastoral:

because it accompanies the young as they go to meet Christ, and in the building of the Church and the Kingdom.

[157]

The components of the CEP are: the salesian community, the youngsters, their parents, lay people under various headings such as collaborators and sharers of responsibility, among whom are in the first place the members of the Salesian Family.

**IN IT ALL FEEL THEMSELVES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COMMON FORMATION WITH A VIEW TO AN EDUCATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND TO SPECIFICALLY SALESIAN OBJECTIVES.**

The CEP attains goals and strategies in the educative and pastoral project, for the identity of which the province is responsible.

It has need of organisms and orientations which foster communion and the participation of all its members: councils, assemblies, organs of communication and methods of programming (decision-making, execution, verification).

  2.1  **Animation**

[158]

To animate the CEP in line with the spirit and mission of Don Bosco, there are tasks to be carried out at different levels:

- organization,

- coordination,

- methodological accompaniment,

- educative orientation in objectives and content,

- spiritual and Christian formation,

- guarantee of salesian originality.

All these tasks are necessary and they are interconnected; some indeed are decisive for the animation of the CEP.

Team-work, with the distribution of assignments and responsibilities guarantees practical convergence.

[159]

*Animating duty of the salesian community in the CEP*

The salesian community is a 'charismatic community', which means that it is alive and that it guards, deepens and constantly develops Don Bosco's charism (cf.MR 11).

It carries out a specific animating activity with regard to the CEP, in a unified manner and with reference to the more decisive levels of animation.  Every SDB is an animator, and strives always to fulfil the task more efficiently.  This is what is meant by the expression 'animating nucleus' of the CEP, attributed to the salesian community by R 5.

In particular his special duty consists in:

- testifying to the primacy of God and total dedication to education and evangelization through the vocational figures of the salesian priest and the salesian brother;

- guaranteeing the charismatic identity;

- being the centre of communion and participation;

- prompting, urging and calling on the laity to share in Don Bosco's spirit and mission;

- promoting spiritual, salesian and vocational formation.

  2.2  **The council of the CEP and the council of the work**

[160]

**Animators of the CEP: Salesians and laity together**

The SDB community, aware of its specific responsibility, calls lay people to the CEP.

In it all then become animators, albeit in a diversity of relationships, and hence it is necessary that lay people and Salesians together plan, activate and verify the PEPS, and undergo a common formation.  To this end there is need of an organism which we shall call the Council of the CEP or Council of the Work, composed of Salesians and lay people, who act as a group in animating and sharing responsibility.

[161]

**Council of the CEP**

Within complex works which have several sectors of activity (parish, school, university hostel, youngsters in difficulties), there can exist several CEPs or one alone.  If there is just one CEP, there will be only one CEP Council, which coincides with the Council of the Work.  If on the other hand there are as many CEPs as there are sectors of the work, each will have its own council, and the Council of the Work will be made up of representatives of the CEP Councils.

Within the CEP Council and the Council of the Work, the SDB Rector has a specific task which must be precisely defined.

**3. Convoking of the laity**

[162]

**Motivations**

In the past the various tasks of animation of the CEP were assumed almost exclusively by the salesian community.  Today the latter must call lay people to fill roles of animation and responsibility.

Choice on the part of the SDBs is determined by various motives:

- *anthropological: in so far as education is a secular action, shared in also by those who have different religious terms of reference;*

- *ecclesiological: in so far as all the baptized are called upon to take up the evangelizing mission of the Church;*

- *charismatic: to the extent that the laity express better the secular dimension of Don Bosco's mission, thus enriching the educative and pastoral plan;*

- *professional, educative and pastoral: since numerous lay people have qualifications and ability at professional, educative and pastoral level.*

[163]

**Types and categories**

Lay people who come into contact with us and who, for widely differing reasons, become associated with our educative and evangelizing mission, present a varied reality:

- according to the settings in which they work (Oratories and youth centres, Schools, Parishes, Missions, Social works);

- according to the roles they play (animators, catechists, teachers, directive and auxiliary personnel, coaches in sport, parents, volunteers and others);

- according to their degree of attachment, commitment, involvement and responsibility in the same mission.

To foster the process of communion and sharing in Don Bosco's spirit and mission, which happens in very diverse contexts and situations, the GC24 indicates some criteria concerning fundamental aspects for the salesian mission and the main requirements for those involved in it or who want to become so involved.

[164]

**Criteria**

The human, social, cultural and religious values for the realization of Don Bosco's programme, "good Christians, upright citizens", must be lived by the lay educators themselves if they are to put them in credible fashion to the young.

These values form the frame of reference of the criteria here indicated.

**Basic criteria**

The principal basic requisites asked of the lay person  coming to the salesian mission, in line with each one's possibilities, are concerned with an evaluation of his sensitivity and ability to become inserted in the mission.  Among the more significant traits we may list:

- personal coherence, so as to become an educative point of reference for the young, especially in the values of their lay life;

- an educative attitude and sensitivity to the youth condition, especially of those who are poor;

- empathy for Don Bosco and for his method of education;

- openness to the transcendent and respect for religious and cultural diversity.

**Criteria of growth**

The progressive involvement and assuming of responsibility call for the gradual growth of the lay educator in the areas indicated by the 'oratorian criterion' (cf.C 40).

These concern:

- human maturity: affective balance, educative rapport in family style, ability to live and work with others, strong ethical leanings, sensitivity to social values, readiness for ongoing formation;

- educative competence: positive vocational motivation, adequate professional preparation, cordial openness to other people and especially to the young, pastoral sensitivity, adaptable to our style of animation;

- salesian identity: priority of attention to needy youth, progressive knowledge and practice of the preventive system, concrete presence in the midst of the young, willingness to live the local project;

- Christian witness: coherence of faith, participation in ecclesial life, respect for the values of other religions and cultures.

[165]

**Manner of realization**

The diversity of contexts and situations in which SDBs and laity are working demands that it be left to the individual Provinces to adapt these criteria and spell out further their content and manner of application.

In any event it is quite certain that to foster formative processes attention must be given to three points:

\* the creation of an environment which:

 - puts the person at the centre, gives due value to his specific qualities, fosters the spirit of sharing, and educates to the ability to work with others;

 - lives and manifests the 'oratorian heart' of Don Bosco;

 - educates to justice and legality, drawing inspiration from the Church's social teaching;

\* the *making of a plan which:*

 - involves in the sharing of Don Bosco's spirit and mission everyone who approaches him.  This requires:

- the nearness and joyful testimony of the salesian community;

- the provision of opportunities for participation and the sharing of responsibility;

- careful selection of educators on the part of the local directive team with, other things being equal, preference for laity belonging to the Salesian Family.

\* *attention to a follow-up which:*

 - helps the subject to deepen and share the vocational motivations of life and work, especially in times of trial;

 - involves him fully in the educative and pastoral community (CEP), through processes of combined formation;

 - makes him an active element for the linkage between the salesian work and the local area;

 - leads him to a living knowledge of the different vocations in the Salesian Family (cf.C 47).

[166]

**4. Feminine presence in the CEP**

The presence of the woman in our works is an accepted fact, as regards both those for whom we work and those who share with us the responsibility for education.

To this fact two other elements must be added:

- the importance the feminine presence is acquiring in our culture;

- the commitment required by coeducation for offering both male and female models for identification.

On the other hand, we feel the importance of remaining faithful to Don Bosco's option, which was decisively oriented to boys and young men.

**3.  Guidelines**

**3.1  With reference to the consecrated communities**

[167]

The salesian community should:

- *frequently verify the incidence of its consecrated and communal life as a dynamic force in the education and animation of the CEP;*

- *exploit occasions for presenting and explaining to lay people and youngsters the specific aspect of consecrated life in respect of its educative importance;*

- *offer possibilities and experiences for others, and especially young people, to share the life and prayer of the community.*

In the various phases of *initial formation the young SDBs should be helped to deepen the identity of their consecration and to develop solid convictions about the educative value of consecration itself.*

[168]

In the CEP the *Rector should always be effectively present; with the consecrated community he constitutes its animating nucleus.  To the consecrated members should be assigned those roles most in keeping with their educative and pastoral identity.*

**3.2  With reference to the CEP**

[169]

**Practical models for the CEP**

The Provincial with his Council, keeping in mind the realities of the province and the consistency of the various educative settings, in dialogue with the local salesian community, shall:

- determine the concrete models for the realization of the CEP;

- define for each work whether there shall be a single CEP for the whole work, or a CEP for each sector;

- indicate for the various kinds of work the functions of responsibility and animation to be entrusted to lay people.

In all this the Provincial and the local community must be careful to safeguard the unity of the salesian project in the area and in the local Church.

[170]

**Verification of the functioning of the CEP**

Every local community, in continuity with the deliberations of the GC23 (cf.nn.232-238) must verify the functioning of the CEP.

In this task it should be supported by the Provincial with the collaboration of the provincial organisms of animation.

The Rector Major, through his teaching and the help of the competent Departments shall foster the deepening of this verification and stimulate it.

[171]

**The Council of the CEP and/or Council of the Work**

The SDB community should set up or consolidate the Council of the CEP and/or The Council of the Work, as the central organism which animates and coordinates the whole salesian enterprise, through reflection, dialogue, and the programming and revision of the educative and pastoral activity.

These Councils should be made up of those SDBs and lay persons who have roles of responsibility in the CEP, in line with the criteria defined at provincial level.

For the Council of the CEP or the Council of the Work, the Provincial with his Council shall:

- determine the criteria of composition,

- define the competences,

- establish the levels of shared responsibility and the areas of decision,

- indicate the method of the necessary linkage with the local council of the salesian community.

[172]

**The Rector in the CEP**

The Rector, as the one with primary responsibility for the apostolic activity and the administration of the goods of the community (cf.C 176), has also the primary responsibility for the CEP: in it the final word, after patient research, will belong to him (GC21 68), always in dialogue with his council.

When the work has a single CEP, the Rector presides over the Council of the CEP.  When there are more than one CEP, the Rector is a member by right of the Council of each of them and presides over the Council of the Work.

In the CEP, the Rector in particular:

- animates the animators and is at the service of unity;

- fosters the charismatic character of the PEPS, in dialogue with the Provincial and in harmony with the provincial project;

- promotes formative and relational processes;

- activates the criteria for the convoking and formation of the lay people indicated by the province;

- maintains the linkage between the Council of the salesian community and the Council of the CEP (or Council of the Work).

[173]

**Quantitative consistency of the salesian community**

To carry out its role of animation, the salesian community needs a quantitative and qualitative consistency which helps to make its activity visible and significant.

Numerical consistency is better for sustaining formation, spiritual and fraternal life-comparisons and pastoral quality, planning and dialogue with the area and the local Church.

Following the indications of R 20 and R 150, we undertake to give greater numerical consistency to the salesian communities.  This means reducing or overcoming the dispersion of the confreres who work individually in activities or works, as also redimensioning the salesian presence in an area in line with the criteria indicted by the Constitutions (art.6) and Regulations (art.1).

[174]

**Qualitative consistency of the salesian community**

Qualitative consistency means that in the community there must be confreres able to remain present among the young, accompany them and educate them to the faith; capable also of animating individuals and groups, of formation of lay persons, of giving attention to the neighbourhood and the local Church and to the Salesian Family and Movement.

In the next six years the qualification of the SDBs in these matters must be attended to, with educative, relational and pastoral ability receiving preference over administrative, bureaucratic and organizational skills.

The significant and complementary presence of salesian priests and brothers in the community should be guaranteed as an essential trait of its physiognomy and apostolic completeness (C 45).

  3.3  With reference to the bringing in of lay people

[175]

Every province must see to it that the basic and growth criteria indicated above are integrated into its "Lay Project".

Contracts with public or private entities are to be drawn up by the Province in dialogue with the local community.

[176]

The local community shall clearly define:

- the role to be filled by the lay person,

- the duration of his engagement,

- the period of trial,

- the process of formation.

**3.4  With reference to female presence in the CEP**

[177]

Collaboration with youngsters' families should be intensified, since parents are the primary educators of their sons and daughters.  To this end they should be offered in our works an educative climate rich in family values, and in particular an educational team with a harmonious integration of men and women components.

[178]

In this context one must emphasize the significance and prophetic force of the Salesian (SDB): not only does he play his part in education with his male values but, by living his celibacy with joy and fidelity, he bears witness to a particular quality of love and fatherliness.

For this reason, from the first years of formation confreres should be helped to develop a serious and mature attitude with regard to the opposite sex.

To build a healthy and balanced environment of coeducation care should be given to the affective and relational formation of both the SDBs and the lay members of the CEP.

[179]

Without detriment to the requirements of different contexts, the need should be emphasized to overcome an artificial parallelism of tasks in which the education of boys is entrusted to men and that of girls to women.

It is urgently necessary that at provincial level and in the local CEP a serious reflection be made:

- on the values and possibilities of coeducation;

- on how to live the preventive system in a coeducational environment;

- on how to foster sexual identification in the integral development of the individual and education to love.

In the context of coeducation, the province should aim at a healthy balance of boys and girls among those for whom we work, as well as among our collaborators (cf.R 3).

CHAPTER 3

SOME PARTICULAR NEW SITUATIONS

**1. Activities and works managed by lay people within the salesian provincial project**

An analysis of the situation shows that in some contexts there are works or activities entrusted by the SDBs to lay people, and also activities and works started up by the laity and subsequently recognized in the provincial project.

**1.1  Fundamental criteria**

[180]

For an activity or work managed by lay people to be considered as forming part of the project of a Province, there must be realized in it the criteria of identity, communion and significance of salesian activity and must be given effect under the responsibility of the Provincial and his Council (cf.VC 56).

a. **Criteria of salesian identity**

The criteria for the salesian identity of works and activities, given in the SDB Constitutions and Regulations, ensure the realization of salesian objectives and refer to the CEP, the PEPS and those to whom our mission is directed.  The same criteria are valid also for works and activities managed by lay people within the provincial project.

\* With reference to the *Educative and Pastoral Community:*

The work gives effect to the CEP, involving in a family atmosphere young people and adults, parents and educators (cf.C 47):

- it has a group of animators and of those who take responsibility for it;

- it takes part in the life and initiatives of the provincial community;

- it has a lay director who is, if possible, a member of the Salesian Family.

\* With reference to the *Educative and Pastoral Project:*

The CEP draws up and realizes the local PEPS according to the guidelines of the provincial project:

- it takes its inspiration from the preventive system;

- it fosters the integral advancement of the young person; it promotes his education and culture; it proposes a journey of faith based on a meeting with Christ, ecclesial experience and sacramental life; it helps the young person to discover his own vocation; it gives attention to the formation of groups and to the growth of group activity;

- it emphasizes criteria proper to salesian activity: oratorian heart, various processes, personalized follow-up, a spirit of initiative and creativity, youth protagonism.

\* with reference to *those towards whom our work is directed:*

- the work is directed to the young and especially to the poorest of them, to the working classes, and to people not yet evangelized;

- it takes place preferably in places of the greatest poverty, and is committed to collaboration with the forces of the area and of the local Church (cf.R 18-19).

b. **Criteria of communion:**

- *Vocational communion:  in the educative and pastoral community there is a plurality and variety of vocations, which manifests and realizes an 'experience of Church' (cf.C 47).  In it is always to be preferred the presence of SDBs, because of their specific vocational and charismatic contribution.*

- *Provincial communion:  works or activities managed by lay people, within a provincial project, should seek forms of communion and of sharing Don Bosco's charism; they should become integrated into the provincial community and create the conditions needed for the maturing of vocational choices for the Church and the Salesian Family.*

c. **Criterion of significance**

The *significance of a provincial project depends on the resources of the SDBs and laity placed at the service of animation of activities and works.*

The provincial project must in the first place guarantee the charismatic identity, evangelizing efficacy, educative quality, and ability for fostering vocations in all the activities and works.

The province must be able to offer to the laity responsible for such activities a strong charismatic accompaniment; in fact, in the presence of lay people with a clear Christian and salesian identity, the form of provincial accompaniment must be equally positive, so as not to leave without corresponding support the already existing availability.

**1.2  Guidelines**

1.2.1  Responsibility of the Province

[181]

It is the Provincial with his Council who decides whether or not to accept into the provincial project and under provincial responsibility educative works or activities which came into being autonomously and are managed by lay people.

It also belongs to the Provincial with his Council to decide whether to entrust to lay management any works or activities; the latter will remain within the provincial project and responsibility.

Activities or works of the laity accepted within the provincial project.

There are works and activities belonging to lay members of the Salesian Family or Movement which realize Don Bosco's mission.  The SDBs must foster the full autonomy and responsibility of the laity in such realizations; in fact it would normally be neither useful nor possible to take them into its own project and responsibility.

But if in particular situations an activity or work belonging to lay people of the Salesian Family or Movement should ask to become part of a provincial project, after an evaluation by the province of its own forces and of the possibility of realizing in the new work the criteria of salesian identity, communion and significance, it can be accepted by the Provincial with his Council.

*Activities or works entrusted to the laity within the provincial project.*

The Province has the responsibility for ensuring the salesian identity of works and activities managed by the laity within its own project.  For this reason:

- it offers interventions of animation and government, by analogy with what happens in those CEPs which have the presence of the salesian community, such as the provincial visitation, verification of the local project, the linkage between the lay director of the work and the Provincial, the periodic participation of a delegate of the Provincial in the Council of the CEP;

- it promotes the constitution of the CEP Council;

- it organizes together with the laity a serious process of formation to the salesian identity;

- it follows up the lay people who have roles of animation and responsibility in the CEP;

- it establishes a stable linkage with a neighbouring salesian community or with the provincial centre of animation, especially as regards charismatic and ministerial aspects;

- if there is question of closing a work, it will first verify the possibility of entrusting it to lay management, conveniently locating it within the provincial project.

**1.2.2  Responsibility of lay persons**

[182]

*Statutes*

Since contexts and civil legislation vary so much, every Province must define he models of management for different kinds of works entrusted to the laity within a provincial project, with particular reference to tasks of responsibility, to nominations, duration in office, decision-making organs. and the competence of the Provincial.  For this purpose the Province will propose regulations or statutes for the activity or works concerned.

*Contracts*

Situations exist in which a Province entrusts to a juridical entity (association, society, or cooperative) a work or sector of a work, together with the use of furniture etc. belonging to the province.  In this case a contract is necessary to regulate juridical and financial relations.

**2. Lay collaborators in plurireligious and pluricultural contexts**

**2.1  Ecclesial references**

[183]

There is a fundamental unity between all human beings, in so far as they have God as their origin and the fullness of life in God as their destiny (NA 2; DA 28).  There is also a single history of salvation for the whole human race (Gen 1-11; DA 19,28) with at its centre Christ Jesus, who in his incarnation "in a certain way united himself with each individual" (GS 22; RH 13).

The presence and activity of the Word and of the Spirit, even beyond the confines of the Church (AG 4; RH 6; DV 53; DA 26), give origin to positive values and elements of grace also in the various religious traditions (NA 2; AG 11; LG 17; DA 30).  This does not imply that everything is good in these religions.  Because of the consequences of sin, truth and error, good and evil, cannot always be clearly distinguished.  This requires careful discernment (DA 31).

The fundamental unity of all human beings, the positive values and elements of grace present in the traditional religions, encourage the Church to enter into "dialogue and collaboration" with them (NA 2; GS 92-93.

Faith in Christ and baptism, the sacrament of unity, are in Christians of other denominations the foundation of a communion, albeit imperfect, with the Catholic Church, and this communion makes possible a deeper dialogue.

Dialogue is of various kinds:

- the dialogue of life, which requires hospitality, respect and a genuine interest for everyone, sharing their hopes, joys, sufferings and difficulties;

- the dialogue of action, which aims at common commitment for the cause of development, justice and peace;

- the dialogue of theological exchange, which calls for mutual understanding and the promotion of values present in other religions;

- the dialogue of religious experience, which implies the sharing of prayer experiences, of the *Lectio Divina, of the search for God (DA 42; VC 101-102).*

The Church is ready for dialogue and collaboration with everyone: with Christians of other denominations, with members of other religious traditions, with persons who respect human values, and even with those who are opposed to the Church and persecute it (GS 92).

In this way the Church, while avoiding the dangers of syncretism and without failing in the duty of evangelizing and proclaiming the Good News, tries to collaborate with all for the building of God's Kingdom, definitively inaugurated by Jesus Christ (RM 16), which is the duty of every individual, of society, and of the whole world (RM 15).

Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration are a serious obligation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, and this requires an adequate formation (VC 100-102.

**2.2  Salesian references**

[184]

At the beginning Don Bosco's collaborators were Catholics.  But he was ready to accept the help and collaboration of others.  In 1881, writing to a Jew who had expressed surprise and bewilderment at finding his name included in a list of cooperators, he said: *"It is perhaps very unusual for a Catholic priest to propose an association of charity to an Israelite!  But the Lord's charity has no limits, and excludes no one on grounds of age, condition or belief..." (Collected Letters, V n.2247).*

Don Bosco's attitude fosters in us the same openness at the present day.

We can invite lay people of different beliefs to collaborate with us in an educative project applicable to different situations and cultures: *The aspect of religious transcendence, the cornerstone of Don Bosco's pedagogical method, is not only applicable to every culture but can also be profitably adapted even to non-christian religions" (IP 11).  "There, (in territories of first evangelization), it will be possible to work efficaciously, even with lay people who do not belong to the Catholic Church, provided that there is the ability to live to the full the experience of Don Bosco and to put forward in an integral manner both his educative system and his apostolic spirit" (Message of Pope to GC24, Oss.Rom.[Eng.edtn], 13 March '96).*

For such contexts it is important that the Salesian live in fidelity to his own charism and to the evangelizing mission of the Church (C 6.7.30.31), inserting various elements into his intervention: the witness of Christian life, commitment to human advancement and social justice, prayer and contemplation, inter-religious dialogue, direct proclamation of Christ's Gospel.

**2.3  Guidelines**

[185]

From the ecclesial and salesian references we can deduce two criteria for our guidance in the delicate process of communion and sharing with lay people of other traditions and convictions.

a. The fundamental criterion is the preventive system.

With those who do not accept God we can journey together, basing ourselves on the human and lay values present in the preventive system; with those who do accept God and the transcendent we can go further, even to welcoming their religious values; and finally, with those who share our faith in Christ but not our membership of the Church, we can walk still more closely on the path of the Gospel.

b. Since the mission to youth leads to an education which is at the same time evangelization, no collaboration is possible with those who are not open to a search for God.  Nevertheless they will not be excluded from our pastoral concern.  This is the case especially with persons adhering to certain sects, movements or ideologies with convictions hostile to the Christian faith.

**2.4  Practical commitments**

[186]

a. The GC24 asks the Salesians and the CEPs for a greater awareness of the rich possibilities offered us by lay collaborators of other religions and convictions, and asks urgently for a vital and practical dialogue to be begun with them in the area of the education of the young.

b. In the next six years a deep and accurate study should be made of our rapport with them in all its breadth, having always in mind the ultimate objective of the fullness of the proclamation of Christ.

c. Their presence should be exploited in our works, meeting their desire to be recognized as valid collaborators in the salesian mission.

d. Together with them a qualified and adequate formation should be promoted on he salient aspects of the preventive system, and on the humanistic, ethical, transcendent and religious values contained in it.

e. An intelligent collaboration should be fostered with other public or private organisms which work for the benefit of the young.

CONCLUSION

  [187]

A year after his arrival at Valdocco Don Bosco had a dream, which he recounted only in 1864 to a small group of Salesians whom he called together after the 'good night'.

"I have already told you of several things I saw as in a dream.  From them we can infer how much Our Lady loves and helps us.  But now that we are alone together, I am going to tell you not just another dream, but something that Our Lady herself graciously showed me.  I am doing this so that each of us may be convinced that it is Our Lady herself who wants our Congregation.  This should spur us to work ever harder for God's greater glory.  I tell you this in confidence".

And he went on to describe the famous vision of the 'Pergola of roses'.

Don Bosco was told to take off his shoes; this he did willingly, only to discover at once how many painful thorns were hidden among the flowers.

They indicate the difficulties: both internal (need for mortification!) and external (need for apostolic courage).

But he was not alone:

"Many priests, clerics and lay people whom I had asked, began to follow me quite happily, attracted by the beauty of the flowers, but when they found they had to walk on piercing thorns and that these were sticking out on all sides, they began to cry out: We have been fooled!  I replied: Let those who are only out for a good time go back again; the others follow me.

Quite a number did go back.(...)  But I was soon consoled when I saw a group of priests, clerics and laymen coming towards me.  'Here we are', they said, 'we are all yours and ready to follow you'.  So I led them forward.  Many of them I knew, but many more were strangers".

The path brought them to another pleasant garden where a cool breeze cured all their injuries and led them to an imposing building where the Blessed Virgin explained the sense of the vision and encouraged her followers in their mission.

As soon as the Mother of God finished speaking, I awoke and found myself in my room" (BM 3, 25-27).

This message is addressed primarily to us SDBs; in it we find echoed with certainty the Word of God.

[188]

In response let us note the need we have to renew our faith if we want to become 'symbols', a bond of communion with our brothers and sisters scattered all over the world.

*We believe that*

*guided by Mary*

*and working together*

*we can reach that wisdom*

*which is the promise of life.*

*We believe that*

*what unites*

*Salesians and laity*

*together*

*is the cry to Don Bosco*

*"We are all yours".*

*We believe that*

*we can push ahead*

*and call others to our side*

*together*

*along our way.*

*We believe that*

*for the Church and the world:*

*with living hope*

*we shall be*

*together*

*builders of the Kingdom.*

DELIBERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTIONS

AND REGULATIONS

AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY

The 24th General Chapter examined the proposals coming from the Provincial Chapters and confreres concerning some points of our proper law and the structures of animation and government of the Congregation. It approved the following modifications to the legislative texts (Constitutions and General Regulations), and certain other practical guidelines concerning the animation and governing of the Congregation.

1. LIMITATION OF THE DURATION IN OFFICE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL, IN THE SAME SECTOR OF ACTIVITY (C 142)

[189]

The GC24, after considering the proposals reaching the Chapter,

- keeping in mind the general indication of the Code of Canon Law on the temporary nature of duration in office in Institutes of consecrated life, as also the norms already adopted by our own proper law for superiors at provincial and local levels;

- considering also, on the one hand, the notable effort required by a task at the level of the General Council, and on the other the acceleration in history and the great complexity of the times in which we are living, so that two sessions in the same office seem sufficient for expressing the ability for animation of a person, who could eventually fill other offices, still with force and possibilities;

has approved the following modification (in italics) to art.142 of the Constitutions:

142. Members of the General Council remain in office for six years, except for the case referred to in article 143 of the Constitutions, and may be re-elected for a second period of six years in the same office.

Should a member of the General Council die or be permanently unable to attend to his duties, the Rector Major with the consent of his Council shall entrust his office to whomsoever he judges most suitable in the Lord, but only until the expiry of the six-year period.

This modification of art.142 of the Constitutions was approved by the Apostolic See in a rescript n. T.9-1/96 of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, dated 20 March 1996, and promulgated by the Rector Major by decree n.088/96 of 20 March 1996.

2. MODIFICATION OF ART.3 OF THE GENERAL REGULATIONS

[190]

The GC24, on the basis of proposals coming from the provincial chapters, and reflecting on the presence of girls and young women in works and activities directed and animated by Salesians, in the light of our mission, with reference to art.3 of the General Regulations, has emphasized the following main aspects:

a) It is considered important, in the first place that the charismatic reference in this article to the priority of attention for boys and young men be preserved; this was the intention of the GC22 in approving this article, which is linked with Chapter IV of the Constitutions.

Nevertheless it is judged opportune to reformulate the first paragraph of the art.3 in the following manner: Our educative and pastoral service is directed primarily to boys and young men.

In this way, by introducing into the present text the word primarily, while expressing the charismatic priority the impression of exclusiveness is removed (which could give the impression that the presence of girls is an exception).

b) As regards the remainder of the article in question, it seems better to remove the reference to the various specific works (youth centres, schools), thus broadening the scenario to the whole of the salesian mission. It was also considered convenient to eliminate from the article the reference to "dialogue with the Rector Major" before introducing coeducation in schools, since the criteria and norms laid down by the Provinces are sufficient in this regard.

c) Noting finally that coeducation is not a phenomenon identical in all parts of the world, the importance is emphasized of giving attention to local situations and hence of establishing criteria and norms at provincial level. The competence for the establishing of such norms and criteria for coeducation in the works of the Province is assigned to the Provincial Chapter, with the Provincial and his Council obviously having the power to make decisions in concrete cases. The Rector Major and his Council come into the matter when approving the deliberations of the Provincial Chapter, in accordance with the Constitutions.

The Provincial Chapter, in establishing norms and criteria, will obviously act in harmony with the directives of the local Church and civil legislation, being concerned to create an adequate environment for coeducation in line with Don Bosco's preventive system.

On the basis of these principles the GC24 has approved the following new text for art.3 of the General Regulations:

Our educative and pastoral service is directed primarily to boys and young men.

In our works girls are also welcomed in line with criteria and norms indicated by the Provincial Chapter.

3. PRACTICAL GUIDELINE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE

STRUCTURES OF GOVERNMENT

[191]

The 24th General Chapter

- after examining some contributions from the Chapter itself and from a study of the Report of the Vicar General on the state of the Congregation;

- considering the present structures of government which, in their general arrangement, were created by the GC19 though with subsequent partial modifications; and being of the opinion that in view also of the many changes that have taken place in recent times in the life of the Congregation in various contexts, it seems opportune to submit them to a more exact verification both as regards functioning and possible as regards arrangement, has approved the following practical guideline:

The GC24 requests the Rector Major with his Council to make in the course of the next six years a careful study, with the help of experts, on the functioning of the General Council (in its arrangement of Councillors for Departments and Regions), giving effect to opportune interventions for a more efficacious organization, giving greater strength to study organisms and practical offices, and with a well-arranged programme.

The Rector Major and his Council should study also the manner of making a deeper verification of the structures of the central government, involving the Provincial Chapters, with a view to the GC25.

4. GUIDELINE CONCERNING THE "FORM" OF OUR SOCIETY

[192]

The GC24, after examining the proposals coming from confreres of certain Provinces of the Congregation on the expediency of a further study on the "form of our Society", has emphasized the following elements:

- On the one hand it noted that in the recent Synod of Bishops on the consecrated life, a proposal was made to study a possible "mixed" form (neither lay nor clerical) of religious Institutes with respect to their foundational charisms, and that a specific commission for the purpose was set up by the competent Congregation.provide us too with an occasion for a deeper examination of the "form" of our Society, to see whether it corresponds to our charism (a Society made up of clerics and laymen).

It was observed that a new study of this kind on the "form" of the Congregation, with a possible recognition of the "mixed" form, could help to define better the figure of the salesian brother which should be given greater value; and this in the interests of the whole Congregation, rather than of a category of confreres.

- On the other hand, calling to mind the great work done by the renewal Chapters (SGC, GC21 and GC22) for the study and definition of the Society's "form", it was emphasized that the question touches deeply the charism of the Congregation, on which there is both a tradition and the salesian magisterium (of General Chapters and Rector Majors).

A thorough understanding will be needed of what is meant by a "mixed" Religious Institute and what consequences, not least of a juridical nature, it would have on the life and mission of the Congregation; this too in the light of the charism.

On the basis of these reflections, the GC24 has approved the following guideline which it entrusts to the Rector Major with his Council:

In the light of the Apostolic Exhortation Vita consecrata (n.61) and of the juridical developments now in progress on the "form" of Religious Institutes, the GC24 considers it important that a study be made of a possible "mixed" form of our Society, and that there be a deeper investigation to see whether the innovations in such a form respond to our charism and to the original project of the Founder.

5. THE GROUPS OF PROVINCES (C.154)

[193]

The GC24, in accordance with art.154 of the Constitutions, has examined the configuration of the groups of Provinces, entrusted to the Regional Councillors. It noted, in fact, the need for a reconsideration of the entire framework of the so-called salesian Regions in the light of the present development of the Congregation,, keeping in mind both the guideline already expressed by the GC23 (n.309) and the relevant study carried out by the General Council, and in particular the changes that have come about in recent times.

The Chapter considered it important to make a preliminary reflection the role of the Regional Councillor and on the main criteria for the constitution of the groups of Provinces.

The Regional Councillor and his duties

Attention was first focused on the figure and duties of the Region Councillor, as they appear from the Constitutions and General Regulations, and also from the life of the Provinces and the expectation of the confreres.

The verification, based on experience, substantially confirmed the figure of the Regional as described in the text of the Constitutions and Regulations, and emphasized certain particular characteristics, such as:

- he is a full member of the General Council, and so a Councillor of the Rector Major, with duties regarding the entire Congregation;

- at the same time he has a particular care for a specific salesian area, with a task of:

communication and linkage, in two directions: he represents the Rector Major and his Council in the Provinces and with the confreres, and represents the concerns of the Provinces and the confreres in the General Council;

coordination of salesian activity between Provinces: he puts them in communication with each other, fosters the exchange of aptitudes and values between different provincial realities, so that each group is mutually enriched;

animation and encouragement for the development of the salesian charism: he helps the Provinces in the inculturation of the salesian mission.

Criteria for forming groups of Provinces

Keeping in mind the duties of the Regional Councillor, to which constant reference is needed, the Chapter went on to identify the criteria to be applied in formulating concrete proposals for the grouping of Provinces.

Taking as a starting point the criteria indicated by art.140 of the Constitutions ("promotion of a more direct liaison between the provinces and the Rector Major and his Council" and the fostering of the linkage of the provinces among themselves), the following aspects were emphasized:

- The criteria of geographic contiguity, and of cultural and linguistic affinity, are good and must be kept in mind, but without them becoming absolute. No single criterion is sufficient if considered in isolation.

- The importance is emphasized of having flexible criteria:

which do not render homogeneity rigid;

which do not tend to identify the group of Provinces which form the Region with the Provincial Conference (or Conferences), even though the presence of Conferences in a group may lead to more intense collaboration between Provinces which are more homogeneous.

- A flexible criterion of this kind should foster meetings, exchanges and the communication of values, and hence promote a creative relationship between culture, history, mentality and even different languages: this especially at the level of experiences and salesian history (reciprocal enrichment and exchange between the Provinces). From this standpoint an effort to internationalize a Region will have positive results.

- The importance is also emphasized of taking into account in the first place the mission of the Provinces. If it is important to consider the numerical consistency of a group of Provinces, it is vital to cultivate whatever fosters the mission and salesian development.

- With regard to the numerical criterion: here too flexibility is to be applied. Priority is to be given to the good of the Congregation and the Provinces, and to the service of the mission. This dictates the conditions for the configuration of the group, but with due attention to practical situations and possibilities.

- Together with these criteria, whatever be the composition of the groups the importance is emphasized of collaboration and mutual exchange between the Regions themselves.

[194]

The groups of Provinces

With the criteria established, after a discernment on the situations and concrete possibilities, the GC24 approved the following overall framework for the configuration of the groups of Provinces for the coming six-year period":

1. AFRICA GROUP

This is made up juridically of the five circumscriptions at present existing: Central Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, Madagascar, and Zambia-Malawi-Zimbabwe.

The Rector Major with his Council will specify the responsibility of the Regional in coordinating the other salesian foundations in Africa, in the spirit of n.310 of the GC23.

2. LATIN AMERICA (SOUTHERN CONE) GROUP

This group has 14 Provinces:

Argentina-Buenos Aires, Argentina-Bahia Blanca, Argentina-Cordoba, Argentina-La Plata, Argentina-Rosario, Brazil-Belo Horizonte, Brazil-Campo Grande, Brazil-Manaus, Brazil-Porto Alegre, Brazil-Recife, Brazil S+o Paulo, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay.

3, INTER-AMERICA GROUP

This group includes 12 Provinces and 2 Vice-provinces:

Antilles, Bolivia, Central America, Canada, Colombia-Bogot·, Colombia-MedellÌn, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico-Mexico, Mexico-Guadalajara, Peru, United States East, United States West, Venezuela.

4. ASIA-AUSTRALIA GROUP

This group contains 13 Provinces and 2 Vice-provinces:

Australia, China, India-Bangalore, India-Bombay, India-Calcutta, India-Dimapur, India-Guwahati, India-Hyderabad, India-Madras, Japan, Korea, Philippines North, Philippines South, Thailand, Vietnam.

5. NORTH-EUROPE GROUP

This group has 16 Provinces and 1 Circumscription:

Austria, Belgium North, Czech Republic, Croatia, Eastern Circumscription, Germany-Cologne, Germany-Munich, Great Britain, Ireland, Holland, Hungary, Poland-Breslau, Poland-Cracow, Poland-Pila, Poland-Warsaw, Slovakia, Slovenia.

6. WEST-EUROPE GROUP

This group has 11 Provinces:

Belgium South, France-Lyons, France-Paris, Portugal, Spain-Barcelona, Spain-Bilbao, Spain-CÛrdoba, Spain-LeÛn, Spain-Madrid, Spain-Seville, Spain-Valencia.

7. ITALY - MIDDLE EAST GROUP

This group embraces 10 Provinces and 1 Vice-province:

The Middle East and the following Provinces etc. of Italy:

Adriatic, Genoa, Milan, Piedmont Circumscription, Rome, Sardinia, Sicily, Southern, Venice East, Venice West.

can 624

cf. C 163, 177; R 171

In presenting the modified text for approval, the following clarifications were given:

1. Concerning the expression in the modified text: "... may be re-elected for a second period of six years in the same office": this to be understood in the sense that the General Chapter has the possibility of electing a Councillor for a second six-year term, but not for a third six-year term.

2. Concerning the particular situation indicated in art.143 of the Constitutions (the death or cessation in office of the Rector Major), the expression "may be re-elected for a second period of six years in the same office" is to be understood in the sense that, in the case of a Councillor not having completed the second six-year period, the norm does not prevent the General Chapter - if it finds it convenient - to elect the Councillor for a third time in the same office; i.e. the interrupted period is not considered to be a complete six years. It will be up to the General Chapter to make its own discernment in this regard.

C 170

cf.nn.253-254

cf. VC 61

cf. Report of the Vicar General n.254

C 140

R 135-137

**APPENDICES**

APPENDIX 1

**Message of His Holiness JOHN PAUL II**

**for the beginning of the GC24**

To the Very Reverend

Fr *JOHN E. VECCHI*

Vicar General of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco

[195]

1.  It gives me particular pleasure to send to you and to all the salesian confreres, especially those gathered together in the Congregation's 24th General Chapter, my cordial greetings and good wishes.

    How could my first thoughts at this time fail to be of the late lamented Fr Egidio Viganò, who was Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation for so many years?  I think of him with gratitude and emotion as I recall his prodigal commitment in disseminating the renewing wisdom of the Second Vatican Council in both the Society of St Francis de Sales and the wider areas of the Church at large, taking an active part on several occasions in great and important ecclesial assemblies.

    While I recall his faithful service to the Church, I pray that the Lord may grant him the peace of his Kingdom, and imbue the entire Institute with renewed apostolic and missionary spirit in view of the third Christian millennium which is already imminent.

[196]

2.  It is in the perspective of the Great Jubilee that this General Chapter is taking place, an event of fundamental importance in the life of the Congregation.  Every General Chapter has always a double objective: on the one hand that of looking back over the previous six years to assess the commitment made by the various communities for the realization of what was decided on by the previous Chapter and, on the other, that of planning in the light of the original charisma the life of the Congregation in the period now beginning.  The original charism, in fact, must never be lost sight of.

    In this context, and in these years of notable and rapid social and cultural changes, the specific educational and pastoral vocation of the Salesian Congregation finds in the Chapter the means and occasion for reaching decisions for the benefit of the young and of the whole Christian community, which awaits a renewed evangelical and missionary impulse.  A great responsibility is this!  In its light, while praying that the work of the capitulars may be effective, I remind them that the assembly has a character of particular urgency in the context of the contemporary world.

[197]

3.  With the down-to-earth approach of the educator and the far-sightedness of the saint, Don Bosco put before his sons a precise apostolic objective: 'The preparation of upright citizens and good Christians'.  Without any doubt the Salesian Congregation has frequently reflected on the significance of these words, even to the extent of making them a slogan;  it reminds educators of the path they must follow and propose to the young who avail themselves of salesian education in the various sectors of activity: a kind of challenge able to give sense to their existence.

    The results of an educational method of this kind can be seen in a history which is by this time more than merely secular in nature.  The Salesians can count on a great number of friends of Don Bosco scattered all over the world, with different denominations but all linked with the Saint of the young; they can count on numerous Past-pupils who still look to the Father and Teacher of their younger days as an important reference point in their family commitments and their obligations in society; they can count on Cooperators who give effect to their Founder's dreams of education and evangelization, as they continue to spread abroad Don Bosco's genuine spirit and salesian spirituality.

[198]

4.  The reference to those who ask Don Bosco and his salesian sons to help them to live as "upright citizens and good Christians", provides me now with an opportunity for a more explicit reflection on the theme of the present capitular assembly: *the relationship between Salesians and lay people.*

    In recent years the world of the 'laity' has attracted special attention on the part of the Church's magisterium, and before and after the Synod dedicated to the "vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world"  I myself have made several pronouncements in this regard.  In the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici which followed the Synod, I gathered together in an organic manner the needs and perspectives which have arisen in recent years in the Church, so that "the rich 'theory' on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church 'practice'" (n.2).  Speaking of the risks to which the witness of lay people is exposed in today's world, I wrote: "Two temptations can be cited which they (the laity) have not always known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, i.e. a separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world" (ibid.).*

[199]

5.  At the school of Don Bosco, who wanted to make "upright citizens and good Christians" it is possible to help the lay faithful to overcome these two risks.  In their tradition, in fact, the Salesians have efficacious means for creating harmony and balance between the various demands of contemporary life.

    I would like to recall three elements in particular.

    In the first place, *the ability for educational follow-up.  You can call it assistance, animation, family spirit, or whatever you like, but it is always a matter of being present among the laity and among people in general as a "stimulus to the growth of the person in his own environment" leading to a "common search" for a project of life.  Hence the urgent need for salesian communities, rich in numbers and spirituality, ready to accompany all and respond to needs and demands.  Collaboration between Salesians and laity must aim at forming "educative communities", in which personal talents are shared for the good of all.  Who could ever forget Don Bosco's extraordinary ability to gather around him so many persons in a unity of purpose?*

    The second element consists of a *dynamic organization, adroit in its strengths: of individuals in groups of common interests, in associations of civil and religious commitment, and in vast educative and spiritual movements.  I repeat what I said on an earlier occasion:  "There is no doubt that this ecclesial tendency towards group apostolates has a supernatural origin in the 'charity' the Holy Spirit instils in hearts (cf. Rom 5,5).  However, its theological value matches the sociological need that in the modern world leads to the organization of combined efforts in order to reach pre-established objectives. (...)  It is a question of combining and harmonizing the activities of those who aim at influencing the spirit and mentalities of people in various social conditions with the Gospel message.  It is a question of putting into practice an evangelization that is able to exert an influence on public opinion and on institutions; and to reach this aim, well-organized group action is required" (Gen.audience, 23 March 1994, n.2).  Truly Don Bosco was a master in the organization of diverse forces, asking from each one what he was able to give, and bringing all of them into concrete, practical and visible convergence.*

    And the third element on which to rely is the *spiritual indication which stems from Don Bosco's experience at Valdocco and which has extended beyond the limits of the salesian community.  Lay people of the present day have need of a deep spiritual life.  This is required by the nature of the tasks they have to carry out: as their commitment increases to the building of God's Kingdom, so too do the obstacles standing in the way, and the need becomes clear of a deeper interior apostolic conviction.  Modern culture needs convinced and active believers who will be in the world a leaven of kindness and of what is good.  For this reason the formation of the lay faithful is one of the priorities on which the efforts of the community must converge.  Formation helps lay people in the discovery of their particular vocation, it provides them with the means needed for their ongoing maturing process, and introduces them to the ways of the Spirit of the Lord.  It builds up the "union which exists from their being members of the Church and citizens of human society" (Christifideles laici, n.59).  "A faith that does not affect a person's culture is a faith 'not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived'" (*ibid.).

[200]

6.  Don Bosco placed much emphasis on spiritual formation, understood as learning to live the whole of one's personal existence, in its various expressions, in the presence of God and the active construction of the Kingdom.  A similar formation will prepare the laity of the new era to be able to respond to the formerly unknown challenges of our time, so as to create a future rich in hope for all humanity.  The work of the recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the consecrated life has emphasized the relationship existing between the spirituality of a religious Institute and the spirituality of the lay people who take from it the inspiration for their life and activity.   This is the perspective in which it is intended that the reflection of the capitular assembly will take place; it will not fail to indicate lines of apostolic cooperation between consecrated and lay persons who are called to be in the world courageous witnesses of the Gospel.

    I entrust the work of the Chapter to Mary Help of Christians, who continues to watch over the dreams and aspirations of the sons of Don Bosco who are working, sometimes at personal risk, in territories of first evangelization.  There it will be possible to work efficaciously, even with lay people who do not belong to the Catholic Church, provided that there is the ability to live to the full the experience of Don Bosco and to put forward in an integral manner both his educative system and his apostolic spirit.

    In invoking the protection of Don Bosco and the salesian Saints upon all who dedicate themselves to so fascinating but demanding a mission, from my heart I send  to you, to those taking part in the General Chapter, to all the confreres in the various communities, and to the whole Salesian Family, a special Apostolic Blessing as a mark of my esteem and confidence.

    From the Vatican, 31 January 1996, Feast of St John Bosco

                                    JOHN PAUL II

APPENDIX 2

**Address of POPE JOHN PAUL II**

**to the members of the GC24**

**received in audience in the Clementine Hall.**

**1 April 1996**

Dear Capitulars

of the Salesian Society

of St John Bosco,

[201]

I am very pleased to have this long-awaited meeting with you, representatives of the Salesians spread throughout the world.  Attending in such numbers, you witness to the marvellous expansion of the work of St John Bosco, whose charism remains living and vital in the contemporary world.

First of all, sharing in your joy, I congratulate the Rector Major, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, whom you have elected to take charge of your spiritual family, calling him to succeed the late Fr Egidio Viganò, so distinguished for the work he carried out with such clear thinking, totally dedicated to the good of the Church and the Institute.  I pray the Lord to accompany the new Rector Major and his collaborators in their important task, so that they may lead the Salesian Society and Family into the new millennium with St John Bosco's apostolic zeal and all the freshness of his charism.

[202]

2.  With this view of the future and with the challenges of the contemporary world before my eyes, I would like first of all to express my grateful appreciation of your family's active and faithful participation in the Church's mission.  You consider yourselves a living part of the ecclesial community, fully integrated in it and entirely at its service in the various parts of the world.

In the footsteps of your founder, who passed this "sensus Ecclesiae" on to you as a precious heritage, you are carrying out your mission in an extraordinarily important area: the education of youth, ~the most delicate and precious part of human society", as Don Bosco said.  In the Letter *Iuvenum Patris which I sent you on the occasion of the centenary of the saint's death, I reminded you that ~the Church has (...) an intense love for young people: always, but especially in this period so close to the year 2000, she feels invited by her Lord to look upon them with a special love and hope, and to consider their education as one of her primary pastoral responsibilities~ (Oss.Rom., English edition, 8 February 1988, p.1).  I therefore urge you to persevere in this noble and sensitive task which is certainly the focus of your Chapter's attention, since - as your Constitutions state - "like Don Bosco, you are all called on every occasion to be teachers of the faith" (n.34).*

[203]

3.  To fulfil this mission, your Chapter devoted special attention to the laity who, in your family, have various roles

in the education of the young.  Don Bosco himself understood the importance of having collaborators who were prepared to help him in different ways with his great educational task and who shared with him the principles and practices of his preventive system.  He also understood the importance of having people who shared the Congregation's spirit more deeply, bringing it into the Church and society.  This is why he founded the Association of Salesian Cooperators, associated with the Society of St Francis de Sales, with the precise aim of cooperating in its mission to save young people.  He considered it "a most important association which is the soul of our Congregation" *(From the Minutes of the First General Chapter).  In addition to the Cooperators, many other lay people, more or less closely connected with the Congregation, have joined forces in the vast undertaking of education and evangelization: alumni, parents, friends and benefactors, volunteer workers, men and women of good will, all united in the love and service of youth.*

Continuing on the path marked out by St John Bosco and attentive to the signs of the Church of our time, especially in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici, you desire to give new impetus to your involvement with lay people, growing with them in the communion and sharing of Don Bosco's spirit and mission.  This is certainly a*

theme directed to the future in the context of the new evangelization, which will help the Congregation and the entire Salesian family to enter the third millennium, now at our door, with numerous effective forces.

[204]

4.  In this perspective, in your Chapter you proposed the objective of widening involvement and promoting participation and shared responsibility.  Yes, this really is the way to go if all the forces of good are to be joined in active collaboration, in which each, according to his own specific vocation - priestly, religious or lay - contributes his own riches, in a mutual exchange of gifts for the fulfilment of the educational mission.

For my part, I would like to stress the demanding task of formation which, in the Exhortation *Christifideles laici, I presented as a fundamental aspect of the life and mission of the lay faithful, as ~the call to growth, and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit~ (n.57).  On the one hand, it is necessary to remember that formation is a task that involves everyone together, because it is mutually received and shared - and this is all the more true in a spiritual family where participation in the same charism and collaboration in the same mission require putting shared formation into action.  On the other hand, however, it is also necessary to stress the precise responsibility incumbent on the ones who, through a special gift of the Spirit, are called to educate those who are responsible for formation.   This is a demanding task for you, sons of St John Bosco: to help form your lay people as teachers of youth, in the spirit of St John Bosco's preventive system.*

[205]

5.  As I reminded you in my opening Message at the beginning of your Chapter, a crucial point in this formative commitment is the spiritual programme which stems from Don Bosco's experience at Valdocco.  It is at the same time the source and goal of the way offered to all those - young people and adults - who share the saint's educational method.  Allow me to insist here on the primacy of this spirituality which permeates your life and mission and must shine forth particularly in your testimony as consecrated apostles, the "signs and bearers of God's love for the young" as your Constitutions state (n.2).  Lay people, who share with you the spirit and mission of the salesian experience, cannot but feel a similar need in the task they are called to carry out as teachers.  As gradually as necessary and respecting the faith convictions of each, you are called to help them grow towards ever loftier goals in the discovery of their own vocation, to the point of introducing them into the ways of the Spirit of the Lord.

In the Letter *Iuvenum Patris I pointed out how, in the figure of Don Bosco, there is an admirable interchange between education and holiness: "He realized his personal holiness", I wrote ~through an educative commitment lived with zeal and an apostolic heart and (...) at the same time, he knew how to propose holiness as the practical objective of his pedagogy" (n.5).  Dear Salesians, I hope you will be able to imitate Don Bosco in his ability to transmit Gospel values, involving your collaborators in the educational mission and the young people themselves to whom it is directed.  Thus you will succeed in making the educational community a true experience of the Church, the appropriate environment for a journey of growth towards authentic Christian maturity.*

[206]

6.  Holy Week, which has just begun calls to mind the Message that your beloved Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, addressed to the Salesian Family last year precisely at this time.  On Good Friday, 14 April, he wrote: "I feel especially close to you on this sacred day of mystery and sacrifice.  I have been in hospital for weeks, but I had never experienced Good Friday as an extraordinary day of Don Bosco's charism.  To be immersed in the mystery of Christ's love, overwhelmed by the sufferings of the flesh: there is no more suitable moment to be with young people, to encourage our brothers and sisters, to intensify the Salesian Family".  With these sentiments Fr Viganò offered everyone his Easter greetings "in the victorious Lord".

Dear Capitulars, I invite you to look to this splendid witness of faith and Christian optimism, in order to draw from it inspiration and courage in the decisions you are called to make.  The lesson left you by Fr Viganò is quite clear: the secret of courageous and fruitful apostolic activity lies in adhering without reserve to the crucified and risen Christ.

I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you, to your confreres, to the lay members of your educative communities and to all the members of the Salesian Family.

APPENDIX 3

**Address of Cardinal Edoardo Martinez Somalo**

**Prefect of the Congregation**

**for the Institutes of Consecxrated Life**

**and the Societies of Apostolic Life**

  Dear Salesians of Don Bosco, animators of the great Salesian Family, I greet you most cordially, and let me say at once that I feel very much at home among you, as in a family.

    I offer my greetings too to their Eminences the Cardinals, to their Excellencies the Archbishops and Bishops, and to all those in charge of the different branches of the Salesian Family, gathered here at the beginning of your 24th General Chapter.

    My words are addressed to each of you individually, hoping if for no other reason to confirm you in the tradition of Don Bosco and his successors, and inviting you to continue at the threshold of the 3rd Christian Millennium your incomparable service as *"Missionaries of the young".*

    Allow me to begin with a quite special reference to the Rector Major who left us last June: *Fr Egidio Viganò, an authentic son of Don Bosco, and for that very reason a wise and faithful servant of the Church.*

    To him the Church owes a debt of gratitude for the ever more progressive and closer service he gave: from his duties as a teacher in the Catholic University of Santiago-Chile, to his presence as an expert at the Second Vatican Council, to the Assemblies of the Latin-American Bishops Conferences; from posts of responsibility in the Salesian Congregation to his participation in the Synods of Bishops and his collaboration with the Departments of the Roman Curia!  We thank God for so faithful and competent a service.  To you goes the challenge of continuing with the same fervour and optimism his following of Don Bosco - a fervour and optimism which must accompany your work in this 24th General Chapter.

[208]

*1.  Your General Chapter, an event of communion.*

    Your Capitular Assembly is a grace of the Holy Spirit for fostering a flourishing communion and sharing among you, whom the God of every vocation has gathered together *"to live and work together", of Don Bosco's educative and pastoral charism. marked by a predilection for the young who have most need of affection and of the Gospel.*

    A climate of communion is necessary to be able to communicate, and in turn cordial communication is necessary to be able to bear effective witness.  Harmony of mind and heart is essential for mutual enrichment through multiple Christian experiences fused into unity of intent, as fruits of the best that comes from all parts of the world, where as Salesians you are present and working.

    That you come from different cultures is clear at once from your features and languages, but equally evident is your unity in spirit and intent:

    - You are linked together in chapter to be strengthened in the unity of your salesian patrimony and to share it with lay people who want to commit themselves with you in the mission of educating and evangelizing the young.

    - You are in communion to increase ever more the unity of all the members of the Salesian Family around the rock which is Peter, in the challenge of the New Evangelization.  And who can ever forget the love Don Bosco had for the Pope?

    - You are united around the sacrament of the Eucharist, another great love of Don Bosco - the Eucharist which St Augustine calls *"the sign of unity and bond of charity" (Commentary on the Gospel of John, 26.6.13) - to bring about in the different cultures in which the Gospel is implanted, the objective Don Bosco himself had so much at heart, i.e. to raise up in society "upright citizens and good Christians".*

    - And you are united in harmony, so that the riches of the salesian charism will maintain all its substance, while becoming embodied in all the positive realities present in the most widely differing cultures.

    You well know, my dear Salesians, that *"outsiders" who look on you with affection want you to be ever more: a light which enlightens others; a warmth which humanizes through the preventive system and makes Christians of the young and older people who gravitate around you; an attraction to others to follow Christ as did Don Bosco and with him, with the same thirst for souls, I would day: "Da mihi animas!"*

    This is a kind of communion which will always be in harmony with a healthy plurality, seeking every day new expressions of truth and prophecy as a service to the New Evangelization.

[209]

***2.  A CHAPTER FOR LAUNCHING THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION INTO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM.***

    You all know how much the Holy Father has been urging the Church to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, so that the *Christ event, yesterday, today and the same for ever, may enlighten with the light of his countenance, strengthen with the truth of his word, and enliven with the hope of his paschal victory, the way of humanity through the paths of the new Millennium.*

    This Chapter has the task of launching your Congregation into the next century, of taking up its challenges with the same pastoral heart of Don Bosco, and of being for the young in a special manner *"signs and bearers of the love of God".*

    May the Holy Spirit therefore, who has brought you together from all parts of the world as in a renewed ecclesial Pentecost, unite your wills, your energies, your toil, your intentions and your desires, so that the salesian spirituality (which is pastoral charity with educative love) may be a significant and generous contribution which you offer to the task of the whole Church.

    May the same Holy Spirit, the Consoler, weld you together by the breath of a renewed spiritual youthfulness; may he fill your hearts with the inexhaustible joy of Don Bosco and confirm you in that down-to-earth apostolic realism which is proper to your educative and pastoral methodology, which forges Saints.

    May he give you a unity of spirit and of planning for approaching the young, wherever you may find them, to accompany them and help them to reach that maturity in Christ (cf. Eph 4,13), being made new beings in him (cf. Eph 2,15; 4,24).

         Faithful to the spirit of St John Bosco and in continuity with your history, you will contribute in this way to the salvation of the young by inserting yourselves actively and effectively into the vicissitudes of our times, as was recalled by the recent Synod on the Consecrated Life.

[210]

*3.  An apostolic osmosis between Salesians and Laity.*

    From the standpoint of communion and the sharing of Don Bosco's mission, the lay member of the faithful will be at the centre of your capitular work.  The common vocation to holiness and mission - this double dimension which then reduces to a single one with two aspects, bringing in all the members of the Church.  The names given to the different members have their root in the functions which each group is called upon to carry out in fulfilment of the one vocation.

    To note once again that the attainment of sanctity and the call to the mission come to the same thing, the same norms and practices, the same *spiritual outlook, will help you to a deeper and more adequate understanding of the significance of "communion and sharing" and to accept the consequences.*

    The norms and dynamism of the vocation to holiness and to the mission pass, as we are well aware, through the interiorization of the life of the Trinity in each one of us, nourished by the regular use of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, by prayer, by ascesis and by a life passed in rectitude of intention for the glory of God.

    The working together therefore of Salesians and Laity implies a distinction between consecrated and lay persons but in unity of spirit and salesian mission, with each one in the identity of his own vocation, in working contexts which may at times be different, but all of them at one in the project which God entrusted to Don Bosco through Mary.  Unity and distinction. communion of objectives but reached through different apostolic activities though always with the same fervour and educative method: in a word, with the same passion for Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.  In this way your consecrated life takes on the value of a sign and becomes for the laity an element drawing them to the mission; while their presence - as we were reminded by the recent Synod - will contribute to the giving of a more organic image to the Church and to her mission in the world.

    These relationships, the 1994 Synod recalled, are founded on the ecclesiology of communion, developed by Vatican II, which recognizes nonetheless that every Christian has specific functions and ministries.

    It is not my intention to separate the ones from the others, but a distinction is necessary even though we are all called to be evangelizers.

    The laity have the ability, by special title, to bring out the evangelical possibilities hidden in the realities of human social life, provided they act in unity with and as part of the Church under the influence of the Holy Spirit, by means of Christ.

    To you it belongs to help the laity to mature in the awareness of their salesian mission, and to form them to the ability to discover levels and practical directions which are proper to them.

    You Salesians in fact are already in possession of an educative method whose power and strength must be applied for the formation of the laity to collaboration; they will thus be helped in the work of the redemption of human activities, so as to restore in them the crystal clarity of the divine design.

    From this emerges with new emphasis what Don Bosco used to say: *"form upright citizens", i.e. people who are competent in the fields of lay activity, such as science, technology, culture, work, art, politics, etc.; and to "form good Christians", i.e. people who will live and act as Christians.*

    Dear Salesians, it is my hope and prayer that the exchange of gifts of intelligence and practical methods which will take place in this General Chapter may lead you to focus on the fundamental points for an authentic communion and sharing with the laity in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco.

    I put, for your attention and my own, four points. all of them emphasized in Synodal interventions, which must never be lost sight of when there is a question of authentic communion and sharing, of interaction between a Community of consecrated life like your own and the laity.

1) Always cultivate with the laity a deep and authentic ecclesial communion: *agere cum Ecclesia starts always from esse in Ecclesia and is fostered by vivere pro Ecclesia.*

2) Bear witness to the call to holiness, and propose it together with groups of committed lay people.  Let your sharing and your communion become the *setting where the vocation to holiness is clearly proposed, manifested and encouraged in the face of any wearying passivity.*

3) Be yourselves, and allow the laity to do likewise.  The irradiation of your charism presupposes, in fact, that individuals and communities are firmly anchored in their own consecrated identity.  Don Bosco's charism, his mission to the young, the spirituality and method of the preventive system, will be effective and flourish only to the extent in which you are convinced and transparent witnesses.

   But you must also help the laity to be themselves.  In the communion and sharing of the salesian spirit and mission they are called to emphasize aspects which are specifically theirs, rooted in their lay status, in fields and environments in which they are competent.  This specific nature of theirs is a source of riches for you and for the mission to youth.

4) And finally, Salesians and Laity together, look at the enormous challenges stemming from young people and their contexts.  With the sensitivity of an *"oratorian heart", make yourselves their friends, brothers, teachers, and promoters of initiatives, which prolong in time the solicitude of the "father and teacher of youth".*

    And with this I will finish.  I have referred to two of the three great loves of Don Bosco: the Eucharist and the Pope.

Last but not least, let me recall his other great love - for Mary Help of Christians.

    May she protect you, bless you and assist you.

    As the Seat of Wisdom, the wise and prudent Virgin, may she increase in each of you those virtues which must emerge in an assembly of high level like the present one.  May she, the Mother most amiable, be your encouragement and support when her loving presence is needed; may she help you now and always to be faithful. courageous and joyful witnesses for all the lay people activities.

for whom you work and who collaborate with you in your educative     May Mary Help of Christians, who guided Don Bosco with motherly concern and predilection, guide you also in bearing witness to the apostolic mission the Church is expecting from you.

    THANK YOU!

Rome, 19 February 1996.

APPENDIX 4

**Address of the Vicar General**

**Fr Juan E. Vecchi**

**at the opening of the GC24**

Your Eminence Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo,

My Lord Cardinals and Bishops,

Mothers, Sisters and Brothers representing Groups of the Salesian Family,

Members of the General Chapter.

[211]

    We are beginning the 24th General Chapter of the Society of St Francis de Sales which will start us out on the path leading us to the great Jubilee of the Redemption.

    I am happy to be able to offer grateful greetings to his Eminence the Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.  His presence is a sign of our communion with all those in the Church who have accepted the invitation to undertake the radical following of Christ.

    I thank our Salesian Cardinals and Bishops for their fraternal participation in this function.  Your salesian vocation placed at the service of high pastoral responsibility reminds us of the ecclesial character of our Congregation and of this assembly of ours.

    We are grateful too for the representation here today of other branches of the Salesian Family, and particularly to Mother Marinella Castagno, Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to the Coordinator General of the Cooperators, to the World President of the Past-pupils, and to the Superiors General of the Don Bosco Volunteers, of the Salesian Oblates, and of the Sister Apostles of the Holy Family.

    And to you, members of the Chapter, gathered from all over the world, I offer a warm welcome and best wishes for the success of your work.

[212]

1.  An ecclesial event

    What it is that brings us together today we are told by our Constitutions.  Our General Chapter is the principal sign of unity of the Congregation: a sign in the sacramental sense which such unity manifests and at the same time produces and strengthens.

    The unity is revealed in the visible fraternal encounter in which we intend to carry out a communal reflection to keep ourselves faithful to the Gospel and the charism of our Founder and sensitive to the needs of time and place.  Gospel and charism are our common and constant points of reference, but they are not static points.  Times and places are the terrain where they are sown so that they may germinate, flourish and produce new fruits.  The will of God, sought for in discernment, is what we are looking for to guide us in the practical choices we have to make.

    In this way the General Chapter comes to be the means through which the Salesian Society in its totality seeks to know, at a specific point in history, what service it is called upon to render to the Church and to youth.

    This is a matter of considerable importance.  In fact the objectives already mentioned - discernment of God's will, adherence to the Gospel, fidelity to the charism, spiritual and practical unity, sense of the present time, adaptation to places - are at the root of our human existence and the foundation of our consecrated life.

    It is true that they imply tasks which are demanding but at the same time both noble and joyful, and this all the more so when we can count on excellent fellow-travellers: the Holy Spirit, Mary most holy, and Don Bosco.

    The same image of the General Chapter given us by the Constitutions is also revealed in our history.  The past 150 years gave seen 23 great assemblies before this present one.  Although there were many differences between them they opened up a perspective, made concrete a certain trait, strengthened a dimension, and perfected a method.  The combined result has been not only to ensure our charismatic unity with the passage of time but continually to enrich it.

    For us Salesians, therefore, the present moment is pregnant with significance and possibilities, but is also dense with realities already achieved.

    This would seem to be something that concerns only our Congregation, or at the most our Salesian Family.  But art.6 of the Constitutions opens up further horizons.  It invites us to turn our gaze on the Church and feel ourselves immersed in its mystery: "The salesian vocation", says the article, "places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission".  It is the Church herself that considers our General Chapter not just as a private happening in a religious Institute but as an ecclesial event, when in her own law (can.631) she lays down its character, compass and main objectives.

[213]

    We are gathered together here as Church, called together in her name and for her service, in virtue of that charism which with other gifts of the Holy Spirit constitutes the mystery of the Body of Christ and the principal energy of its mission.

    This ecclesial dimension has been underlined by the filial and welcome acceptance of the message of the Holy Father, who according to our Constitutions is our highest Superior, to whose authority the members, even when gathered in General Chapter, are always filially submissive, even by force of the vow of obedience.

    Precisely because of its spiritual and ecclesial significance, the General Chapter has the highest authority in the Congregation.  This it exerts in extraordinary form, especially in the fulfilment of its three tasks of legislating, electing and deliberating.

    Every capitular, once he has been elected by his Province, becomes a member of the General Chapter with full and exclusive personal responsibility.  He is not bound by directives or choices of his own Province or Region, as though he were merely a spokesman.  The General Chapter is not, in fact, an assembly of representatives, but a collegiate body of extraordinary government whose authority derives from the Constitutions (cf. C 123).

    The first and principal term of reference of every capitular is the General Chapter itself, its objectives and purposes and the process of discernment pursued in it.  To this process each one brings his personal experience and cultural sensitivity, and in it he allows himself to be moulded in the light of the charism.

    This belongs to the very nature of the General Chapter: it looks at the Congregation in itself in the first instance, and then in its parts, from the standpoint of the unity, fidelity and vitality of the whole.  It is a powerful reminder for all the members to place the charismatic dimension and world perspective before any particular ones.

[214]

**2.  The 24th General Chapter**

    Our present General Chapter (the 24th) is the largest in numbers in salesian history.  There are 210 capitulars from 89 circumscriptions, with this latter also the highest number yet achieved.  Those present will actually number 208, but with them we link a grateful and deeply felt thought for Fr Egidio Viganò, who would have presided over the Chapter, and for Fr Martin McPake, Councillor General for the English-speaking Region.  To the capitulars there have also been added seven observers, who have been invited to ensure a more consistent presence of coadjutor brothers.

    The preparatory stages indicated by the Constitutions and General Regulations have been duly implemented: the convocation and presentation of the theme, formation of the technical commission, provincial chapters, appointment and work of the precapitular commission, the sending out in due time of the scheme of work, and the designation of the juridical commission for checking the validity of the elections.  We believe therefore that as far as human responsibilities are concerned the preparation has been well done.

    The GC24 follows the line taken progressively by the General Chapters of the period following Vatican II: after an overall reflection on the salesian identity and the subsequent promulgation of the renewed Constitutions, they went on to study more deeply certain particular aspects of our life: the evangelization of the young, formation, our pastoral practice or the preventive system, animation of the community, and the figure of the members.  Subsequently they focused on points still more precise and capable of verification: the journey of faith to be proposed to the young, criteria of functionality of our works, salesian youth spirituality, the configuration of the subject of pastoral activity, i.e. the educative community with the Salesians as animators and the laity as participants in salesian educative and pastoral interests.

    It is precisely through this last point that the GC24 is linked with and almost visibly joined to its predecessor.  The intention, in fact, is to clarify and make more concrete the sharing of responsibility which the laity can have in Don Bosco's mission and spirit, always for the evangelization of the young and  especially those who are poorer; and this in the context of the educative community, of the Salesian Family and of the vast movement of the friends of Don Bosco or of persons interested in education in a Christian sense.

    At first sight this may seem a completing or crowning of what we have already said about pastoral practice, but it is in fact an invitation to rethink the whole new perspective of the Church as the people of God which has matured in recent times.

    It may also seem to be a further effort at spreading the salesian spirit, but it is in fact a spur to a reexamination of everything with a view to the discovery of dimensions which have so far remained hidden.  In this sense the path we have already followed is most useful to us in discerning the further road we see indistinctly as lying ahead.  And this is something indispensable if we are to understand and render fruitful at the present day what we have developed so far.

[215]

    And then our General Chapter, like its predecessors has the duty of electing the Rector Major and his Council.  I think it hardly necessary to emphasize the importance of an act of this nature.  Our communication services have sensitized communities and confreres in a more intense manner than in the past.  We are therefore sustained by the prayer and solidarity of many in our process of discernment.

    What appears as a legitimate interest for everyone becomes, for each capitular, a fact of conscience for which he is personally responsible before God and his confreres.  The Lord wishes to make use of our personal and communal mediation to indicate the one who will become a sign of the presence of Don Bosco, with his closest collaborators.  In this we are asked for purity of heart and a joint effort at serene seeking.

    Patient enlightenment, the ability to listen, detachment from superficial motivations, autonomy in giving one's own vote, will find their most genuine sources in prayer and in charity towards all.  We have thought it well to precede the elections by some days of discernment and the invocation of help to obtain that interior peace and tranquility which will ensure us God's help.

    The GC24, in line with its legislative task, can also verify in accordance with law and within the limitations of its competence those norms which need urgent adaptation: i.e. the Constitutions and General Regulations.  Its authority is supreme, but is neither isolated nor limitless.  It takes place and is completed in association with other organisms of government.  It would be a waste of time to take up secondary problems or those which ordinary government can deal with more easily through experience.

    For the validity, not least at a charismatic level, of the conclusions concerning each of the three tasks indicated, there must be absolute juridical correctness, beginning from the elections in local communities, going on through the realization of the Provincial Chapters, and finally in the merit and procedures of the General Chapter.

    Ours is not just a gathering of friends or pastoral workers, nor is it a meeting of experts.  It is the point of convergence of some 17,000 confreres, each of whom has in this General Chapter his own shared responsibility laid down in norms resulting from wisdom and long-studied considerations for the expression of communion.

    Its legality is therefore far more than an external formality.  It belongs to the substance of the General Chapter with its contents.  As the SGC20 declared: "The religious life is of its nature charismatic; for this reason it has a spiritual dimension and here its vitality is to be found.  But from the very fact that religious are human and have specific goals to attain together, there is the need to have an organization as in any other society, and this has need of structures" (SGC 706, 1).

[216]

**3.  The context of the GC24**

    The Chapter does not isolate us from the world, but inserts us in it with greater awareness and greater foresight and caution.  It is called upon to become the occasion for taking note of the point in history at which we are living, so as to be part of it in a more evangelical manner through a service, but especially through a prophetic presence.  There are some coordinates which mark this climate of the world.

    The first is the new evangelization: it includes a reading of the times, the feeling of an urgent need for the proclamation of Christ, and the ecclesial proposals and movement already taking place.  It is like the concrete expression in pastoral practice of the whole process of reflection which the Church has made through Synods and documents of the period following the Council.  It appears as a lucid awareness of cultural tendencies, of world problems and human aspirations; and at the same time as the response which Christ's disciples intend to give by their words, but more especially by their lives.  And this not only to guarantee salvation after death, but also to defend personal dignity in history.  As educators both aspects are of concern to us; they become fused together in our intention to evangelize by educating.

    The second coordinate is the discovery of the riches brought to the new evangelization by each of the vocations: that of the lay person, that of the ordained minister, and that of the consecrated individual.  And this not in isolation but in their interaction, in their mutual enrichment and working together for the evangelical leavening of the world.  It is not a matter of conforming to a single pattern, of watering down our identity, of being less consecrated, but of being so more radically and openly, so that the laity too may live the Gospel in a more radical manner within secular realities.  We are asked to draw new light and energy from our situation in total transcendence and love, so that the laity may feel themselves led to the leavening of worldly realities from within, in line with the laws involved, by directing them to the Kingdom.

The third coordinate is the Jubilee of the Redemption of the year 2000.  This is more than a mere anniversary, even though it be an exceptional one.  The figures are full of significance, such as the urgent need of prophecy in our own time, the reawakening in believers of hope in him who was, who is and is coming again, a glimmer of "what lies beyond" for those who are unbelievers, the calling of all churches to unity and of all religious experiences to commitment for mankind.  The digits 2000 are merely a chronological indication of the year, but as a point in history it comes laden with possibilities.  And to the examination of these we too are called, even as a General Chapter.

[217]

**4.  Conclusion**

    The nature, purpose, tasks and context require from each capitular and from the Chapter as a whole, vision and concreteness, a utopian outlook and a practical approach.  It may be that these two dimensions are incompatible from the outset.  There will be some who want something prophetic and charismatic, open to God's future, without limits of perspective.  And there will be others who are looking for something practical, almost of an administrative nature, restricted to the possibilities of the present time, prudent in the face of dreams for the future.  To the capitulars it belongs to make a synthesis of the two.  We must not let ourselves be so blinded by distant horizons that we do not know what to do today; but neither must we let our view be so imprisoned in immediate needs that we do not see the light of the perspectives ahead and fail to aim at their realization.

    As religious and educators we have to be at one and the same time specialists in both dreams and the understanding of possibilities, in the utopia of the Kingdom and the nitty-gritty of daily work.

\*  \*  \*

    From her who was given in a dream to Don Bosco as the Mistress of Wisdom, we ask for inspiration and guidance in the work we are about to undertake.

APPENDIX 5

**Address of the Rector Major, Fr Juan E, Vecchi**

**to His Holiness John Paul II**

**during the audience granted to the GC24**

**Rome, 1 April 1996**

Most Holy Father,

[218]

Gathered here before you are 230 participants in the 24th General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation.  Some are members by right; others have been invited, and among the latter are some lay people who share with us Don Bosco's spirit, form part of the Salesian Family, and collaborate in the mission to the young and the poor.  I would like to present them to you one by one.  They are working in as many different parts of the world in the new evangelization and today they represent the realization of Don Bosco's charism.

During these past weeks all of them, Salesians and Laity, have been working solidly in the important event of the Congregation, which is the General Chapter.  And subsequently they will take to others and put into effect what has been decided.

In the name of all of them I express to Your Holiness sentiments of gratitude for the attention, affection and confidence you have always shown towards our Family.  Your messages and addresses to our last three General Chapters, together with the letter *Iuvenum Patris which you sent us on the occasion of the centenary of Don Bosco's death, constitute for us an anthology.  They remind us of the originality of our spirituality and of our style of education, which we want always to place totally at the disposal of the Church's mission, and particularly in this last part of the century which leads us to the third millennium.  Indeed we consider this period as a challenge and an opportunity for apostolic educators.  In this we are encouraged by your own encounters with young people, the hopes you place in them, and your words of guidance.*

We know too of your fatherly interest in the development of our General Chapter, and your expectation and anticipation of the "white smoke", as we have heard from our confreres who work in the Vatican.

[219]

This audience which you have kindly granted us, taking time from the multiplicity of your engagements, is something we have long desired and awaited.  It gives rise to a joy we have been striving to contain.  We ask the indulgence of those responsible for Vatican protocol and order if some of those present should be led by their exuberance to offend in some way against established usage.  There are several here from oratories, and they act on the principle that spontaneity should not be repressed but guided.

The joy stems from our filial adherence to the Vicar of Christ, which is easy for us because it has its root in faith and a pastoral sense.  We have absorbed into our family traditions the sayings and examples of Don Bosco and the gestures of those who formed us.  Today is a date which easily takes us back to our roots, because it is the anniversary of the canonization of our Father and of the birth of Mamma Margaret.

In our work with the young and in Christian communities, we live and present the ministry of Peter as a gift of God to the Church for unity and to the world for ethical and social guidance, in difficult times which have need of points of reference.

This is a dimension of our spirituality which the Constitutions - our project of life in God - recommend to us in these words: "We feel ourselves a living part of the Church, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we  express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity".

[220]

Because of this ecclesial sense, our 24th General Chapter has decided to deepen the relationships of communion and sharing among consecrated and lay persons in the charism and mission of Don Bosco.  In this we have been encouraged and enlightened by your Apostolic Exhortations *Christifideles laici and Pastores dabo vobis.  But at the present time especially, after its recent publication, we are profiting by the Exhortation Vita consecrata, for which we are grateful to Your Holiness, because it gives us the unending dimension of our choice and indicates the conditions for rendering it significant in the world of the present day.*

It is our wish that the gift which God has given in Don Bosco to the Church for the evangelization of youth, be extended and shared by the greatest possible number of people, so that a continual and fruitful dialogue may be undertaken with young people in the traditional settings of education, but also in today's new and youthful versions of the areopagus.

We entrust these desires to the heart and prayers of Your Holiness.  And while we offer you our most sincere congratulations for your priestly Jubilee, we are ready to receive your words into our hearts, and we invoke upon ourselves, our communities and projects your Apostolic Blessing.

APPENDIX 6

**Address of the Rector Major**

at the conclusion of the GC24

Dear Chapter Members,

[221]

Through the grace of the Holy Spirit we have reached the conclusion of the 24th General Chapter.  This concluding capitular Assembly is the final stage of a path we have followed together in our shared search for the road our Congregation is called upon to follow, together with numerous collaborators, in the challenging years that lie ahead in our mission on behalf of the young.  In this solemn and significant moment, while we recall in synthesis all that has slowly matured in two months of the Chapter's work, we feel how important it is that each of us accepts and makes his own the guidelines and deliberations of the Chapter, so as to be able to live them and pass them on to our educative and pastoral communities.

[222]

**1.  Sense of gratitude**

The first feeling that arises spontaneously is that of gratitude.  First of all to God, who has accompanied us and guided us with the constant presence of his Holy Spirit: to him is due our praise for the wonders he has worked and continues to work in our Congregation, and which have been made manifest once again during this Chapter.  To Mary Help of Christians, our Mother and Teacher, always close to us and attentive to our needs and those of the young; to our Father and Founder Don Bosco, to whom we have incessantly made reference at every stage of our work.

The Eucharist which we shall soon celebrate, in the joyful atmosphere of the paschal liturgy, is the fullest expression of our gratitude, in union with the unending praise which the Church offers through Christ to the Father.

Our thankfulness then extends also to all who have committed themselves with constancy and self-sacrifice to the work of the Chapter, and first of all and especially to the Moderator, Fr Antonio Martinelli, tireless, foreseeing, ever present and attentive in everything, and to those who collaborated with him more directly; to the Chairmen and Secretaries of the Chapter, so capable and precise; to the various Commissions headed by their Presidents and Spokesmen and to the drafting group, who combined to give us a rich and stimulating document; to the assiduous and tireless translators; to the lay people who shared with us part of the Chapter's proceedings; the Rector and confreres of the Generalate, who accompanied us by their generous service and kindness; and in particular the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their girls who provided for our daily needs with such availability and courtesy.  Our heartfelt thanks go to all of them:  we shall not easily forget the experience we have lived through and which we can well refer to as a reciprocal exchange of gifts.

[223]

**2.  The GC24: an event of the Congregation**

**on the threshold of the Third Millennium**

The General Chapter, as I said in my opening address, is an *event of the Congregation; it is a landmark in its history and launches it towards the future.  Although celebrated institutionally in Rome it involves, in fact, the whole of the Congregation in all its structures and expressions; and we have experienced in this Chapter more than in preceding ones the closeness and involvement of confreres and communities in the event, not least because of the better quality of communications.*

As well as an event of the Congregation, the General Chapter is also an *event of the Church, not only because through the charisma we have received from the Holy Spirit we feel ourselves to be a living part of the Church (cf. C 13) and at its service, but also because the Chapter event has its consequences on the Church's mission in today's world in which we collaborate.*

And from this standpoint we cannot fail to emphasize its particular character.  With its celebration on the threshold of the year 2000, it inserts us in the course the Church is following to develop a renewed evangelizing capacity in the new millennium.  Pope John Paul II, in the audience he granted to the General Chapter, pointed out our task of "leading the Society and the Salesian Family into the new millennium with the apostolic ardour of St John Bosco and with all the freshness of his charism".

Within the setting of our Family we have also relived, during the Chapter, the humble and prophetic episode which was at the beginnings of our history: on 12 April 1996 in fact we commemorated the *150th anniversary of Don Bosco's arrival at Valdocco, to the Pinardi shed so poor and yet so pregnant with hope, where the Oratory found a stable home and from which it spread, through the protection of Mary Help of Christians, to every continent.  The memory of this event placed all our capitular reflections in the light of the origins.*

Some other significant facts and features characterized this Chapter at the end of a millennium.  They remain engraved in our minds and hearts, and we take them with us as a substantial content of our capitular experience.

[224]

In the first place there is the *depth and manifestation of communion within our capitular community.  Though coming from a wide variety of contexts and having to face problems which of necessity implied different outlooks, we have experienced the fellowship of living and working together (C 49).  Our charismatic identity, the "grace of unity" of our apostolic consecration. common prayer, harmony of hearts, the effort to reach convergence in frank and always respectful discussion: all this has been an authentic manifestation of salesian worldwide communion.  For this reason, as we finish our work, we feel supported by this "practical unity" as bearers of the Chapter's message.*

[225]

Another characteristic feature of the GC24 has been the *openness of the Congregation to the world at large, which has been manifested ever more clearly, with due and constant attention to preserving the unity of spirit and mission.  This openness to the world is revealed in particular in the intercultural and transcultural vision of the charism, in the approach to realities and problems of specific contexts, in the concern for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, in the exploitation of different languages.  Even in the reflections which led to the new arrangement of the groups of province, attention to intercultural and international exchange was one of the criteria from which the Assembly drew its inspiration.*

[226]

Against the background of openness to the world we can also see the *growth in missionary awareness, discernible in the Chapter.  Even though "missionary" activity was not specifically on the agenda, its impact on many aspects of the Chapter theme, together with the communication of experiences of Provincials and Delegates from our missionary territories, contributed to a revival of the missionary aspect of the Congregation; and this in a double sense: in becoming aware of the missionary commitment lived by our communities, and in acquiring an ever better understanding of the urgent need of missionary frontiers "ad gentes" with the missionary heart of Don Bosco.*

[227]

An innovation of the GC24, which calls for special mention, has been the *presence of lay people, who not only contributed to a deeper analysis of the Chapter's theme but enriched it by their fraternal presence, the contribution of their experiences and the witness of the gifts of their specifically lay vocation, within the Salesian Family or Movement.*

[228]

An important fact and significant coincidence during the course of the GC24 was also the *promulgation of the Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consecrata".  The Exhortation had been long awaited after the Synod, and has become inserted in the work of the GC24 as a stimulus to the ever better understanding of our specific vocation in the Church, the gift of the charism we have received through the Founder, and the great horizons now open in the Church and in the world to us who are consecrated apostles.  Within the theme of the Chapter, the Apostolic Exhortation has helped us to perceive more deeply our own contribution as religious priests and lay religious in the educative and pastoral community, of which we want to be animators together with our collaborators.*

[229]

And we must remember too the *novelty of the discernment process which in this Chapter has helped us to listen to the Holy Spirit, open to different possibilities, internally free and available, for choosing those who would be called to animate the Congregation during the coming six years.  This experience is a valid indication also for provincial and local communities as regards the path to be followed in making decisions or deciding on orientations concerning our life and the carrying out of our mission.*

[230]

In pointing to these aspects, while rightly emphasizing the resulting innovations and the progress that has been made, we cannot fail to stress also the *sense of continuity which has accompanied such development.  In fact when we examine the reflections and proposals of the provinces we have become aware that they have moved in harmony with the Constitutions, in the effort to give effect to the apostolic project expressed in them, in a form better corresponding to the situations and needs of today's youth, but in complete fidelity to the mind of Don Bosco.  Even in respect of sharing with the laity, the GC24 has recognized that this is an already existing reality or one in process of being started up, and must be stimulated and made more alive and active.*

Finally we must underline the *quality of communication which has marked this Chapter: both the official communication using the equipment and professional competence of our Salesian News Agency (ANS) in close collaboration with the Chapter Commission for information, and - an important fact - private communication which used updated technology to reach confreres and communities immediately.  This is an aspect which will certainly be kept in mind by future General Chapters.*

**3.  Some orientations which have emerged**

After recalling some outstanding features of the event, I would now like, without re-reading or summarizing the Chapter document, to dwell for a while on some indications which I consider fundamental for our progress in the coming six years.

[231]

**3.1  Lay people:  a grace, and a task to be performed**

The focal point of our reflections has been the salesian charism, mission and spirit, as a possibility still to be discovered of communion and shared responsibility in the service of the young.  We must not forget this because from this gift of the Spirit stem the riches and original forms of the cooperation which we hope to achieve.

The subjects involved are simultaneously the Salesians and lay people.  But the novelty of the perspective stems from the sudden entrance of the latter into the salesian horizon and of the insertion of their experience as freshly understood in the heart of the charism.

For the Salesians this implies not just a marginal addition, but a new light involving the whole of their vocation.  In living this vocation with renewed awareness and enthusiasm they will find the resources to enable them to put into practice the conclusions of the GC24.

The new attention to the laity leads in the first place to the recognition and exploitation of the reality of which they are bearers: children of God, temples of the Spirit, members of the people of God.  They act in the world with the prophetic grace which points others towards the Lord, with the sanctifying power which heals and reconciles, and with royal energy which creates, orients and transforms.  They are called to holiness, which is the human fulfilment of communion with God.  If these points are repeated it is because they need to be considered again and again in the real terms of daily life.

The secular condition of the lay person, used as a key for a new understanding, broadens and enriches the vision of the salesian mission: it makes it clear that, although it has an identity, this has no limits as regards extension and can integrate aspects, initiatives and ever new forms conformable to the movement of the world; it can be expressed through a whole range of persons who, while living in different parts or working in different environments, are nevertheless linked by an identical spirit and purpose.

The lay perspective also leads to a discovery of the possibilities regarding the communion which salesian consecrated life can create around spirituality, education and pedagogical praxis.  It indicates to us numerous groups of persons in which these things can be active and leavening: from the Cooperators, who take and mould their lay salesian identity under the gaze and spiritual guidance of Don Bosco and are today our main partners, down to those who share with us human values, a religious attitude and concern for education.

The presence of lay people also makes us give renewed thought to secular, human and Christian experience, and situations in which this is expressed: family, professions and politics.  These realities and values are naturally associated with them and form an  indispensable part of the content of education, which is our own field of work.

[232]

In this fresh understanding emerges the identity of the woman and her contribution to culture, education, ecclesial and salesian life, which calls on our part for welcome acceptance, exploitation and reciprocity.  But we shall certainly draw from it too advantages for our consecrated life, for communion and for our pastoral work.

And so with the presence of the laity our vision becomes broader and deeper, as well as increasing our practical possibilities.  We know that there are many people who have been moved in spirit after coming into contact with Don Bosco.  And we know too that his plan of life in the spirit offers infinite possibilities for realization at both institutional and individual level.

But *Christifideles Laici, at n.2, reminds us: "In reality the challenge embraced by the Synod Fathers has been that of indicating the concrete ways through which the rich theory on the lay state expressed by the Council cam be translated into authentic Church practice".*

For us too the test lies in the practice, in which the first step is the welcome, the attitude of availability and pleasure, at the emergence of the laity in the field of the charism.  It is true of course that the practice has need of ecclesial and salesian reflection, constantly enriched and strongly motivated.  And it must not be taken for granted that such reflection has been internally accepted and projected into reality by every Salesian.

As regards the laity, provincial and local communities are invited by the GC24 to pass from fragmentary realizations to a complete and organic project.  All the elements and situations which past experience had revealed were highlighted by the GC24, and now they have to be rethought as a whole and their problems solved, counting on the laity not as mere temporary help but as our companions all along the way.

We have to pass from different individual evaluations to a communal shared mentality.  A period in which ideas and practices concerning the participation of the laity was left to the judgement of individuals has been replaced by another in which this has become the conviction of all, a criterion for all institutions and programmes.

[233]

3.2  The salesian mission

Don Bosco's experience, which we recalled in our celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of his work at Valdocco, underlines an important fact: impressed and attracted by his relationship with poor boys and by his work for their benefit, various lay people began to gather around him.  More than a few of them, perhaps, were already concerned  about the youth situation and wondered how they could respond to it as Christians.  But they needed a spark to prompt them to action, an example, a sign, a project, a setting.  And they found it in the choice made by Don Bosco and in his first steps towards its realization.  Their contributions were of various kinds: educative collaboration, financial support, close help and friendship, acceptance in social circles which could cooperate, the exploitation of his work in local churches.

And with his youngsters in mind and whatever could be done for them, Don Bosco extended far and wide his invitation to share in working for them.  And even today boldness in the expression of the mission calls into communion and provokes the collaboration of those moved interiorly by the Spirit.

On the modern realization of the more original features of the mission, therefore, must be concentrated the efforts of provincial and local communities.

[234]

The setting of *the young and the poor, which is a fundamental characteristic of our mission, suggests that we go more decisively in the direction of needy youth and poorer neighbourhoods.  Youthful distress appears today in many different forms.  Everywhere the Church has made a preferential option for the poor.  Service for their benefit still has an unrivalled ability for bringing people together, and rightly so!  It represents hope for those who feel themselves abandoned, and in this sense is an eminent manifestation of the pastoral love of Christ.*

The *educative dimension opens us up to all and leads us to welcome those who are poor in life or interests, those looking for a path to follow; it enables us to offer them plans leading simultaneously to human advancement and to evangelization.  Attention to the faith from the outset is certainly an essential point which we can never renounce.  In it we find the energy for human growth and for meeting Christ, who leads to an understanding of the mystery of God and of man.  But at the same time we work in the vast spaces of advancement, of culture, of social dynamism.  Nothing that is human finds us indifferent.  Such an option is natural to the lay dimension and allows for an unlimited insertion of lay people at different levels.*

The mission always bears the stamp of the *preventive system as a synthesis of aims and methods, as a model of relationships and educative communication, as the ability to form a community of the young and the poor with specific characteristics, as a criterion of perception and assimilation of the values involved, as a vision of the resources of the individual.*

Ever since the GC21 the preventive system has been stimulated to reformulation in the light of the youth condition and culture of the present day.  Renewal of the system is an ongoing task, but today it appears almost as a turning point as well.

[235]

Finally the *oratory appears as the prototype of the presence and activity of Don Bosco's mission: at one and the same time it provides welcome, cultural growth, preparation for life, and maturing in Christian spirituality.  This it does with an integrated programme, made concrete and vital by an environment of spontaneous participation.*

With reference to the overall mission of a province and of the Congregation, every foundation tends to be *significant: in planning, attracting, radiating and enticing through the quality of its educative style and the relevance of what it offers.  Preceding General Chapters have emphasized the need to make of every foundation an evangelical innovation suited to the condition of the young, the needs of the Church and the situation of society - an innovation expressed especially in the evangelical witness given by the community and individual members when in fraternal unity they show that they are close to the people, dedicated to their task, with a positive attitude toward the locality and an influence on its mentality and life.*

In addition to presence among the poor, greater significance attaches at the present day to initiatives for young people looking for sense in life, missionary and solidarity commitments, and journeys of faith.  They help to bring to maturity capabilities raised up by the Spirit for the service of the Church, and insert us into the movement of the new evangelization of the young, which strives to create a leaven and sign.  To these must be added initiatives linked with new expressions of the Areopagus, like social communication, carried out with communal criteria, with prospects of progressive and competent continuity, with due regard for aggregation and dedicated to the elaboration of messages of culture and evangelization.

[236]

**3.3  The SDB Community**

The salesian community, as the Constitutions declare (C 44), is the subject of the mission, even when it does not directly manage all the initiatives.  It is true that many others participate in Don Bosco's charism, but the latter is concentrated in the SDB community in a special way by virtue of the force of consecration, the plan of life (profession), and total dedication to the mission.

The community, therefore, is always the animating nucleus, even though not by itself and not necessarily of the local setting.  It is the point from which come the vast majority of impulses for initiatives, proposals for formation, stimuli for the constitution of a wider community.  What enables it to fulfil its role of animation is especially its experience of the Spirit, who is found in the primacy given to the sense of God, to the following of Christ, to pastoral charity which places it at the service of the young in its transparently fraternal character, in its salesian educative and spiritual patrimony.  All this must naturally be translated into relationships, into a project of work, in a form which gives proper value to culture, and into pedagogical method.  It is strengthened further by the richness of the complementary vocations of the priest and the brother.  The first has a privileged channel in the ministry of the Rector who, with the other confreres, points the way to Christ, indicates the reality of his *grace, and fosters membership of the people of God.  The second makes visible our closeness to the world and our confidence in secular realities coming from the hands of God the creator and redeemed by Christ.*

Animation is a task which goes naturally with the Spirit's gift, but it can be carried out fruitfully only under certain conditions.  Hence certain elements must be attended to which are essential for fruitfulness.  We have this at heart much more than the simple management of works.

Numeric and qualified consistency is necessary whether the community has to animate a work or is entrusted with a collection of initiatives.  We run the risk of being too much conditioned by an individual management of roles.  This renders the planning and experience of communion more difficult, as also does the thinning out of the *active community which becomes accustomed to carrying out its services in an individual form.*

Clarification and order of importance are also needed among the objectives of salesian animation: an adult sharing of responsibility on the part of all; the Christian, salesian and professional formation of the components of the educative and pastoral community; the constitution, unity and dynamic thrust of the overall community; planning in line with the mission and salesian spirit, orientation towards action and the main decisions, direct and competent contact with adults and young people according to the particular possibilities, and the careful application of criteria laid down for the involvement of lay people in the educative community.

[237]

*Certain objectives too must be pursued with perseverance, even when forces are reduced:*

- The solid concept of the task of animation.  The real participation of all members of the community according to each one's possibilities is enriching: animation can take many paths, even unusual ones.  What is important is that no one draws back, opts out or leaves everything to others.

- Preparation of each one for the task of animation.  What the GC23 recommended must be taken up again and given effect: "Every province... will prepare confreres especially for the work of education to the faith, the animation of pastoral communities, and the formation of lay people" (n.223).

- A rethinking of the role of the Rector and Council in animation, so as not to deprive the organisms of the educative and pastoral community of their natural attributions, and not limit them solely to the internal religious aspect which would lead to a loss of the unity between spiritual, pastoral and pedagogical aspects which is characteristic of our experience.

- The adopting of a form and rhythm of life which fosters and almost predisposes to animation: communication, discernment, planning, verification, and shared prayer.  Particular importance seems to attach to cultural sensitivity and the educative and pastoral enthusiasm of the salesian group, and its ability to make contact with the young.  The community is called, in fact, to be a sign, school and environment of faith.

[238]

This General Chapter provides a reminder of the role of the province in promoting religious life, in prompting the awareness of the community, and in activating pastoral creativity.  The path we have followed in recent years is more than satisfactory, and prepares us for what we have to do in the immediate future.  The Province not only gathers local communities into one which is broader but, as the subject of the mission in a much wider territory, can take on initiatives and activities to be carried out by lay people, properly formed and followed up.  It is up to the Province to discern, applying the criterion of quality and to the extent that this makes it possible, how to distribute salesian resources in line with the importance attaching to each initiative and its involvement in the work.

We need to strengthen the sense of the provincial community and its inter-communication with the educative and pastoral community, the convoking and formative ability of the province, so that the laity also may have a point of reference for communal membership over a very wide range.  For this reason the arrangement of the organisms is important as also is their convergence; this was recommended by the GC23 (cf.nn.239-246).  But still more important is the line and tone given by the Provincial and Council to their own governing activity.  Their priorities must be those of animation; their trust must be placed in the spiritual and professional qualiication of Salesians and laity rather than in material means and structures.

[239]

**3.4  Spirituality**

In every part of the Chapter's preparation and work there has been appropriate reference to "spirituality".  It emerged strongly in the proposals of the Provincial Chapters, both in lay and salesian form.  And this is a sign of the vitality and assimilation of the proposal on Salesian Youth Spirituality, which the GC23 pointed to as the energy, goal and criterion of evaluation of salesian educative processes.

The discussion on the report on the state of the Congregation led to the recognition of a priority: the formation of the Salesian, understood as a preparation for the "living and communication of spirituality".

The GC24 arrived at the discussion of spirituality in its search for a source of communion between laity and Salesians.  There is a widespread awareness in the Congregation that our linkage with lay people needs a more robust spirituality if we are to face up together to the difficult challenges which the salesian mission presents at the present day.  Spirituality leads not only to sharing in the work of education but also in the motivations which underlie it.  It represents the common ground for discussion between lay values - be they of Christian or natural inspiration - and those of consecrated life.

It has been pointed out that the term 'spirituality' does not belong to our traditional language, which in general has preferred to speak of 'spirit'.  But its emergence must be considered as a response to a need, and today it is indispensable for a meaningful approach to culture.

Spirituality, in fact, is "a concrete programme of relations with God and one's surroundings, marked by specific spiritual emphases and choices of apostolate, which accentuate and re-present one or another aspect of the one mystery of Christ" (VC 93).

[240]

With the reappearance of forecasts on the eclipse of what is sacred, and the failure of promises of uninterrupted progress and wellbeing for all, and the revival of a utopia of rapid and universal justice and equality, faith has faded in the ideology, techniques and political organization in which were seen, not entirely without reason, the signs of modern civilization.  All this and much more has made it quite clear that human growth is to be sought rather in conscience than in consumerism, in being rather than in having.

Young people, even though deceived by so many temptations, are not insensitive to those who are able to put before them pathways of contemplation and commitment, of rediscovering the mystery of man, of Christ, of God.

Many lay people who in recent years have been our travelling companions in work have shown their appreciation of the style of Christian life linked with Don Bosco's experience of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata tells us: "Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity.  The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes" (VC 54).*

We conclude the GC24 with the conviction that to propose the salesian spirituality to them is the proper and adequate response to a pressing calling and the offering of a desired gift.  In any case, the demand for spirituality prompts us to discover our family treasures, to develop and analyze more deeply those traits which Don Bosco has left us and which are so extraordinarily efficacious.

The entire salesian mission is the mature fruit of a spiritual seed.  We all know by experience the gratification that follows the success of educative work, the simple joy of being in the midst of the young who have a certain charm, the satisfaction of using our own resources in a significant setting; these do not separate us from our apostolic commitment;  but there is much more to it than that.

Before all else the mission is a work which the Holy Spirit carries out within us: "our Transfiguration", the *Vita Consecrata suggests, which makes us "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Lk 4,18).*

Without an experience of the Spirit no mission exists, either on our own part or on that of the laity.  The contemplation of God who loves and saves man is the powerful spring which impels us towards the young and the people of God.

[241]

Da mihi animas  is primarily an invocation, a prayer, a cry for help addressed to God that he may himself accomplish what he has asked us to do.

It is an invitation to involve the laity in a spiritual adventure, rather than merely implicate them in the many mansions of an educative and pastoral service.

But are we capable of such an adventure, and do we really want it?  Could it not be that a certain weakening in our missionary thrust is due to spiritual tiredness?  "Consecrated persons, because of their specific vocation, are called to manifest the unity between self-evangelization and witness, between interior renewal and apostolic fervour, between being and acting, showing that dynamism arises always from the first element of each of these pairs" (VC 81).

And so let us not be surprised that spirituality is at the heart of the GC24.  It is called to be the soul of the educative and pastoral community, the core of the formative journeys we have to make together in an atmosphere of the exchange of gifts.  We communicate it through our daily life, coming down - as Don Bosco suggested - from the teacher's desk to the playground so that our words may be the exegesis of our life.

The GC24 invites us to make explicit the lay dimension of salesian spirituality, with a deeper examination and updating of those elements which, for Don Bosco, mould the "upright citizen and good Christian".

We are asked to qualify our presence in the educative and pastoral community as bearers of a pedagogy with a strong spiritual validity.  It is expressed in the model of the kind of man to be attained - Jesus the perfect man, in the motivations which nourish the desire, in the goal to be achieved and the methods used for the purpose.

~~WITHREGARDTOTHEWORLDTHEGCCOMMITSUSTOTHEDISCOVERYOFTHOSE"SEMINAVERBI"WHICHTHESPIRITHASSPREADEVERYWHEREINABUNDANCEANDWHICHENABLEUSTOENTERWITHHOPEINTOECUMENICALDIALOGUEOFBOTHANINTER-DENOMINATIONALKINDANDWITHALLMENANDWOMENOFGOODWILLITWILLBEALIVEDSPIRITUALITYTHATHELPSUS"TOLOOKFORANDFINDINTHEHISTORYOFINDIVIDUALSANDOFENTIREPEOPLESTRACESOFGOD'SPRESENCEAPRESENCEGUIDINGALLHUMANITYTOWARDSTHEDISCERNMENTOFTHESIGNSOFHISSAVINGWILL"VC~~

[242]

**3.5  The pastoral and cultural quality of the Salesian**

The new aspect of lay people (in quantity and the taking of responsibility), the significance of the mission, the obligation to be a solidly attracting nucleus, require in the Salesian almost a qualitative leap forward in what concerns his general preparation and specifically as a pastor and educator.

Varied are the cultural and professional qualities which must find a place in this new preparation: the ability to discern reality, a mentality that can plan ahead, team-work, habitual updating, the knowledge of new languages.

Others are specifically connected with the pastoral dimension: the continual re-understanding of his own Christian, consecrated and ministerial identity; a deeper study of the themes from which pastoral work draws its inspiration, so that such work may not rest on external elements or become limp under the weight of technical and professional applications; the enrichment of the spiritual life, and the ability to welcome and guide individuals, groups and communities in the faith.

In our life some of these aspects are more exposed to wear and tear or to sclerosis and need particular attention.  Culture evolves rapidly, knowledge becomes more extensive, new information is continually fed in, while the mentality on the values and concepts of life present ever new questions.  The cultural dimension is one that calls for patient and unceasing effort.  Its urgent need and stimulation needs serious attention in the process of initial formation.  But it also calls for the including of time for study during the years of full commitment to activity.

In this area too the set-up of life and work in the local and provincial community will be decisive.  Social and inter-personal communication provide opportunities for following the evolution of culture.  But a personal habit of study is indispensable, as also is concentration on areas of specialization in theory and practice, without rigid divisions.



At provincial level it will be well to consider the advisability of university studies for all who are capable of them in an ecclesiastical or secular setting, and the permanence with the necessary flexibility of confreres in the sectors for which they have been prepared.  There is little point in spending money on obtaining qualifications if they are not subsequently exploited and perfected.

The urgency which we feel is shared by all Institutes of consecrated life, traditionally the leaven of Christian life through faith and charity, but no less through the education of the mentality and presence in culture.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata reminds us of this in n.98 from which I want to quote at some length: "The need to contribute to the promotion of culture and to the dialogue between culture and faith is deeply felt in the Church today.*

Consecrated persons cannot fail to feel challenged by this pressing need.  In their proclamation of the word of God, they too are called to discover the methods most suited to the needs of the different social groups and various professional categories, so that the light of Christ will penetrate all sectors of society and the leaven of salvation will transform society from within, fostering the growth of a culture imbued with Gospel values.

But in addition to this service of others, within the consecrated life itself there is a need for a renewed and loving commitment to the intellectual life, for dedication to study as a means of integral formation and as a path of asceticism which is extraordinarily timely, in the face of present-day cultural diversity.  A lessened commitment to study can have grave consequences for the apostolate, by giving rise to a sense of marginalization and inferiority, or encouraging superficiality and rash initiatives.

With all respect for the diversity of charisms and the actual resources of individual Institutes, the commitment to study cannot be limited to initial formation or to the gaining of academic degrees and professional qualifications.  Rather, study is an expression of the unquenchable desire for an ever deeper knowledge of God, the source of light and all human truth.  Consequently, a commitment to study does not isolate consecrated persons in an abstract intellectualism, or confine them within a suffocating narcissism; rather, it is an incentive to dialogue and cooperation, a training in the capacity for judgement, a stimulus to contemplation and prayer in the constant quest for the presence and activity of God in the complex reality of today's world".

[244]

**3.6  The principal investment: formation**

Cultural qualification, professional approach and spirituality all direct our attention to formation.

The demands for a renewed commitment to formation emerged very strongly from the analysis of the state of the Congregation and from the deeper study of the theme of the Chapter.

The reflections of the GC24 have pointed to the need for the formation of the laity and of our own formation with the laity.  But the Chapter emphasized no less strongly that the formation of the Salesians should include specific periods, contents and methods appropriate to our particular vocation.  This latter point was made by the lay people themselves, as though to endorse the fact that communion and sharing will be the more intense and contagious the more the Salesians live their vocation in a transparently authentic manner.

The GC23 had already led us to undertake a positive process in the field of ongoing formation, pointing to the importance of the local community and the quality of daily life and work; this is a task which must continue.

Not less urgent is decisive action in the field of *basic or initial formation.  The youth condition and the cultural context, the challenges arising from the project of religious and priestly life, the problem of those leaving, and especially the profile of the Salesian of tomorrow, all require very clearly that formation must be based on quality.*

To do this it would seem necessary to give primacy of attention to three points.

[245]

- *The first is practical consistency or the conscious application of salesian formative practice.  The Congregation can count on a practice of formation that is well tried out and codified.  The objectives, manner and conditions of the formative process are sufficiently well defined: formation communities, role of formation guides, maturing processes, practical experience of the aspects which constitute spirituality and life, personal follow-up.  More than new formulations, what is needed is adequate formative back-up: the training of formation guides and providing each formation community with a sufficient number of them, constant verification of the experience, the promoting of a purposeful pedagogy, attention to the problems of life and to evolutionary processes, and the ability to provide constant follow-up at a personal level.  The incidence of formation is linked with "the ability to establish a method characterized by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom, which will gradually lead those wishing to consecrate themselves to put on the mind of Christ the Lord" (VC 68).*

[246]

- *Next comes attention to the new demands of evangelization and inculturation.  Thy have a deep effect on every project of religious life and pastoral mission.  For our own Congregation, which is becoming ever more universal and pluricultural and is in contact with the young, they are indeed vital.  Our formation process, in fact, has its starting point in the "youth culture" and the intention is to lead to the assumption of a project of apostolic consecration which refers back to the realization of the mission in a cultural context which is complex, fragmented and in constant evolution.*

The objectives of formation and formative pedagogy must therefore be constantly attentive to cultural situations and to pastoral evaluation, and those in charge of formation must make themselves capable of a dialogue which takes account of both elements.

[247]

- *For this reason, particular importance must be given to intellectual formation.  What we have said earlier becomes impossible without an updated cultural preparation which enables the vocation to be lived in a conscious manner, leads to an adequate vision of reality, creates habits of reflection and provides opportunities for further study.*

A solid intellectual preparation - says the *Ratio - "is of indispensable assistance for a full and efficacious living of the characteristics proper to the salesian vocation and its mission" (FSDB 210).  This we have already emphasized, speaking of the pastoral and cultural quality of the Salesian.*

All this reflects back on the commitment the GC24 urgently asks for with respect to the *formation of the laity.  As the Pope said in his initial message to the Chapter: "The formation of the lay faithful is one of the priorities on which the efforts of the community must converge".*

[248]

What are the implications for us of this commitment, which represents a challenge to the formative and motivating ability of the community and of every confrere?  Without repeating the words of the capitular text, I will emphasize certain lines of action:

- *The first is to make of daily sharing a formative element.  It is made up of relationships, shared intentions and responsibilities, an atmosphere, organization and interventions, and of communion in the preventive system.  It exposes the Salesians to the gaze and verification of those who participate in the educative experience.  To make it formative means that it be communicated by the manner of life and integrate everything in the Christian, educative and salesian vocation of the individual, be he religious or lay.*

- *It will be necessary therefore to give back to the Salesians the sense of the priority of formation.  We are called to be animators of the growth of individuals.  It is a service imposed on us by our vocation as consecrated persons and educators and by the priestly ministry, a service which finds an opportunity in every encounter, but is concentrated at specific moments for which all should be prepared.*

Of this the Pope reminds us in his initial message: "Formation helps lay people in the discovery of their particular vocation, it provides them with the means needed for their ongoing maturing process, and introduces them to the ways of the Spirit of the Lord. (...)  Don Bosco placed much emphasis on spiritual formation, understood as learning to live the whole of one's personal existence, in its various expressions, in the presence of God and the active construction of the Kingdom".

- *Hence follows a third suggestion: strengthen a plan of action.  A series of initiatives must be programmed at local and provincial level, corresponding in content and duration to the different situations of collaborators and members of the Salesian Family.*

The GC24 asks us to make of formation our chief investment, from which we expect the greatest profit.  Investing means laying down and maintaining priorities, ensuring conditions, working according to a programme which gives pride of place to persons, communities and mission.  Investing in time, personnel, initiatives and financial resources for formation is a task which is of importance to all of us.

It is an obligation for every confrere since he has the prime responsibility for his own formation.  It is a duty of every community, which must take "the time necessary for attending to the quality of its life" (VFC 13).  It must be attended to by the Rector, arranging a priority among the expressions of his service.  It must be done particularly by those responsible for provincial government who must keep in mind the formation and qualification of personnel, the consistency of the communities and the significance of the various works.

[249]

3.7  Communication

Communication is becoming the expression of the "global village" towards which our planet is heading.  It is being spoken of as the "new power" which will belong to those who have the most up-to-date "data banks" and the most sophisticated means of reaching them.  The conscience of modern man is being progressively moulded by them and continually stimulated to broaden its outlook to world range, becoming instantly in touch with the events, dramas and hopes of the entire world.  This new communication is showing its capacity for creating aggregations, spreading new ways of life, confronting different cultures, and generating a new context with which the traditional media (books, newspapers, radio, TV etc.) will have to come to grips.

The Church has recognized in this complex phenomenon a new Areopagus which the modern Christian cannot ignore but must rather accept the fact that he is inserted in it as an active and responsible protagonist.  "The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour as individuals, families and within society at large.  In particular the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media.  To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected" (RM 37).

[250]

Our Congregation has always shown itself sensitive to the phenomenon, but has not always found the best means for extracting from it the possible fruits for education and evangelization.

It has understood, from the time of Don Bosco himself, that it could not prescind from the means of social communication in its efforts of cultural animation and work of evangelization, and that the "pastoral charity", which is at the root of our mission, is also able to orientate the new technologies in the service of mankind and of the Gospel.

At the same time it has recognized the fact that in so sophisticated a field it cannot enter without adequate formation.  And it has understood that the educative dimension of social communication can be developed only if supported by educators (Salesians and lay people) who are competent in the formation of "discerning listeners and expert communicators" (VC 99).

For this reason it has started up ISCOS, which appears rich in promising developments; it has a General Councillor responsible for social communication; it has fostered social communication in the animation of the provinces; it has sought a technological renewal of its central services and has provided for the formation of competent confreres.

The awareness of the phenomenon of *communication (understood in an interpersonal, communal and social sense) is already an integral part of educative awareness.*

All this naturally draws attention to the quality of the communicator (an individual or community), who is committed to witnessing to what is expressed with a radical ability to provoke questions, strike the imagination and touch the heart.  This is why true witnesses prove to be excellent communicators.  Don Bosco was one of them because of the force of his message, the totality of his dedication, and the daring nature of his initiatives.

Such awareness verifies also the quality of the message, personal or communal, and its intelligibility on the part of ordinary people.  It becomes understandable when it is an event and not just an outpouring of words or display of eloquence.  And it should be noted that holiness frequently endows such an event with unusual communicative force.

Modern human sciences have highlighted the elements which render communication efficacious.  It seems only natural that we Salesians should be attentive and interested.

[251]

The reflections of the GC24 could not bypass these matters, because of the very nature of the theme it had to address.  Communication is an indispensable vehicle of communion within the educative and pastoral community, the Salesian Family, the Salesian Movement, and among the Friends of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco had an intuition of all this when he founded the *Salesian Bulletin, and we are all witnesses to its enduring validity in different languages.*

Moreover, it is not difficult to recognize in the field of communication a privileged area in which lay sensitivity and professional competence can be exploited for the service of the salesian mission.  We already have a lot of experience of this in the Congregation and it is still growing.

Reflecting on the story of Don Bosco, we discover the close linkage that exists between his mission, the radiating of his charism and the involvement of lay people.  For him communicating meant making the entire world, so to speak, a "salesian work" in which the preventive system, the problems of the young and his concern for their *salvation were at the centre of his attention.  By communicating, Don Bosco made it clear that his was a "mission without frontiers", which reached everywhere where there was a youngster in need and someone who undertook to take care of him.*

To communicate is to reach the ordinary people and proclaim to them the mystery of salvation; it has an incidence on the culture which every youngster automatically breathes; it points to the salesian vocation as an ecclesial charism in which everyone can commit themselves.

To communicate is to mobilize and communicate forces for good, so that together they may cultivate the hope of humanity which is called youth.  Since the world of the media "represents a new frontier for the mission of the Church... the lay faithful's responsibility as professionals in this field demands a recognition of all its values, and requires also that it be sustained by more adequate resource materials, both intellectual and pastoral" (CL 44).

[252]

**3.8  Vocational capacity**

Among the points emerging from the work of the General Chapter there is an indication underlying many of the aspects that were dealt with, and seems to be a signpost for the six years ahead of us.  It is the *vocational capacity which must distinguish every confrere and salesian community.*

To give rise to vocations is one of the purposes of the Congregation's mission (cf.C 6), and to cultivate them (independently of the results we might obtain) is an essential dimension wherever we happen to be and in every project or process which takes its inspiration from Don Bosco's method of education.  In fact, as the GC23 recalled, since "vocational guidance constitutes the vertex and crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, this is not the terminus of the faith-journey; it is an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention" (GC23, 247).  Vocational guidance comes in this way to be one of the characteristic tasks of the educative and pastoral community, which moves in the spirit of Don Bosco's preventive system.

The theme of the GC24, on the communion and sharing of Salesians and laity in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco, recalls of its nature the vocational dimension.  On the one hand, in fact, it leads to a consideration of the vocation of each one - be it lay, consecrated or priestly - in its intrinsic value, based on the plan God has for every individual in his personal glance of love; it leads us therefore to be able to exploit all vocations in the Church.  On the other hand the Chapter theme emphasizes the specific contribution each one is called to give through the riches of his own personal endowments: the lay person, committed to making the Gospel present in the world through his typical secular style of life, and the Salesian - lay or priest - called to bear witness by his consecrated life to transcendent values and the absolute love of God.  In this way Salesians and laity are invited to share vocational commitment by their witness of life and their personal ability as educators to accompany the young in the discernment and acceptance of God's plan for them.  Rightly the Chapter document includes among its practical guidelines concerning the common formation of Salesians and laity that of vocational discernment.

The privileged place for such commitment is the *community: the salesian community which is responsible for the genuine nature of the charism, and the educative and pastoral community where Salesians and lay people, in shared responsibility for the educative project, are involved together in the service of vocational orientation.*

[253]

Clearly this service is open to the whole wide range of vocation in the people of God.  Among them, in line with the Chapter document, we may recall in the first place attention to the family as the first and most common vocation, to the values of which we must be able to form the younger generations; then comes the care of young animators and young volunteers, disposed to give themselves freely in the service of others, and who are frequently living already an effective harmony with Don Bosco's spirit and mission.  The Salesian Youth Movement has proved to be fertile territory for active participation in the spirituality of vocation and in experiencing its values.

It will be the task then of the salesian community and of the educative and pastoral community, while accompanying each young person in the discovery of his or her specific plan of life within an overall vision, to be able to present and propose also the vocations of special consecration to the religious life, to the consecrated secular life or to the priesthood.  Against this background, a special commitment of the groups of the Salesian Family, which share the charism and mission, is to bear witness to and propose the vocations of the different groups, with their particular characteristics.  For us SDBs, while we give effect to our mission as "educators to the faith" (C 34), we have always the challenge of bearing witness to our own particular vocation as consecrated apostles - in the double and complementary lay and priestly form - to willing youngsters, so that many can continue Don Bosco's project.

This too represents one of the priority commitments for the coming six years, in which are involved the entire educative and pastoral community and the groups of our Family.

[254]

**3.9  The worldwide aspect, a new dimension of the salesian mission**

The GC24 has been an experience of the worldwide character of the Congregation, not only as knowledge and unity among the provinces but as a dimension of the salesian spirit and the possibility of working over a vast area.  Numerous elements in the discussions and in the life of the Chapter have provided evidence of this wider extension: the restructuring of the Regions, inculturation, the volunteer movement, exchange of information and the reference to different contexts.

It is the fulfilment of art.59 of the Constitutions: "Religious profession incorporates the salesian in the Society,  making him a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its life within the Universal Church.  Union with the Rector Major and his Council, solidarity in apostolic initiatives, communication and exchange of information about the work of the confreres, all increase this communion, deepen the sense of belonging and dispose us to give our service to the world community".

Many, and still increasing, are the manifestations of this *worldwide concept in the recent past; the missionary enterprises carried out with the help of all provinces, intercommunication at continental level with the involvement of all five continents, financial solidarity, formal and informal 'twinning', sensitization to the needs of distant regions, the attention and support given to the UPS and the Generalate, of which we have had further proof during the present Chapter, the visits to places which are significant for all of us, the desire to follow common paths (the Educative and Pastoral Community, the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project, the Salesian Youth Movement).*

This is a dimension which, with the world getting ever smaller as a result of communication and ease of movement and transport, is becoming an every-day component.

It offers us new space for the mission, and provides us also with elements which today are indispensable for the education of both young and adults to important values like intercultural openness, the ability to live with others at an inter-ethnic level, solidarity, tolerance, and the critical evaluation of financial systems.  It must therefore be expressed in new and more abundant forms than in the past.

Leaving to the creativity of the provinces those initiatives which will gradually come into being, I emphasize some which at present seem to be the main items.

One is *collaboration in missionary effort: some frontiers have still to be consolidated with specifically qualified personnel for formation or animation and with adequate educative structures; others must be opened after a careful study of the best way to use our forces.  Things are happening which we can consider as signs, and fields are appearing in which seeds can be sown which promise well for the Church and our charism.*

[255]

Leading us towards international openness is the *lay missionary volunteer movement, especially among young people.  The first tests and orientations have already matured and seem sufficient to allow us to undertake a courageous expansion.  It is an initiative which harmonizes well with all the pastoral work being done among young adults who show themselves available for such commitment.*

I include also the *inculturation of the salesian charism, on the basis of a careful study of its original riches.  We shall have to deepen the spirit and content of the Constitutions which are our code of reference, together with the other fundamental texts of salesian history and spirituality.  It is impossible to inculturate something which is still unknown, even under the guise of another culture.*

There is the exploitation of *international study centres and other initiatives of formation, in which we try to link together different parts of the Congregation.  With some small exceptions, often repeated excessively, the net result of the frequenting of such centres by students is highly positive for individuals, provinces and the whole Congregation.  We do not see any other arrangement that would be more advantageous.*

The Constitutions emphasize the importance of *communication with the Rector Major and his Council.  It is our intention that nothing shall stand in the way of you presenting requests, impressions or - if need be - your fraternal observations, and that nothing shall prevent us from speaking clearly in due season.*

[256]

**3.10  A pedagogy of practical application: guidelines, content, praxis, verification**

Like all others, our own General Chapter offers the provinces inspirations and practical guidelines to help them to live our charism more fully in the Church of the present day.  They have to be translated into practice by the individual provinces - a situation that is vast and variegated.  It will be necessary for the indications of the Chapter to be integrated into a unified project and be converted into processes which foster their vital assimilation (mentalities, attitudes, capabilities, experiences).  It is a question of bringing broad visions down to earth in daily life.  And here we face a challenge: to find an efficacious mediation between inspiration and practice, between the *document and its practical application.*

We have not lacked practical strategies and adequate methods for translating principles and criteria into practice, nor for reaching through them to the daily life of individuals.  One need only think of our various *manuals, the insistence on projects and processes; the importance given to the local community, the educative and pastoral community, and the provincial community; to the repeated recommendations in favour of programming and verification, i.e. of working together to ensure unity of criteria, convergence of efforts, adaptation to situations, and the overcoming of individualism, discontinuity and fragmentation, and vagueness in action.*

Progress has been made without any doubt, but the situation seems to require a further effort if we are to achieve a change of mentality and foster a personal and communal manner of living and working.

Don Bosco, educator, pastor and spiritual guide, was able to combine boldness of initiative (far-seeing horizons and motivations, creative response to innovations), practical organization (ability to combine elements into a project, a system, a stable community, and organization) and the wisdom of the pedagogue, attentive to situations and processes, able to create a climate, an environment, a style of relationships, a methodology of daily life made up of successive moments and references.

We are not short of guidelines, and equally evident is the multiplication of interventions or their realization.  But despite this, the discrepancy between proposals and their achievement, the evaluation of the results of so many efforts, prompt us to verify our pedagogical practice.  The fruitfulness of our work, the quality of our life, the significance of persons, communities and initiatives depend to a great extent on this intelligent pedagogical practical approach which is not disjoined from organization and from the magnanimity of the inspirations.

[257]

Reference can be made, if example be needed, to certain environments.

As far as *pastoral activity is concerned, we must decisively pursue that communion of criteria (mentality), that convergence of intentions (objectives), that organic arrangement of interventions (shared responsibility, dimensions, continuity, verification, etc.) which we call the educative and pastoral community and the salesian educative and pastoral project, and which the Chapter document presents as a powerful expression of the communion and sharing of Don Bosco's spirit and mission, as a process of ongoing formation and a condition of apostolic fertility.  It is a case of going beyond mere generous activity so as to reach a sharing of criteria for action, a systematic programming, periodic verification, and the readjustment of our manner of working.*

With regard to *salesian spiritual experience, the need is felt to translate into a life process, into a personal pedagogy, the style of holiness which unites Da mihi animas with the preventive system; of ensuring the conditions which permit the Salesian to live his vocation in depth, avoiding fragmentation, wear and tear, the spiritual, pastoral and pedagogical superficiality, which is so often denounced; to give growth to a true communal spirituality with the sharing of apostolic experience and discernment, the making together of a spiritual journey.*

In connection with the *action of government at various levels, there is need of a further commitment to mobilize energies in the perspective of significance, overcoming emergency situations and pragmatic immediate and repetitive procedures, and pursuing a proper balance between quality and extension; giving unity to proposals, seeking a greater convergence of objectives and messages, fostering adherence to motivated options, ordering in importance services and interventions, and avoiding sectorialism; adapting everything to the rhythms of assimilation and to practical capacity, to.personal and communal situations.*

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

[258]

The prospects are demanding.  The sum total of the tasks to be carried out may rightly seem ponderous and formidable.  But the field before us is ever more extensive and fertile, and so the work becomes attractive, and its flourishing through the Spirit makes it joyful.

May Mary, who showed Don Bosco his own *field of labour and encouraged him to cultivate it with faith, accompany us and assist us.  To her today, in the name of all our confreres, we repeat with particular intensity: "We entrust ourselves entirely to thee, and we promise to work always for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls".*

**INTERVENTIONS IN THE ASSEMBLY**

**OF Fr JUAN E.VECCHI**

*The following extracts from the MINUTES of the CAPITULAR ASSEMBLIES refer to some clarifications and interventions of the Rector Major.*

APPENDIX 7

**Replies to questions concerning the state of the Congregation**

**27 February 1996**

[259]

**Clarifications concerning the government and central structure of the Congregation, and the way they function (n.254 of the report).**

Various questions expressed opinions about the validity of the present structures as regards their functioning, or proposed to insert among the Chapter themes a discussion on the central structure of the Congregation.  Fr Vecchi gave a general response rather than answer each question individually.

By the **central structure of the Congregation, is meant the fundamental roles which make up the General Council: Rector Major, Vicar General, the Departments and Regions.  A problem arises over the relationship between Departments and Regions.  N.254 of the Report recounts a reflection made by the General Council on the central structure and its functioning; it was made over two different periods, at the first of which Fr Viganò was present.  The Council was of the opinion that the present arrangement is convenient and the best for combining communication with the different parts of the Congregation and animation of the different sectors of its life (formation, youth pastoral work, Salesian Family, communication, finances); it allows for movement, contact and reflection at national and world level, as regards the making of suggestions, production of material and assistance on the part of the Council.**

There are **difficulties:**

- in the practical definition of the roles of the Councillors, which need to be clarified and expressed in writing;

- an improvement is needed in the ability to face problems of global perspective by spending more time together and overcoming a sectorial concept of the role of each one;

- we must aim at a more unified programme thanks to the Department Councillors being able to remain longer at headquarters; this would allow us to avoid overlapping in common areas or sectors which are already looked after at provincial or national level.

**As regards the proposal to discuss again the Congregation's central structure of government, Fr Vecchi said it will be wise to keep in mind the process which led to the elaboration of the present structures at world, provincial and local level, involving considerable time for explaining the underlying reasons and in reaching a substantive agreement on the details by two thirds of the assembly.  He thought that for an enterprise of such a kind an adequate preparation of the theme would be essential, so as not to lose sight of the organic vision (cf. the experiences of the 20th, 21st, and 22nd General Chapters).**

**Concerning the request to set up the Regions in conformity with the new geography of the Congregation, he said the need for this will be on the Chapter agenda, on the basis of a reflection made in the General Council,  As regards the perspective of a fresh study of the areas of work covered by the Departments, it was pointed out that the Rector Major has the authority of easy movement among what is allotted to the various Departments, and in this sense it would be useful to have specific suggestions from the Chapter.  Another problem is where to put the Department for Social Communication.  On these problems the General Council has reflected without reaching any agreed decisions; the conclusions have been passed to the Moderator.**

**With reference to a request for an evaluation of the team visits, it is suggested that the persistence of these since 1972, with an evaluation at intervals of six years, shows that they are valid.  In 1984 Fr E.Viganò presented to the GC22 the results of an evaluation of the team visits, which emphasized the following aspects, which are still the motives for their validity.  The team visits are:**

- moments of communion and exchange of views,

- times for verification and synthesis,

- occasions for relaunching certain aspects of the previous GC,

- periods of animation for Provincials and their Councils.

It is recognized that some elements need improvement:

- in the choice of themes,

- in the preparation of the Provincial Councils and General Councillors concerned.

- in the definition of concrete guidelines to be adopted,

- in the efforts to apply the conclusions.

The overall evaluation of the Vicar General with respect to the team visits is that they are good and sufficient, and in some cases markedly positive.  They have multiple effects in many directions.  We must not let ourselves be carried away by the partial aspect that they are not always immediately practical.

[260]

**Concerning the significance of our pastoral presence.**

A series of questions concerning **salesian identity, numerical growth and** the educative originality of the parish were dealt with synthetically.  There had been a gradual mental acceptance of the SGC and the GC21 and of other documents with regard to the identity of the parish, clarified also in some meetings of Regions with the Councillor for the Youth Apostolate and the Rector Major himself.  There has been a gradual improvement as those responsible were gradually replaced by others with a new kind of preparation.

- an updating of the concept of the parish (community, mission);

- the establishing of priorities among the dimensions to be fostered in the project, among which will be those relating to education and the young;

- a balance between parochial commitments.

The dimension needs to be readjusted concerning the excessive numerical growth of parishes, with attention to the fact that they are distributed over 88 provinces and the different motives for accepting them (pastoral experience, missionary expansion, pressing requests of bishops, and the need to provide work for certain classes of salesian personnel).

[261]

**Clarifications on the Salesian Youth Movement, and on the influence and limitations of Salesian Youth Spirituality (n.265 of the Report).**

Fr Vecchi explained that the SYM has developed as the educative and apostolic involvement of young people united by a spirituality and linked together by meetings and encounters, with an indispensable minimum of organization and structure.  The results are good, even though there are evident limits in the maturing of some youngsters who risk at times getting no further than activism.  This is partly due to the youth condition and partly to the ability (or lack of it) of the Salesian responsible for the spiritual accompaniment of the young members.

With regard to the statement that the **oratory runs the risk of becoming educatively insignificant, Fr Vecchi wholeheartedly agreed, pointing out that in some oratories no project existed. no objective was aimed at, and that there was no educative rapport, involvement or content offered.**

To the request for criteria for a renewed **pastoral work for vocations, the Vicar General replied by referring first of all to the available salesian literature.  He emphasized the following :**

- concentrate on today's likely age groups - adolescents and young men, without neglecting pre-adolescents,

- the commitment of the local community,

- a favourable atmosphere,

- accompaniment in the journey of faith,

- meaningful experiences of prayer and apostolic involvement,

- discernment,

- individual follow-up in personal vocational development.

He added that good work is being done in the Congregation as regards journeys of faith which are applicable in many of the groups.

[262]

**On the relationship between vocational fertility and pastoral quality, he replied that vocations are certainly a gift of God, that some contexts are difficult, that some categories of young people (drug addicts and those with other problems) are less likely prospects, and that not only pastoral activity but also the life of the community is at the origin of vocations.  But it should be noted that in the text it is stated that this is a sign (not the only one) that the life of the community is an integral part of our youth pastoral work, and that when we speak of vocations we are referring to priestly and religious vocations, but to lay vocations as well.**

[263]

In connection with clarifications asked for about **tasks and roles offered by dioceses (n.270 of the Report), on the one hand there had been the danger of Salesians become little different from secular priests, but on the other there are many positive experiences.  The criteria for accepting such work are: harmony with our charism, responsibility of the province, the urgency involved, and the proportion.  Working for the local Church does not necessarily mean taking on diocesan commitments.  The charism must maintain its tendency towards our own frontiers.  Our relationships with dioceses have been judged 99% good.  Difficulties which arise are sometimes due to the personality of the Bishop or that of the Salesian concerned, or to the manner in which our charism and presence is perceived.  There remains nevertheless the need that the Salesians be actively present in the life of the local Church and become elements of communion.**

[264]

**Formation.**

The Vicar General replied that it is not possible to provide a complete framework with intellectual responsibility on the motives of those who leave us, because of lack of sufficient data for an overall study of the phenomenon.  The General Secretariat and the Formation Department have asked for a full report from the Provincial in each case together with a statement from the subject concerned, but both the one and the other are rarely received, and so we are left without sufficient material for a serious study.  Moreover the research needs to be made at Regional level because the causes differ widely.  From the Report it is clear that such verifications have been made in Spain, the Atlantic side of Latin America, and India.

[265]

**Brothers.**

It has been asked whether the so-called 'juridical equality' is one of the reasons for the falling off in coadjutor vocations, and whether the question is to be considered closed.  Fr Vecchi replied that it does not seem that the fact that the highest authority in the Congregation can be given only to priests is a fundamental obstacle.  At the present moment it should be said that it is a criterion of discernment, in the sense that anyone who wants at all costs to realize a different figure of the lay religious is not meant for the Salesian Congregation.  This is equally true of anyone who would want a kind of priesthood which has little in common with our community project.  A further stage of reflection and discernment cannot be excluded, but light is go be sought in the charism, in the kind of community and mission and hence in the kind of guide the Congregation wants, and not in the hope that the change would result in more vocations.

A theological commission following the Synod is investigating the possibility of a third kind of Institute of consecrated life called 'mixed', which would be neither clerical nor lay, but this too emphasizes the need for each individual Institute to study more deeply its charismatic reality, the mission, community and spirituality.

[266]

Some denounce certain **inadequacies in the content of ongoing formation, especially in what concerns knowledge of the youth situation and the understanding of culture.  Ongoing formation is not to be identified with a course, but is the capacity of the individual to make a constant dynamic synthesis of the realities and ideas with which he interacts, on the basis of a strong spiritual foundation (which is sometimes found to be absent).  A good course includes this aspect, and provides plenty of stimuli and keys for reading.  This means that the contents concerning the youth condition and mission offered to communities by the various Departments or teams form part of ongoing formation.  It is understandable therefore that in a certain part of the courses there should insistence on personal aspects (spirituality, sense of consecration, nature of the mission).  The reasons for vocational "giving way" are to be found in this direction rather than in knowledge of the youth situation.**

[267]

**Salesian Family**

As far as concerns the other groups beyond the Cooperators, Past-pupils and Don Bosco Volunteers, we have responsibility for communion in the Salesian Family, but no obligation for animation or spiritual assistance.  We offer those services we are able to provide, in the general economy of our mission and under the responsibility of Provincials and Rectors.

The **Friends of Don Bosco are a living reality, which is on the move, without structures or organisms for linkage; they have a bond in a common affection for Don Bosco.  The General Chapter may want to say more about them.**

Nothing has been said about **possible difficulties in relations with the FMA, for reasons of honesty and sincerity: we have no serious elements for analysis, and problems are sometimes linked with individuals; in any case, such a question would have to be studied together with the FMA.  Generally relationships are good, respectful and fraternal, even though we may not have found an ideal manner of collaboration in our works, and we need to recognize our need to mature in the appreciation of the original contribution of women in general and women religious.  In the Report the Vicar General noted that there is good collaboration at local level where both are working in the same area.**

APPENDIX 8

**The launching of the Chapter's work**

**2 March 1996**

[268]

A word about the twelve days we have already experienced.  They have been marked by some effective realizations:

\* the opening of the Chapter, with a general vision of its nature and tasks;

\* the 4-day retreat, to lift us to a proper spiritual and salesian level;

\* we have heard, studied and gone more deeply into the Report on the state of the Congregation to an extent that went beyond the practice of previous Chapters; and we deduced the urgent need for a study of the present theme and the elements of a global response to the salesian vocation;

\* we have studied and approved the Chapter Regulations, not as a mere formality but as a condition for validity and for mutual understanding;

\* we have approved the basic working document after an intense discussion in which many took part;

\* the presidency has been completed with the election of the chairmen and the completing of the Central Coordinating Committee;

\* the Commissions have been set up and have already elected their own presidents, secretaries and spokesmen;

\* the overall general calendar has been approved, covering:

- elections

- meeting with the laity

- definitive polishing up

- closure;

\* we approved a manner of communal discernment to combine in the best way possible the personal process with access to all the information that could come from the community.  Fr Vecchi emphasized that the choice had been made on the basis of a specific request from the GC23 in view of a phenomenon that had been pointed out: some items of information remained concealed in national groups or tendencies; it ensures that there will be nothing to fear on grounds of discretion because there will be no general assemblies during the discernment process and no signatures will be asked for at any stage; what *is asked for is absolute purity of intention;*

\* the Committee for Information has been set up; it is responsible before the Congregation and public opinion for the diffusion of information about the Chapter; naturally the committee can use the services of other agencies and preferably the ANS, which has our confidence, for passing on correct information about the aims and content of the GC24; the responsibility for such information cannot be delegated to others.

The work of this first phase of the Chapter has been abundant, and the results more than satisfying. The conduct of business has been skillful, sure and respectful.

In this first phase the assembly has practised the responsible use of: study, participation in discussion, request for clarifications, voting, and acceptance of results.

We now have available all the instruments needed for working with intelligence, wise choice and discernment.

Some communal and decisive objectives for the attainment of the Chapter's goals have been launched or achieved: our community has become progressively integrated at fraternal, cultural and salesian level, with the knowledge, esteem and appreciation of our differences; we have celebrated personal birthdays, feastdays, etc. in a suitable manner at table, and in praying together.  We recognize that language imposes a barrier, but that somehow we have to get over the difficulty, accepting the use of translation as necessary for communication.  We have developed trusting relationships: when we express our opinions we have no hidden intentions: we keep nothing up our sleeves.

Realizing that we are a Capitular Community, we have accepted and made our own the need to adopt a universal perspective which rises above regions and nations in exchanging experiences and cultures at personal level and in sharing liturgical moments.  The latter are not closed to exclusively linguistic groups; we must remember that the Region is seen as an exclusive element only for the election of the Regional Councillor.

All this serves to place us on a charismatic platform which unites us in the sense that all matters, problems and proposals, are seen in the perspective of the nature, form and structure of salesian originality, i.e. in the light of the charism and not of fleeting facts and circumstances.

We now prepare ourselves to face the second stage:

1. the drawing up of guidelines on the theme of the Chapter;

2. integrations in the Constitutions and Regulations.

The quality of the work of the commissions is of great importance.  All the capitulars without exception are obliged to make use of their time and intelligence in study, research, reading and discussion.  In this work it is essential that there be communication between commissions and the assembly, which alone has authority; the function of the commissions is to prepare and facilitate the work of the assembly.

Fr Vecchi concluded emphasizing that we must "let ourselves converge", i.e. bring about an interior convergence which will also be the result of a rethinking of what is necessary, urgent and possible.

APPENDIX 9

**9 March 1996**

[269]

We have reached the end of our third week; it has witnessed:

\* the work of the commissions,

\* the functioning of the Central Coordinating Committee,

\* a test of the assembly, which has taken a document from its first phase through to its approval, in the following stages:

- proposal of the commission,

- requests for clarifications,

- general discussion in assembly,

- soundings by straw vote,

- re-presentation of the proposal,

    - successive votings on the same text, with the possibility of reformulation.

The commissions had realized a first discussion, reaching some convergence and preparing for the presentation in the assembly of the first draft of their document.

The Central Committee had held two meetings in sober and concise fashion and had heard the opinions of the commission presidents with a view to solving some problems concerning coordination and overlapping.  He congratulated the commission presidents, spokesmen and secretaries on their work.  He also added some comments on the dynamics of the Chapter and other questions.

*With respect to the dynamics of the Chapter he remarked on the internal tranquility of everyone. They have a time and place to make their ideas heard, especially in the commissions, and it is up to each one to put forward solid and convincing reasons for his proposals, following the discernment method.  He also mentioned the freedom of expression and the will to participate which have been undoubtedly a source of benefit for the assimilation of the document by individuals and for the document itself which can thus reflect the sensitivities of everyone.*

*As regards the topics about the study and creation of structures of government, he directed attention to*

- a sense of objectivity: universal application on the part of ordinary government.  After expressing personal preferences and interests, one has to pass:

\* from feelings to reasons, and

\* from the part to the whole.

Moreover it would not be expedient to disregard an overall view because of minority opinions;  ours is not an assembly for the dividing up of capital, but for the purpose of giving consistency to the Congregation in its life and activity.

- A second point calling for our attention concerns the global coherence of the structures on which functionality depends.  The Vicar General explained this by two examples concerning the relationship between the tasks of the Regional Councillors in respect of their own Region, and those in the setting of the General Council in respect of all the other Regions and important questions of the Congregation as a whole.  With regard to possible new obligations: the sectors are important, but more important still is the ability of the General Council to come to grips with global problems.  He further referred to the criterion of proportionality, emphasizing that it is necessary to activate the sectors in a manner proportional to the Congregation's possibilities.  To think that where an urgent need arises structures must be immediately set up to meet it, seems to be a too hasty way to go about things when the articulation of 89 circumscriptions of the Congregation have to be kept in mind.  In addition to a horizontal distribution of duties, there is also a vertical sequence corresponding to the principle of subsidiarity: the Regional Councillor does not have a direct rapport with the local communities but with teams and structures at provincial and regional level,  Central roles are not called upon to repeat with greater authority what has been entrusted to provincial levels, but to insist on coordination at higher level.

- Fr Vecchi concluded with a reference to three further points concerning the functioning of transmission structures.

\* Correspondence with the mission, but remembering that the mission is not exhausted by the sum of the sectors which express it; there are problems regarding the life of the community and the strengths available, their location in the context, etc.

\* The dimensions concerning what the General Council is called upon to do at the present day in the Congregation as a whole, in the organization and ordering of the different sectors, i.e. the range of the Departments is not to be measured simply by their titles (missions, youth pastoral work, etc.) but in line with what the Salesian Congregation can and must do.

- A criterion of action: due proportion between the production of proposals, their communication and their realization; it is useless to have an abundance of proposals coming from various sectors, if those who receive them have neither the time nor the means to give them effect.  In such a case the General Council would do better to study other problems of a global nature.

APPENDIX 10

**After the first passage of the Chapter themes**

**in the assembly**

**16 March 1996**

[270]

Summing up at the end of this week, I emphasize three sets of items:

**1.  Points realized during the week:**

1.1 *The setting out of the six parts into which the theme has been split up.  This means that the commissions now have their method for working, as the individual spokesmen have explained in the assembly, and have understood the specific objectives of each part so as to make a good selection of the contents.  The commissions now have a detailed panoramic view of their own theme, and hence a sufficiently clear vision of points that are clear and of others which appear problematic.  Consequently they will be able to stimulate discussion on the points which have need of it and thus evaluate the contributions they receive.*

1.2 *The presentation in the assembly of the six parts of the theme; this has enabled us to get an idea of the work as a whole.  Each part has been presented sufficiently clearly to enable the capitulars to study it with profit, without conditioning the assembly.  There was more than sufficient time for an attentive reading before the discussion took place, especially if we keep in mind the parts that will be discussed after the week of discernment.  Each one is getting an idea of the material as a whole.*

1.3 *The discussion 'per partes' of the schema of the first commission.  We had the opportunity of listening tranquilly to each others views and also to begin to foresee the make-up of each part and the content of the whole schema.*

At this point too we must begin to verify what we are trying to do.  It is a common phenomenon to demand a final document which is very brief but must contain everything, so that (as one humorist put it) we want shoes that are small outside but big inside.  We begin to see also that concordance must be brought about, and hence the usefulness of the passage of parts from one commission to another to which reference was made in our early days.  We hope we shall finish up in this way with the picturesque country fair that came to mind when we first heard the expression, and that we do not have the kind of difficulties that followed Maastrich.

1.4 *As far as the questions about the Constitutions and Regulations are concerned, with the work of the seventh commission we have practically defined, with the final vote, the matter of the limitation to the duration of Councillors in the same office, and the assigning to a single Councillor the sectors corresponding to the Salesian Family and to Social Communication.  The work of distributing the provinces among various Regions is well advanced and we hope that the conclusion will give satisfaction (at least relatively) to all, and will be of help to the Rector Major and his Council in the coming six years.  Again for the Regions, as in the case of the Departments, it must be said that after examining them one by one, we shall have to consider the way government applies to them as a whole, so as to be able to animate all of them more easily and throw light on the overall problems.  Since there is a further discussion still to come, this is a point that could be considered.*

[271]

**2.  In addition to the items that have been realized, a certain maturing is evident in the assembly, and I emphasize five indications of the progress we have made in this line.**

2.1  There is a *greater clarity about the role of each one, and hence in the manner of fulfilling it adequately.  It is the assembly that decides, and today we have experienced the importance of the final vote, because by a single vote a certain deliberation has been adopted.  The moment of decision is typical of the assembly, since it is also the response in conscience to the soundings made through the straw votes; it is typical because it is one of the moments when the assembly expresses itself as a body.  The decision of the assembly is prepared by the work in commission, by the discussion, by the soundings of opinions; each one has learned to intervene at the appropriate moment to avoid bewailing the fact that he had not inserted what he wanted to say.*

2.2  Together with greater clarity about the role of each one, there is an *awareness of the relationship between commission and assembly.  The commission has the task of reordering the material, to offer and clarify motivations for the various hypotheses and to explain the reasons for its own choice.  Without doubt this has an influence on the assembly, but no one should allow himself to be conditioned by it; rather he must let himself be enlightened, but in soundings and voting the decision is always in his own hands.  The mediator of this relationship between commission and assembly is the commission's spokesman, and we thank all the spokesmen we have heard for their efforts at clarity, synthesis and adherence to what the commission wants expressed.  The spokesman does not speak in his own name, but brings to the assembly what the commission has said and expressed.*

2.3  There is a *process of common assimilation of themes, of problematic points, of foundations of our reflection; this assimilation is the result of the linkage that exists between the different passages of a theme.  Thanks be to God that our assembly does not carry on a dialogue between deaf people.  And so we prepare also to communicate in a mature manner our course of formation to the confreres.  This material, which goes through the assembly and is assimilated by all in its totality, will later be passed on to the confreres, perhaps to a greater extent than what is written in the official documents.*

2.4  Also developing is a *healthy balance between deeper doctrinal analysis and operative concreteness.  At the beginning of the Chapter we seemed to detect in some of the exchanges a certain doctrinal allergy, perhaps justified to some extent, but it is being replaced by the conviction that without motivations, rooted in the fundamental realities of our life and Christian experience, we cannot move forward, and still less can all our 1,700 communities move forward together.  My experience is that there has never been any pastoral and spiritual progress without a corresponding deepening of faith in a doctrinal sense, a return to the truth of the Church, a return to the truth of Christ, a return to the truth of faith; and so if we are to move forward together we must combine doctrinal depth with spiritual life and pastoral practice.  I say "to move forward together" because, while action varies with places and groups, there is need for a shared frame of reference to ensure that the different actions and activities are carried out in the same orientation.*

2.5  I think that there is a *greater understanding of the problems, which at the beginning may have been outside the knowledge of the majority of the members of this assembly; the limitation on the duration in office, for example, gave rise to some interesting deeper thought about the figure of the Rector Major; the discussion on the Regions prompted some interesting information about the Regionals and problems of government.  And one could give other examples too.*

[272]

**3.  Some final comments concern the *community*.  Let us give them a quick glance.  I feel that at community level too we are making progress.**

The *overall vision and intercultural sensitivity is becoming consolidated.  It is acquiring consistency through daily encounters, the fraternal evenings we experience, and the 'good nights' we hear.*

Gaining in strength also is the desire for continuity between our work and what was done by the GC23, as we see the lay aggregation that is possible with us: it is true that the mission does not coincide with the works, but it is also true that the salesian mission always requires a visible operative setting around which those invisible circles are formed which live a kind of spiritual adherence; an operative setting is not a work in the formal sense, but it can cover a wide area.  We can dream of the day when the Salesians will put a communications satellite in orbit, with a team to use it.  We shall not have a work in the traditional sense, but our working space will include wherever communication reaches.  Our form of aggregation, as can be seen from the way the Oratory began, is rather different from that of some ecclesial movements: it allows for spiritual adherence, but the visible and stimulating centre, through which God calls in the first instance, for the building of other circles is the working space where the mission is embodied and rendered visible.  The continuity between this Chapter and the preceding one, which emphasized the journey of young people to the faith rests in this linkage: the breadth of the mission and the significant force of the working space.

The union of the community and its intercultural aspect are realized to an ever greater extent in times of common prayer, especially when such moments are characterized by some sign which touches us deeply, as for instance our visit to the tomb of Fr Viganò at the Catacombs or some particular moments of our community celebrations.

And so we are approaching in a sufficiently well prepared manner the important week of discernment, which we place under the protection of Mary Help of Christians.

APPENDIX 11

**At the end of the week of the elections**

**23 March 1996**

[273]

As we end this week which has seen the election of the Rector Major, the Vicar General, and the General Councillors for the various Departments,  it is interesting to see the convergence that has developed, and another point of interest is the presence already in the new Council of persons with experience of four continents, if not by birth at least by virtue of long salesian activity.

The Council is already rich in ability and in knowledge of languages, and will be subsequently completed and further enriched by the election of the Regional Councillors.  Thanks are due to those who have accepted, and those who worked so hard during the past six years. The Rector Major referred particularly and expressed his personal thanks to Fr Omero Paron, who is leaving behind him a strong and well-ordered department, open to solidarity.

Fr Vecchi went on to speak of the positive result of the new 'discernment' process which seemed to have given general satisfaction.  He referred to the personal spiritual fruit stemming from the interior process of purification, from the ability to listen, from prayer and the practice of convergence, which had also allowed some unclear moments to be accepted calmly by the community: this was gratifying because we live close to God not in some mythical way, but with realism and responsibility.  This experience of discernment is something rich that we can take with us to local communities and provincial councils: there are always problems that must be faced with discernment and calm.  He mentioned numerous articles of the Constitutions which refer to discernment; it is demanded by our identity in view of fidelity in today's cultural world, in the complex situations in which the Congregation is living, and in view of long-term prospects, perspectives and deadlines.

In conclusion he indicated a further achievement: mutual trust and esteem in diversity, and an easier relationship amongst ourselves.  He expressed thanks to God and to the capitulars.

APPENDIX 12

**A week with the laity**

**30 March 1996**

[274]

**1.  Presence of lay brothers and sisters**

They arrived as expected and have been involved in the life and realities of the Chapter; they have taken part in discussions in the assembly; they have been responsibly implicated in the subsequent redrafting of documents, and have helped to increase our knowledge of the different branches of the Salesian Family.

Their presence has been of real worth because of the consistency of their contributions, and has also had a symbolic value as a sign for the Congregation.  Certainly its influence will be multiplied in salesian communities.

Fr Vecchi renewed his thanks to them for their contribution to the Chapter, and referred to the difficulties that had been experienced in getting them there: first they had to be sought and invited, and then there were problems to be overcome with regard to employment and other obligations; but the results had been more than satisfactory, and well repaid all the efforts.

[275]

2.  The **first discussion in the assembly had been completed in respect of each of the six parts into which the Capitular Document had been divided.  Interventions and personal contributions had been abundant.**

The first commission had received 137, the second 70, the third 49, the fourth 37, the fifth 61 and the sixth 36.  A total of 390 interventions (verbal or written) - an average of 1.8 pages per capitular (including the lay participants).  Some were frequent contributors, some wrote nothing at all but took part through the soundings and straw votes, but wisdom is made up of a combination of words and silence.

Some determining aspects received many comments, e.g.  the relationship between the laity and consecrated life: that rapport which goes beyond courtesy and welcoming acceptance, and consists rather in the exchange of talents for the building of the educative community and the education of the young;  the animating nucleus; the definition of Salesian Movement and Salesian Family.

From the lengthy discussions Fr Vecchi emphasized certain elements, without going into details of the contents which will come later.

The first element is the *concrete nature of approach and the effort at definition.  We did well not to seek enthusiastically utopian terms in trying to define the precise practical significance of terms.  Perhaps here lay the source of the desire for a vocabulary of terms, and examples of a kind we could not accept (cf. the suggestion made in the assembly of an example on the lines of the McDonalds fast-food chain).*

A second element is the *many references to lived experiences which enable all to see the possibilities of realizing the suggestions made.  Moreover there was a constant search for foundations and inspirations for evaluating individual experiences and for maintaining the charismatic originality of different solutions.*

[276]

3.  The third achievement was the **examination of the discussions on the part of the commissions; thus began the preparation of the second draft of the document.  Great care went into the effort to integrate into the text the different contributions, including those of the laity, and even the Apostolic Exhortation** *Vita consecrata which had only recently been published.*

Sometimes these integrations brought about a reduction in the number of pages and at the same time a concentration of the contents.

And so we are moving towards the definitive text; there will be further discussions, more soundings with straw votes, and then the definitive systemization.

4.  The **future path of the document from its present state to its conclusion is now clear; it must be completed in the three weeks of the Chapter which now remain.**

In the process has also been included the work of the group which will give unity to the style of the document and make the final text easier to read.

5.  The **results at personal level are evident: all have been able to get a universal vision of the situation, all know where we are and what we still have to do, and all know the conditions to be fulfilled if we are to realize our objectives.**

6.  The seventh commission has finalized the **definition of the Regions after overcoming mountainous difficulties.  All these "regions" have been approved by the assembly with a majority of more than two-thirds.**

This brings me to the end of the points I had listed, and so I have reached the goal ahead of the others (applause).

***And now one or two comments about the discussions***

[277]

1.  **Looking for equilibrium**

There is an equilibrium or balance to be fostered personally, in the document, in the government of the provinces and houses, and there are some other complementary requirements.

The documents are reaching this balance.  The Rector Major spoke rather about some aspects indicating a "strong disparity".

- A first disparity or cleavage: *the common vocation of the People of God and difference of gifts*

All are equal in dignity and in the vocation to holiness and in the possibility of formation, but as regards the human condition the Spirit has made them different so as to enrich communion.  An example is provided by man and woman, who are equal in dignity in marriage and hence there is a reciprocal relationship, but each has the specific elements of their particular human condition: this not for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy but so as to make the personal gift with generosity.

In this way we have to think of the gifts or endowments of the laity, but also of what is given by consecrated Salesians to the laity, amongst which we must not forget the priestly manifestations.

To be a priest means not only to exercise a particular function, but also to allow oneself to be moulded interiorly so as to be conformed to Christ, the "Good Shepherd".

- Another disparity is one that can defined as **extension and quality.**

The Salesian Family can be extended to include all those who make some gesture of empathy with Don Bosco; but one must then consider whether the bonds created are such as to enable the person concerned to be a bearer of the spirituality which makes the Salesian Family to be the animating nucleus of a boundless movement.

Such movements cannot function without the input of "leaven", and we have to think at the same time of extending the influence and of fostering the "leaveners".

- Then there is another cleavage: humanism and Christian originality.

Certainly all could be part of the educative community, even those who intend to limit themselves to human values and have no intention of considering the possibility of the faith.

- And we could continue with other disparities, as for example:

*education and pastoral work*

*ordinary and extraordinary conditions.*

In some circumstances an educative community can take up certain items difficult to manage, but one has to consider whether such a situation can be proposed as a general norm for giving consistency either to the province or to our educative and pastoral activity.

Maintaining the elasticity between these priorities is a guarantee of operative concreteness, and means actuating the "grace of unity" which is always quoted.

The General Chapter is called upon not only to point to goals and utopias, but also to present practical ways of realizing them.

[278]

2.  **The "animating nucleus".**

Another comment concerns the "animating nucleus";  this is a theme which provoked a great deal of interest, and rightly so because it involves the new position of the salesian community in a work or initiative.

And here there is the question of the educative and pastoral identity of the salesian community, and also of its educational results.

This is a problem which had caused concern to Don Bosco himself in the conditions of his own time, when he had emphasized the importance of the Rector and his council, and had given to the Rector indications for animating both young people and adults.

It will be well in the first place to give clear expression to the various levels of animation: those of organization, daily coordination, methodical follow-up, educative guidance (as regards content and objectives), then spiritual and Christian formation, and above all the ensuring of the spiritual identity of everything.

These levels are interlinked, but a distinction can be made between them.

Some aspects are more decisive than others.

Secondly, it is important that the SDBs, wherever they are present, be always the animating nucleus; that every SDB be capable of animating and dedicate himself to animation, and that the community as a group sees it as a primary function to be carried out together.  This is something that belongs intimately to their vocation as Salesians and consecrated persons.

The consecrated community is always a strong point of formation of the Church.  Around it become created circles of communion and participation.  This does not mean that it is at the centre as an organizing nucleus, nor that it is alone in the task of animation; in the latter lay people too take part, in line with their own progress and that of the community.  It is a good and desirable thing that lay people be present in the animating nucleus, but it is most important that SDBs be not lacking in it.

It is even possible to have an animating nucleus at local level made up of laity alone, but with the assistance of SDBs as a reference point, either at provincial level or from a nearby community which will see to charismatic aspects and provide a ministerial presence.  And this not in any weak form; in fact, the stronger the presence of the laity, the more substantial must be the assistance of the province or the nearby community, because Christian availability must never be left without corresponding encouragement and support.

Finally, with reference to such situations in a province one must ask: how many can be sustained efficaciously?   Because the principle is not to "occupy" the greatest possible space, but rather to see whether the enterprise is fruitful in terms of formation of Church, of evangelization, in giving rise to vocations.

[279]

3.  **And here there is another discrepancy.**

It is true that we are for the world, but the Church has never thought of the world without thinking of herself at the same time; and this not to impose on others or seek privileges for herself, but to examine her own identity and the conditions for her activity.

Being 'for' the world is not to be interpreted only in terms of extension, but as providing strong Christian leaven.  The world does not live in terms of quantity alone, but both world and culture progress in terms of the quality of stimulation.

[280]

4.  Finally we must remember that there can be **other subjects totally responsible for works which are called salesian, because they intend to apply the salesian spirit and style, and it is not in the interests of the Congregation to take on the main responsibility for all these works, especially if there are people available who are able to do so in their own name.  One thinks of Cooperators, Past-pupils, 'Damas Salesianas', etc.  This implies on our part a different kind of assistance and follow-up, which does not correspond to the action of an 'animating nucleus'; the latter belongs to the subject with responsibility for the work.**

As the Rector Major drew towards a conclusion, he emphasized that what he had said was not intended to close any horizons but to point to paths it was possible to follow.

But before closing his wide-ranging, rich and significant comments which threw light on what the Chapter had done and what still remained for it to do, he had also a word for the laity present.  They would not be present during the work which still lay ahead, and this caused a certain nostalgia.

Theirs, in fact, had been a welcome and enriching presence, for which we must thank them once again, but there will not be any formal leave-taking.  What is happening is that they are being sent-out, so to speak, on a mission as though we are saying: "Go", go to the places where Salesians and laity are working together, go to the communities of consecrated Salesians.

They are sent to proclaim an innovation: "we believe that it is possible, and we intend to work as an integrated family, as a movement that wants to gather up even the crumbs of good will and empathy of all who want to place themselves at the service of the young, and especially the poorer ones among them".

APPENDIX 13

**The end of the discussions and**

**final elaboration of the text**

**13 April 1996**

[281]

We have heard expressed all that this assembly of some 220 members wanted to say and hear in a month and a half of work.  This does not mean that we have exhausted every argument.  It still remains for them to be put into context and given more detailed expression by individual provinces and communities.  Our reflections have been as deep as we could make them.  They have led us to some indispensable clarifications, e.g. on the educative community, the animating nucleus and other themes; they have brought us back to certain important points which at the beginning were to some extent neglected, like the identity and function of consecrated religious or of the priestly ministry; they have led us to rethink points we had heard but which had to be given their proper place in the economy of our theme, such as the question of the FMA, who do not live the lay condition but that of consecrated persons: to speak of them is for us a particular commitment to compare ourselves with them; another theme is that of the coadjutor brother, who has a secular dimension but lives in the condition of a consecrated religious.  The text has been able to use terms which were unexpected but enriching, like icons, liturgical accent, and historical references: we have to recognize the attention given by the commissions to all the contributions.

A point already realized is *the work of the commissions in drawing up their documents.  This implies a further obligation for everyone, that of an attentive reading in order to assimilate the contents; there is still the possibility of sending in "modi" for the further improvement of details before the document is offered to the Congregation.*

[282]

Another point reached is the beginning of the *final organization of the document.*

The new arrangement followed repeated requests for the elimination of repetitions and overlapping, and meant a certain sacrifice for the commissions.  There was nevertheless great collaboration between the commissions and the group with the task of giving an aspect of unity to the document

I want to dwell for a moment on the *document of the General Chapter as such.*

Various expectations had been expressed, e.g. that it should be easy to read, immediately understandable, and of practical application.  I am sure that all these aspects will be kept in mind by the group preparing the final draft.  In the meantime it may be useful to make one or two comments.

- The first is in connection with the *character of this particular document.*

It will be a document which will serve for the work of local and provincial communities.  We may want it to have a certain elegance, a rather poetic character or one that will raise enthusiasm; we must not expect something analogous to the recent Apostolic Exhortation, which needed a year's work and five or six different drafts before its publication and is offered to all religious.  Those to whom we offer our own document are communities well known to us; we know of their living and working conditions.  Our document is an invitation to reflection; it is meant to be complemented by study in local and provincial communities.  It should be emphasized that it is not meant simply for reading; it is a document for work.

- A second comment concerns its *legibility.*

The group concerned will certainly do their best to make it easy to read, but it is not a document intended to be read from beginning to end at one sitting, as for instance like spiritual reading.  It is a document that needs study, in connection with the ideas it contains, the existing mentality which needs discussion, and its relationship to the life or situation in which we are placed.  For this reason the document will need mediation, and the mediators will be precisely you who are members of the Chapter.  The document provides a basis to enable you to pass on to others all that you have acquired through your experience of the Chapter, with the various nuances that will certainly be in no way contrary to the text or sense of the document but will serve to clarify it.  For a profitable reading it will have to be split up into parts.  A first reading can be a rapid one, but for a deeper understanding it will be necessary to return and dwell at length on single points and problems.  It is a document that can be enriched by a creative and expansive reading which is not purely repetitive or solely for purposes of assimilation.  Starting from this we have to understand what is demanded by our mentality and situation.

- A final comment on the *function of this document in the Congregation's progress.*

In the first place its function will be the creation of a communal mentality: the first difficulty that arises in the orientation towards pastoral objectives is precisely the diversity of sensitivities and mentalities with respect to content, objectives and methods, so that for a document it is a matter of some importance to try to form a communal mentality.

Secondly it can provide practical suggestions, arising from experiences already tried out, and here gathered together and offered to everyone.

A third function is that of providing criteria to be followed, especially in areas where exploration is just beginning, or can be suggested for future examination.  To go ahead is a good thing, but not in a haphazard manner without either compass or criteria for orientation.  Here those criteria can be found.

Finally a further function of the document is that of presenting goals to be achieved in the next six years.

In the light of all this, some expectations may need reshaping, but at the same time may reveal in the document certain merits which had been overlooked.

**MESSAGES**

APPENDIX 14

MESSAGE OF THE GC24 TO THE LAITY

[283]

We, the members of the GC24, at the end of a week which has seen us working side by side with eminent representatives of lay people from salesian settings around the world, feel that it was a gift and inspiration of Providence that led us to choose as the theme of the Chapter the relationship between Salesians and Laity, and to have called, for the first time in the history of our General Chapters, a group of lay men and women to take part in it and bring us the rich contribution of their views and sensitivities in a theme which concerns them directly.

With regard to these views which we have had the good fortune to hear, we are particularly grateful;

- for the empathy and friendship of those who expressed them;

- for the sincerity and frankness which characterized them;

- for the validity of the points which were effectively made.

They provided a spontaneous and convincing interpretation of the new sensitivity of church, and have called for a fuller response on the part of the Congregation.

In this sense we intend through them to assure the very many lay people, men and women, who enjoy Don Bosco's friendship and have become his collaborators, that we Salesians:

- already have a high appreciation of their generosity and the quality of their presence, for which we thank them most sincerely;

- intend to develop more deeply practical ways of sharing with them in a fuller and more fruitful manner in every field of the salesian mission;

- want in particular to have them alongside us as protagonists in the Educative and Pastoral Community, providing space for their complementary contributions which are indispensable;

- mean finally to improve the atmosphere of our encounters and collaboration, so that it approaches more closely family warmth and the ideal of "communion".

At the same time we ask them fraternally for:

- their patience in this process which is so exacting for both us and them;

- the will to improve our ability for understanding and sharing, accepting ways and periods of a new formation;

- the desire to approach more closely to the great heart of Don Bosco, so as to be further infected by it and express a new generosity and ardour for young people who have greater need of him.

Meanwhile we recognize the significant reality of lay collaboration which is already evident in salesian history through:

- the *Lay Groups of the Salesian Family (and first among them the Cooperators), bearers with us of the same values, animated by the same spirituality and interpreters of the same mission, albeit in different forms and characteristics, according to the originality of each group;*

- the young people of the *Salesian Youth Movement who, with an original protagonism enlivened by salesian spirituality, become missionaries of their peers through a characteristic salesian educative option;*

- the *Friends of Don Bosco, of widely differing physiognomies, who have experienced a fascination for him and despite their differences of origin, culture, social class and religious belief, are at one with him in their willingness to use their energies, time and resources for the benefit of the young;*

- the *Women, called to "affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society" (EV 99), and specifically in the typically educative aspects of the salesian mission, recognizing their new relevance and "new place in thought and action" (ibid.);*

- *all lay people included in the "vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young" (C 5).*

We are moving together, Laity and Salesians, towards the third Millennium which is already at the door, laden with contradictions but also with promise, with our specific commitment "to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2).  This has been already realized in splendid fashion by many Salesians and laity from Don Bosco's time right down to the present day.  But "you have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished" declares the Pope to us Salesians, but also analogically to you lay people who participate in our mission (VC 110).  The challenge is before us.  We can meet it by intelligence in planning, perseverance in keeping going, courage in adopting new means.

Thanks to the intuitions and stimuli of this GC24, there is also for you Laity a strong and renewed appeal from Don Bosco to be, in different and gradual ways, a living part of his mission in the Church to the young and the poor.  And so Don Bosco thanks you; he calls on you to increase in number; he promises you once again, with witty but wise simplicity, "bread, work and heaven" (MB 18, 420).

May Mary Help of Christians, the assiduous aid of those in need, be once again your Mother and Guide.

With fraternal greetings.

                                     The Members of the GC24

APPENDIX 15

MESSAGE OF THE GC24 TO YOUNG PEOPLE

[284]

Dear young people,

150 years ago on 12 April 1846, Easter Sunday, Don Bosco moved with his youngsters to Valdocco.  There the Oratory took root, grew and bore fruit, to such an extent that eventually it served youngsters all over the world.

We Salesians, gathered in our General Chapter and inspired by this event, want to make contact with you, the members of the Salesian Youth Movement, animators, volunteers and all who in one way or another have cme to know and love Don Bosco.

Thank you for your requests

First of all we want to thank you for what you said to us in reply to the questionnaire we sent you in preparation for the General Chapter:

- you asked us insistently to be present among you spontaneously to a greater extent, to share your life in an informal manner;

**- you want us to accompany you and help you in attaining a deeper formation;**

- you want to be given the possibility of playing an effective part in the work of education and evangelization;

- you want to see us as consistent witnesses of the Gospel by our religious life: men of prayer who are truly poor and able to live and work as a community.

**The experience of the 24th General Chapter**

For us the GC24 has been an extraordinary experience of salesianity.  We have touched almost physically the universal nature of the salesian charism and mission, the drawing force still exerted by Don Bosco at the present day, and the communion that exists between us and so many people of good will, of every religion and culture, and especially with the Salesian Family.

We have heard your voice and that of the lay people who work with us:  one and all ask us for openness and participation; they want to be involved in the salesian mission as protagonists.  Don Bosco, who from the very beginning was able to involve youngsters in his enterprise and lead them to put themselves at the service of their peers, is for us an example and stimulus.

We have studied more deeply our vision of the Church as a communion of vocations at the service of the Kingdom in the world.

We have gained a better knowledge, and for this we thank God, of your work in the field of animation and evangelization in so many forms and different places.  We have experienced the great joy of sharing with you the salesian mission.

This is already a realization of the communion and sharing between Salesians and lay people in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco, the theme of the Chapter itself.

**Our response**

We accept the challenge which reaches us through the Chapter.

Though well aware of our limitations, we join hands with you in a common journey, and we commit ourselves to making our communities and works open to all of you.

Like Don Bosco, with you we want to live, with you we want to stay, with you we want to work for the salvation of the young, especially those who are poor and most in need.

We propose to you a journey of faith, made concrete in salesian youth spirituality, of which we want to be living witnesses among you.

We want to see you as young people with strong interior convictions, seeking God and open to him.

We want to prompt you to make of your life a service to others, especially to those who are most abandoned, and to be bearers of solidarity and hope.

We encourage you to be missionaries among the young.

We ask you to live an intense friendship with Christ.

We invite you to make holiness your goal.

And in all this, please count on our accompaniment and support.

A common commitment

Don Bosco used to say: "If I had with me a group of youngsters who think as I do, we could conquer the world".  With the same trust and confidence we invite you to work with us for the education and evangelization of young people the whole world over.

Let us live the experience of preparing ourselves together to continue the journey of faith, and bring Don Bosco to life again as the century draws to an end, giving him as a living person to the new generations of youth!

This will be our concrete form of taking part in the great project of the jubilee year, to which the Pope is calling us.

Let us place these desires and commitments in the hands of Mary Help of Christians, the Mother and Teacher of Don Bosco and of youth, so that they may become a joyful reality.

                                     The Members of the GC24

Rome, 20 April 1996

APPENDIX 16

MESSAGE OF THE GC24 TO THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS

[285]

Dear Cooperators,

We are approaching the end of our General Chapter, and it is fitting that we send you our greetings and a word of thanks both for your fraternal prayers and for your message, so rich in salesian content.

In these days we have renewed our awareness of being in the Church as children of a Father who wanted to unite all forces moved by the desire to do good.  He wanted to involve all of them in his plan of life: to go to poor and abandoned youth to show them that God loves them.

You Cooperators, with us SDBs and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, as the central groups of the Salesian Family (cf. Common Identity Card, art.2), have an important responsibility in the common salesian mission.

Today the mission is facing a greater challenge than ever before: poverty and emargination are becoming ever more widespread in the world and affecting many youngsters.  We believe with the Church of Vatican II that this is a time when we must be united to be consistent with our charism, the mission and the signs of the times.  While respecting and exploiting every particular vocation, we must close our ranks in unity, provide mutual support to each other, and become integrated and organized in a more fluid relationship and communication.

The Chapter theme has made us want to involve in our spirit and mission the greatest possible number of the laity.  We believe that in this you Cooperators have an eminent role to play (cf.SGC 741).  The RAL, in fact, presents the Salesian Cooperator as the prototype of the lay person, sharing the educative and pastoral experience of Don Bosco throughout the course of time.

We thank God for what you are and for your original vocation within the Salesian Family, so indispensable for the mission.  At the same time we want to remain at your side so that we may grow and proceed together in the animation and formation of lay people who form part of the Salesian Movement.

We want to commit ourselves also to the gaining of a deeper and better knowledge of our mutual identities, so as to promote a reciprocal ongoing formation and carry out together a significant pastoral work for vocations.

The conclusion of the Diocesan Process for the beatification of Mamma Margaret (22 April 1996) makes us think of the radical nature of evangelical life in the first community of Valdocco.  The Holy Spirit brought about among those who gave form to the first oratory experience, of which we celebrated the 150th anniversary on 12 April last, a kind of relationship able to lead to holiness.  For this reason, as we approach the jubilee of the year 2000 we want to repropose to you Cooperators in particular and to all members of the Salesian Family, the goal of a holiness constructed together so as to give to young people the best possible gift they can expect from us.

May Mary Help of Christians be our support!

Rome, 20 April 1996

                                     The Members of the GC24

APPENDIX 17

MESSAGE OF THE GC24 TO THE PAST-PUPILS, MEN AND WOMEN, OF DON BOSCO

[286]

Dear Past-pupils of Don Bosco,

1. We send to all of you our most cordial greetings and our thanks for the contributions which many of your Federations, and in particular the World Confederation, sent to us in preparation for our General Chapter.  We also listened attentively to the message which your representatives offered us at the beginning of the Chapter and in the course of the week which saw Salesians and laity working together.  Your contribution has highlighted the vitality of the Past-pupils movement within world cultures; the organizing ability of the Federations, the good they do in daily life and the projects to which they intend to commit themselves in the future.  Difficulties are not lacking, but we are sure of the good will of the Salesians and the Past-pupils in overcoming them.

2. We appreciated the tranquil approach, the objective nature and the frankness of the analysis made by the Confederation of the Past-pupils of Don Bosco.  It helped us to understand more deeply our own share in the responsibility for relations with committed Past-pupils: assiduous attention to the rapport between the past-pupils and the local salesian community, the help asked of Salesians in the formation of leaders and directive personnel, especially of the young; greater stability for the salesian delegates; greater and more significant space for the past-pupils in the CEP (the educative and pastoral community) in salesian works, the particular animation of young past-pupils (GEX), the authentic hope for continuity and deep renewal.

3. We thank the Lord for your presence in the Salesian Family, and with you we want to renew our fidelity to Don Bosco.   Full of trust in Providence and under the guidance of Mary Help of Christians, he gathered lay people around him - adults and younger persons, men and women, and lots of people of good will - in the task of saving poor and abandoned youngsters.  We are convinced that, in fidelity to your religious and confessional identity and in dialogue and tolerance with those who profess other faiths and religions, you can make your valid contribution to the educative work of the SDBs, your own educators.

We reconfirm and wish to share with you our commitment to:

a.  ensure an integral education for young people in our works: this, in fact, is the principal and fundamental criterion for the future of the Don Bosco Past-pupils Association, which takes up the values of the preventive system as a humanistic point of reference in the midst of other secular commitments in social life (culture, politics, employment, economy, and the life of faith itself);

b.  foster the animation and formation of other past-pupils, striving to share responsibility and work for the ongoing formation of leaders;

c.  create and develop together opportunities for the presence and witness of past-pupils in our works through the programming and activities of the CEP, and in society through the defence of life values, of the family, of the woman, of human rights, of social justice, of peace and solidarity, and the service of those most in need.

4. We ask you to work for the development of your own life as an association.  At the same time we suggest that you accept involvement and shared responsibility, according to your possibilities, in the work which from now on the Salesians want to offer to the salesian mission, working with the laity.  At local and provincial level your Association should promote convocation and collaboration, expanding the salesian charism in this way into a vast movement, and creating a network of friendship and empathy with so many 'friends' of the salesian work and of Don Bosco.

Our Father and Teacher continues to call you and invite you to live with us in the communion and sharing of his spirit and his mission, and thanks you for the good that has already been done.

May Mary most holy continue to be your Helper, that you may be always and everywhere diffusers of joy, optimism and kindness.

                                     The Members of the GC24

APPENDIX 18

MESSAGE OF THE GC24 TO THE DON BOSCO VOLUNTEERS

[287]

The members of the 24th General Chapter, gathered in Rome from all parts of the world, address themselves to you, dear Volunteers of Don Bosco, who were born and have grown up in his Salesian Family.  We send you our fraternal greetings and our sincere thanks for having accompanied us in this event.  The contribution you sent us enriched our reflections; we are grateful for your presence on the day the Chapter was inaugurated and during the week of work with other lay representatives.

In our capitular discussions, which were aimed at a better understanding of the reciprocal relationships which bind us together in the common salesian mission and spirit, we have recalled the elements which serve to deepen and strengthen our collaboration and sharing, so as to arrive at a "vast movement of persons" united in the desire to evangelize by educating, in Don Bosco's spirit.

Your specific vocation in the Church and the Salesian Family helps us to a better understanding of how to be a living sign of Christ in the world, as also of the contribution of the woman in the Church and the world.

During the Chapter we endorsed the deep conviction that "consecrated persons are 'in mission' by virtue of their very consecration" (VC 72).  In this case it is the life itself "which becomes educative, because it speaks of itself and raises questions".  The statement refers also to your own consecration, lived in a harmonic synthesis with the values of the world.  We appreciate your simple but demanding manner of bearing witness to the radical nature of love, so important for people of today who have ever greater need of visible signs if they are to believe.

In the contribution you sent us you wrote: "Through our immersion in the secular world we can pass on to you the sensitivity derived from our experience of those to whom our mission is directed".  By indicating to us the problems of society which you live at first hand, you can help us to update our educative and pastoral work.  This too is a gift for us at a time when we are reflecting on the 'secular dimension' of the Church, of the Congregation and of the charismata born in it for the world.

As salesian women, you share fully in Don Bosco's charism, but in a unique manner with a sensitivity that derives precisely from the fact that you are women.  You are often able to approach directly those with whom we are primarily concerned, supporting the mission by your professional competence.  In this way you are present in the Salesian Family with attitudes of creativity and self-sacrificing generosity, albeit silently and sometimes in a hidden manner.

Dear Volunteers, six years ago, during the 23rd General Chapter, we shared the joy of the beatification of your Founder and third successor of Don Bosco, Fr Philip Rinaldi.  Today we renew once again our gratitude to God for a Saint who is our teacher in promoting collaboration with the laity.  Like Fr Rinaldi, we too want to find in each of you "a collaborator and an animator of salesian commitment". (E.Viganò)

In various circumstances you have asked for our help in formation and spiritual animation.  We assure you of our willingness to provide this fraternal service.  We also want to learn something from you who are consecrated Salesians in the world; we want to learn fidelity to the salesian charism, so that we may have the same "thirst for souls" lived by Fr Philip Rinaldi, to whom we entrust the promising beginnings of the male branch, for which we share with you our prayers and hopes.

May Mary Help of Christians be our guide in our common commitment of consecration and mission.

Rome, 20 April 1996

                                    The Members of the GC24

APPENDIX 19

[288]

MESSAGE FROM THE LAITY PRESENT AT THE GC24

TO ALL OTHER LAY MEMBERS OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Dear Friends,

We lay men and women, present at the General Chapter, are living an historically important moment, because this is the first time that lay people have taken part in a Salesian General Chapter.

We have felt quite at home as we have shared in moments of prayer and work, and in the community life, because the Chapter members have welcomed us as brothers and sisters in Don Bosco.  We are honoured to have taken part and to have been able to contribute to the discussions and reflections on the Chapter theme: "Salesians and Lay people: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco".

This occasion has been for us a great responsibility, but as lay people we have accepted the challenge.

The experience of sharing responsibility which we have lived through at first hand has been of importance and great value, and represents  an example to be followed by laity and Salesians the world over, because it extends Don Bosco's spirit throughout all the Salesian Movement.

After living this experience of commitment in a typically salesian atmosphere of joy and serenity, we invite all the members of the Salesian Family to repeat this kind of encounter at local level throughout the world, so as to promote greater opportunities for involvement and communion between Salesians and Laity.

We are well aware that this is far from easy, and we confidently invite you to have trust in the future which will provide us with new opportunities, because God has given the richness of Don Bosco's charism to the Church and the whole world.

Affectionately from your friends:

*Oliviero Zoli, Ken Greaney, Carlos Escobar, Andreu Ibarz, Maria Victoria Bernal, Isaac Tunez Fiñana, Giuseppe Bracco, Paul Lawry, Ortensia Barbarino, Maria Spackova,*

*Marco Belfiori, Abraham Feliciano, Griselda Medina, Robert Hannigan, Gabi Holzinger, Jimenez Ignacio Marin, José Bernardini Campos, Antonio Gomes da Costa, Dominique De Lat, Rodolfo Trillini, Elisa de Rodriguez Azpurua.*

CHRONICLE OF THE GC24

*(18 February - 20 April 1996)*

1.  OPENING SESSION OF THE CHAPTER

18 February 1996 saw the 208 members of the GC24 arriving at the Generalate from all parts of the world to begin the General Chapter on the following day.

At 10,00 a.m. on the 19th there was the opening ceremony.  The morning had begun with a concelebrated Mass of the Holy Spirit, at which the Vicar General, Fr Juan Vecchi, presided.

After the official declaration by Fr Antonio Martinelli of the opening of the Chapter, the message of Pope John Paul was read.  After a moving tribute to the late lamented Fr Egidio Viganò, the Holy Father went on to say that the collaboration between Salesians and laity should aim at the formation of 'educative communities', in which personal talents were shared for the good of all.

The Pope's message was followed by an address by Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life.  Then came brief messages of good wishes from representatives of other groups of the Salesian Family and the opening address of the Vicar General.

Present at the opening session, in addition to Cardinal Somalo,  were the Salesian Cardinals Rosalio Castillo Lara, Alfonso Stickler, Antonio Maria Javierre Ortas, together with Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone and Bishops Vincenzo Savio and Jesús Júarez Párraga.

2.  THE BEGINNING -- A WEEK OF SPIRITUAL RETREAT

At 4.30 p.m. in the afternoon of the same day, began the retreat, preached by Fr Guido Gatti, professor of moral theology at the UPS.  The theme of the meditations was taken from Don Bosco's "dream of the diamonds" which took place on the night of 10-11 September 1881, while the Salesians were making their retreat at San Benigno Canavese.

The clear and sometimes humorous presentation of Fr Gatti helped the capitulars to reflect on the physiognomy of the Congregation *"qualis esse debet", according to Don Bosco's dream.  Fidelity to Don Bosco, faith, hope, charity, pastoral charity, fraternal charity lived in the salesian community, work and temperance, were presented as the ingredients for making the Congregation flourish and for disclosing the Salesian qualis esse debet in the mind of Don Bosco.*

The climate of prayer and recollection, the solemn community celebrations, the liturgical functions well prepared and enriched by hymns in different languages, created immediately the proper spiritual context for a Chapter, and the familiar tone of the 'Good Nights' of Fr Vecchi at the close of each day completed the setting.

The testimony of one of the capitulars well sums up the atmosphere immediately created in the Chapter: "I have seen Don Bosco praying in the chapel, walking in the corridors, and alive in every meeting...  I have seen Don Bosco in every confrere, priest or brother, young or old, white or black, superior or subordinate, all united in a single mind and heart in Don Bosco".

The Retreat ended at lunch on 23 February, when thanks were expressed to Fr Gatti, amongst the usual popular songs.

3.  THE REPORT OF THE VICAR GENERAL

In the afternoon of 23 February in some 90 minutes, Fr Vecchi gave the capitulars an account of the state of the Congregation.  Presenting the volume of 306 pages entitled "The Society of St Francis de Sales in the period 1990-1995", to which was added a second volume of "Statistics", Fr Vecchi did not read the entire Report but dwelt only on certain pages considered more significant: those dealing with future prospects and motives for hope.

The Report was in four parts: the first presented "The Congregation in its various regions"; the second offered an evaluation at world level of "The Congregation in its various sectors of animation"; the third provided information on the functioning of "Some services and institutions of general interest"; and the fourth was "An attempt at an overall evaluation", and was the most exacting.

It was especially on this fourth part that the Vicar General dwelt at some length, on an understanding of what had been done during the past six-year period and the situation at its end, on the significance of our presence, on the witness of consecrated life, on the preparation of the confreres, and on the challenges and reasons for hope.

An applause of approval followed the reading of the Report, and the Moderator thanked Fr Vecchi for his synthesis and the indications he had given.  It was a report, said Fr Martinelli, that needed study and would remain an authoritative point of reference which the capitulars would need to use.

After a day of personal study of the Report, the capitulars sent in their requests for clarifications and further information on certain points: there were 103 in all.  At 9.00 a.m. on 27 February in the assembly Fr Vecchi began to respond to the questions he had received.  There were many of them, just half the total number of capitulars, and he explained that rather than reply to the questions individually he would take them in nine blocks into which he had grouped them: evaluation of the context, reception of the GC23, clarifications about government, economy and administration, significance and pastoral presence, formation, and the Salesian Family.

After three sessions of the assembly, totalling 4 hours and 30 minutes, dedicated to the responses of the Vicar General, Fr Vecchi stressed the expediency of a further study of the Report in language groups.  Of these 13 were set up, each of them with the purpose of selecting three important points, of general interest and with reference to the Congregation in a worldwide perspective.  The various circles (3 English, 2 French, 1 German, 3 Italian, 1 Portuguese, 3 Spanish) dedicated a working session of 28 February to a deeper study of the Report.

The results of the work of the linguistic circles was examined finally by a small group of 6 capitulars who, with Fr Vecchi, summed up in four points the elements emerging: formation, salesian community, significance, animation/government.  A further session was given over to the presentation of these perspectives.  'Significance' had an absolute majority of the preferences.  Confreres want to understand the new role to be played by the community in the open perspective of the new situations, the new missionary and educative opportunities, and the new relationships with the laity

4. THE LAUNCHING OF THE CHAPTER MACHINE

With the examination of the Report of the Vicar General behind it, the Chapter went on to complete its own organization.

By a large majority the assembly approved as a basis for discussion of the Chapter theme the "working document", put  together by the Precapitular Commission and illustrated with convincing enthusiasm in the afternoon of 27 February by Fr Luigi Zuppini, Superior of the Vice-province of Madagascar.

On 28 February were elected the three chairmen to complete the Presidency of the capitular assembly.  From a list of eight names proposed by Fr Vecchi, the assembly chose Fr Richard Authier, Superior of the Vice-province of Canada, who was subsequently replaced by Fr Stjepan Bolkovac, Provincial of Croatia; Bro. Lucio Reghellin, delegate of the Piedmont Circumscription of Italy; and Fr Helvecio Baruffi, Provincial of Porto Alegre, Brazil.  The three thus elected joined the Vicar General and the Moderator (Fr Antonio Martinelli) in the presidency.

The same day saw also the unanimous approval of the Regulations of the GC24, presented by Fr Francesco Maraccani.  Few were the modifications of importance made to the Regulations of the GC23.

On 1 March the organizational stage came to an end with the approval of the calendar of the various phases of the GC24.  In particular ratification was given to the week in which certain lay people would participate in the Chapter (Cooperators, Past-pupils, DBV, 'Damas Salesianas', young people, collaborators and others).  For obvious reasons the dates for this had to be fixed well in advance by the Moderator

For the election of the Rector Major, the Vicar General, and the members of the General Council the dates were approved, and also the manner of election suggested by the Council, which involved a discernment process, i.e. 'a process of spiritual research, through reflection, prayer and mutual enlightenment' in a series of stages leading to a mature personal decision on chosen names.  The process was to be accompanied by a person external to the Congregation and an expert in discernment, Fr José M.Arnáiz, Vicar General of the Marianists.

5.  THE CHAPTER GOES ON INTERNET

An innovation of this Chapter was without any doubt the silent but efficacious use of electronic mail.

Communication with the various provinces (fostered also by the use of fax), information on various stages of the Chapter's work, curiosities, interviews, news items, were plentiful on the Internet, permitting some confreres to inform and others all over the world to be informed, and all very rapidly.  By this means the modern explorers have set up direct communication between the provinces and the GC24.

A handbook provided for the capitulars, with all sorts of useful information, revealed that 58 provincial houses are already using E-mail, with 70 other houses or offices and a further 45 confreres.

A general use of the possibilities of the telematic network can make possible the exchange of 'family' news, which is frequently ignored by the normal media.

6.  THE WORKING COMMISSIONS

In this phase in which the method of working is being defined, another point to be attended to was the constitution of the commissions foreseen by the Chapter Regulations.

It was decided on 1 March, that there should be seven commissions in addition to the commission for information.  Six commissions were to examine the working document: the first would work on the situation, the second the frame of reference, the third the practical commitments of the community, the fourth the criteria for the selection of lay collaborators and those sharing responsibility with us, the fifth open problems concerning the animating nucleus and salesian identity of our works, and the sixth the remainder of the open problems (femininization, male presence, consecration and education, volunteers and their situation afterwards, the friends of Don Bosco).  The seventh commission had the task of studying proposals regarding the Constitutions and General Regulations, and other problems related to the central government.

Once the commissions were set up, each of them elected its own president, spokesman and secretary.  In this way the Central Coordinating Commission was completed; it is made up of the President of the Chapter, the Moderator, the three Chairmen, and seven members elected by the assembly, who proved to be the presidents of the commissions

7.  FROM CAPITULAR TO BISHOP

After only 13 days of the Chapter came the official news that the Pope had appointed Fr José Angel Divassón, a capitular of 57 years of age, Vicar Apostolic of Puerto Ayacucho in Venezuela.  The news was given by Fr Vecchi simultaneously with the announcement by the Vatican Press Office and took the assembly by surprise.  They greeted the new Bishop with loud applause, and he in turn thanked the capitulars as they offered their personal congratulations.  As Provincial of Venezuela, Fr Divassón had taken part in the Synod on consecrated life, being invited by the Pope is his capacity as President of the Venezuelan Union of Religious.  The new bishop left his place in the Chapter and was succeeded as delegate of Venezuela by Fr Johnny Reyes.

A chalice 'neither lavish nor second-rate' was offered  by Fr Vecchi to the newly-appointed Bishop in the name of the capitular assembly as a sign of good wishes.  It bore the inscription in Spanish: "The General Chapter to Fr J.A.Divassón, 2 March 1996".  The new bishop expressed his thanks and his joy at having been at  the Chapter.  He spoke of his Vicariate, which is completely salesian with 30 confreres and a Cathedral dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.  There are also 60 Sisters at the service of an indigenous population with 19 ethnic groups.  The people are very poor, he explained, with some of them living in primitive conditions and some of the ethnic groups disappearing altogether.  A great deal of work is needed in their service and in their defence, as the fight goes on to preserve their culture.

8.  A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

With the general formalities completed the Commissions were able to enter fully into the examination of the basic document, in the light of the results of the provincial chapters and the experiences of the capitulars themselves, exchanged in the commissions and groups.

For three weeks intense work went on in the commissions, with periodic returns to the assembly to report progress and seek guidance, as various parts of the theme were dealt with.  This led to some lively discussions in the assembly for the settling of some central points and the structure and essential lines of each part of the document.

The work of commissions, groups, assemblies, regional and other meetings filled the typical day of the capitulars without break of continuity.  There were four working periods each day, two in the morning (9.00-10.30 and 11.00-12.30) and two in the afternoon (3.30-5.00 and 5.30-7.00).

But the element underlying and emphasizing the intense work was the experience of salesian community.  The 208 capitulars, coming from the various parts of the world, succeeded in constituting a real salesian community, not a typical one but a community nonetheless.  They did it in record time and more successfully that in past Chapters.  One noted the success of the efforts at integration and living together which overcame language barriers.  Meals were a good occasion for getting to know each other and exchanging ideas.

Festive occasions, especially birthdays and feastdays, were frequently solemnized by the addition of ice-cream.  There were also places where groups could gather to watch TV from all over the world (thanks to the parabolic antenna) so that no one felt isolated.  The group for the animation of the communal life of the Chapter had foreseen possibilities for relaxation and fellowship in the after-supper periods, organized by various groups of provinces.  Some evenings were reserved for cultural events:  outstanding among these were the presentation of "Don Bosco en son temps" by its author Fr Desramaut, and of the "Circular Letters" of Fr Egidio Viganò.

Great importance was given to moments of prayer.  Each morning the celebration usually took place in language groups; each evening all gathered together for Vespers and the 'Good Night' which created an atmosphere for information and family communion.  Once a week (usually on Wednesdays) there was a common eucharistic celebration, always well prepared by the group for liturgical animation.  To preside at these communal celebrations were invited: Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone (6 March), Cardinal Alfons Stickler (13 March), Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara (19 March), Cardinal Eduardo Pironio (28 March), Cardinal Antonio M.Javierre (10 April), Archbishop Francisco Javier Errazuriz, Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (13 April), and the Local Ordinary, Bishop Antonio Buoncristiani of the Diocese of Porto and Santa Rufina (18 April).

After lunch each day there were sporting encounters in both football and basketball.  Some went for a stroll along the roads around the Pisana.  The less active played table-tennis.

The fellowship of the community was evident in the touches of humour and the jokes that found their way into 'Good Nights', assembly discussions, and the reading of minutes.  All the capitulars, together with Fr Vecchi, expressed the hope that the expression of communion and unity that was created would not be something fleeting but would continue to be widely diffused after the Chapter was over.

An atmosphere-creating moment looked forward to with pleasure was that of the 'Good Night' itself.  In the first week Fr Vecchi himself spoke of the life and problems of the Congregation.  Then each evening after Vespers came the Provincials or representatives of the provinces to present the history, activities, projects and difficulties of their own circumscription.  The result was a most interesting panorama, vast and articulate.  Particularly interesting were the accounts of some particular situations: the circumscription of the East and the salesian foundation at Yakutsk in Siberia, the presence in the Antilles and particularly in Cuba, the situation in Polynesia and Timor, and the difficult work in Vietnam and China.

A particularly significant and family event took place on the morning of 15 March.  The capitulars made a pilgrimage of prayer and meditation to the Catacomb of St Callistus, on the Appian Way, where they visited the tomb of Fr Egidio Viganò.  They went in procession, pausing at three 'stations'.  The first was "martyrdom" (where was read a text by Fr Viganò on the Blessed Martyrs Luigi Versiglia and Callistus Caravario); Fr Viganò as a salesian guide (with the reading of an extract from his obituary letter, and the singing of 'Giù dai colli' while the capitulars went down to pray at the tomb of the dead Rector Major); and the resurrection (in the church of St Tarcisius with a bible-reading and prayers for the GC24 that it may follow the way of renewal animated by the seventh successor of Don Bosco).

9.  THE PHASES OF THE WORK

The work of the six commissions, presented by their respective spokesmen, led to discussion in the assembly in which many spoke and always to the point.  The area of collaboration between Salesians and lay people turned out to be both vast and variegated in experiences which had matured in the different continents and cultures.  The discussions covered the vast range of lay collaborators (from teachers, to believers of other religions, to people of good will), and also the convergence on criteria, on identity and on professional requirements.  With an eye to the future, the need was also considered for providing new processes of formation.

Dozens of interventions in the assembly and some heated exchanges in the commissions made it abundantly clear that the collaboration between Salesians and laity in the service of the mission had brought us face to face with new problems.  Not by chance many of the interventions echoed the request coming from all over the Congregation for urgent guidelines to enable salesian communities to dialogue with the laity, with women in particular, to become inserted in the dynamics of the neighbourhood, and to deal authoritatively with public entities.  Formation cannot be thought of any longer in separation: laity and Salesians must learn how to face up together to the new situations.

The lay people too are called to take steps on their own side.  It is not only salesian communities that have to do some rethinking.  There are many lay collaborators, but not all of them prove to be as sufficiently prepared and formed to the extent needed by the vast nature of the mission.

Meanwhile the capitulars are aware that the communities are waiting for something from them by way of guidance.  They are waiting quietly, it is said, because everyone is aware that the theme of collaboration with the laity is a vital and demanding one; and at the same time they know that if it is the task of the Chapter to provide indications, it will be up to the communities to find the way to put it all into effect.

The Chapter's work was facilitated by large-scale use of computers.

10.  THE SEVENTH COMMISSION ARRIVES

While the first six commissions and the assembly were working away on the specific theme of the Chapter (Salesians and laity: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco), the seventh commission was examining the observations and proposals received from the provincial chapters and confreres concerning our own proper law (Constitutions and Regulations) and on some aspects of the structure of animation and government of the Congregation.

On 7 March, Frs Zuppini and Maraccani, president and spokesman respectively of the 7th commission, presented to the assembly a first scheme of work on some aspects of the central government, and in particular on the Department of the Salesian Family and of Social Communication.  It was the first of a long series of presentations.

After a long discussion in the assembly and a number of straw votes, the decision was finally made to make no modifications to art.135 and 137 of the Constitutions, in which the two sectors constitute two Departments animated by a single General Councillor.  After a negative vote on the present arrangement (one Councillor for both) at the straw vote stage, the majority finally preferred the certain to the uncertain.  The importance and urgency of social communication was endorsed, but effectively the question was referred back to the overall verification of the functioning of the structures of government entrusted by the GC24 to the new General Council.

Another scheme presented by the 7th commission concerned the rearrangement of the groups of provinces.  This gave rise to a lively and sometimes anguished discussion on the organizational changes called for by the new political structures brought about, for instance, by the breakdown of boundaries, the vitality of Project Africa, the development of the European Union, or the prospects of integration of the two Americas.  Salesian world geography was modified by a vote in the assembly on 28 March, which set up the African Region.  The provinces of Canada and the USA will be joined to the former Pacific-Caribbean Region.  The Atlantic Region will also include Chile, in addition to the provinces of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.  Australia becomes linked with Asia.  Great Britain and Ireland join Northern Europe with Holland, North Belgium, Austria, Hungary, the Balkans, Poland and the Circumscription of the East.  France will be linked with South Belgium, Spain and Portugal.  The Region of Italy and the Middle East remains unchanged.

Approved by a large majority was a practical guideline which entrusted to the Rector Major with his Council an accurate study, with the assistance of experts,  of the functioning of the General Council.

Awareness of the acceleration of history led to the approval of a limitation of the period of office of members of the General Council in the same capacity (C 142).  The Chapter decided that Councillors could be reelected for only one further period in the same office.  An analogous proposal for the office of the Rector Major was rejected by a single vote.

11.  ELECTION OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

After the Chapter had been in progress for about a month came the important period of the elections.

In the afternoon of 18 March began the process of discernment, guided by Fr José Arnaiz, who indicated four necessary conditions: prayer (prayer of intercession of purification, of illumination, of thanksgiving), talk and dialogue with others in sincerity; the seeking of criteria in the assembly without discussion;  and especially personal reflection on three points: get to know today's challenges for the Congregation as it approaches the third millennium; seek to define the profile of the person best able to guide us in responding to the challenges; apply the profile to identify specific persons who are available.

At 10.25 on 20 March the Moderator, Fr Martinelli, announced the beginning of the voting for the election of the Rector Major.  The voting sheets were distributed and the capitulars called by name to place their voting papers in the urn.

At 11 o'clock, on the first scrutiny, the 8th successor of Don Bosco was elected in the person of Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, who was greeted with prolonged applause by the capitulars.  In accordance with the Regulations, since the one elected was also president of the Assembly, the Moderator called the oldest member of the Chapter to proclaim the result.  Fr Ernest Macak, Provincial of Slovakia, 76 years of age and at his first General Chapter, a former prisoner under the communists, was accompanied to the presidency table where he put the ritual question to Fr Vecchi as to whether he accepted his election.  Fr Vecchi replied "I accept" and immediately a group of Indian confreres went up to offer him a magnificent garland of white flowers.  They were followed by all the capitulars who proceeded one after another to greet the new Rector Major, under the eyes of continuously flashing cameras..

At 12.15 in the main church of the Generalate a solemn "Te Deum" was sung in thanksgiving, an appropriate prayer of the faithful was said for the newly elected Rector Major, and Fr Vecchi gave his first address as the successor of Don Bosco.

Festivities began during lunch with songs and toasts.  In the evening of 23 March there was an evening of homage to the new Rector Major, with the participation of spontaneous groups of the Salesian Family and of the formation communities of Rome.

12.  ELECTION OF THE GENERAL COUNCILLORS

The collaborators of the Rector Major, i.e. the members of the General Council, were elected using the same method of discernment guided by Fr Arnaiz.

In the morning of 21 March the assembly began which introduced the discernment for the election of the Vicar General.  A first request was for an indication of the qualities required in the person for this office.  The result showed that the main quality needed was "complementarity with the Rector Major".  In the afternoon the election of Fr Luc Van Looy took place on the first ballot.

In the first assembly on 22 March the results of the discernment for the other Councillors were given, and in the second assembly at 11 o'clock the first vote for the Councillor for Formation confirmed Fr Giuseppe Nicolussi in office.

For the Department of Youth Pastoral Work there was a further period of discernment to clarify the indications which had emerged.  Then in the afternoon the Councillor General for Youth Pastoral Work was elected, again on the first ballot, Fr Antonio Doménech.

Next followed the elections for the Councillors General for the Salesian Family/Social Communications and for the Missions.  The former Councillors, Frs Antonio Martinelli and Luciano Odorico, were confirmed in each case.

In the morning of 23 March the assembly gathered again for the election of the Economer General.  After the clarification of some uncertainties, Fr Giovanni Mazzali was elected, also on the first vote.

At this point the boys' band of the Salesian Institute in Naples entered the assembly playing their instruments, almost as though putting a seal on the ending of the first part of the elections.

In the afternoon of 1 April, after the audience with the Holy Father, Fr Arnaiz took up once again the process of discernment for the election of the Regional Councillors.  The groups of the various Regions met together for a straw vote, the results of which were made known to the assembly before supper.

The following morning were elected (all on the first ballot in each case) the Regionals for Africa (Fr Antonio Rodriguez), Latin America/Southern Cone (Fr Helvecio Baruffi), Asia-Australia (Fr Joaquim D'Souza) and for North Europe (Fr Albert Van Hecke).

Since Fr Antonio Rodriguez, the former Councillor for Spain and Portugal, had been elected Regional for Africa, a further discernment was necessary for the Regional for Western Europe.  Then in the afternoon of the same day were elected the Regionals for Western Europe (Fr Filiberto Rodriguez), the Inter-America Region (Fr Pascual Chavez), and Italy/Middle East (Fr Giovanni Fedrigotti).

In this last series of voting something unforeseen occurred.  For the first time the Chapter elected a member of the General Council from outside the Chapter itself.  Fr Chavez, Provincial of Mexico-Guadalajara, was completing his doctoral thesis at Madrid-Salamanca, when the Rector Major telephoned him to tell him of his election.

12.  THE LAY PEOPLE IN THE GC24

For the first time in a Salesian General Chapter the doors were opened to the laity.  Twenty-one persons from every continent, men and women, young and old, were cordially welcomed and given equal speaking rights in commissions and the assembly.  They included Cooperators, Past-pupils, Don Bosco Volunteers and other groups of the Salesian Family, young people, collaborators and others.  It was a kind of general test of what will become in time a collaboration between SDBs and laity in the communities and widely differing salesian works around the world.

The objective of this summit, previously unknown in the Congregation's history, was the future of the salesian mission: the quality of the salesian presence and the strength of involvement will depend to a great extent on the capacity for exchange between Salesians and laity in the Salesian Family.  And the Rector Major, who welcomed them to the assembly on the morning of 25 March, emphasized with convincing and not merely formal words the new fact of a lay participation in a General Chapter.

The lay representatives came from all over the salesian world.  There were 13 Europeans (4 Italian, 3 Spanish, 2 British, 1 Portuguese, 1 Austrian, 1 Czech, 1 French), 6 from the Americas (USA, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina) and 2 from Australia.  There were 6 women and 15 men; 6 were young people and the rest adults.

In turns, throughout the week, the lay people presented a synthesis of the contributions submitted to the Chapter by their own particular group.  The applause which greeted each of their declarations in the assembly placed the seal on the warmth of their welcome by the capitulars.

The week of the laity concluded with the reading of a "Message to the laity of the Salesian Family", drawn up by the 21 lay participants.

The Rector Major, thanking them for the contributions they had made to the work, presented each of them with a medal of Don Bosco.  This, he said, was not to mark their leave-taking, but rather that they were being sent by the General Chapter to the lay area in general and to the salesian communities.

14.  THE AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE

Pope John Paul II received the members of the Chapter in audience in the morning of Monday, 1 April.

The capitulars left in good time for St Peter's in four coaches, and first went to pray at St Peter's tomb.  They then went by way of the bronze doors to the Clementine Hall where they met the Pope.  After a short period of waiting, the Pope arrived and was greeted with thunderous applause.

The audience began with an address of homage to the Holy Father read by Fr Vecchi.

The Pope, replying, emphasized "the secret of courageous and fruitful apostolic activity: unreserved adherence to the Crucified and Risen Christ".  The Holy Father also endorsed the compelling task which characterizes the mission of the Salesians: "Help the laity to form themselves as educators".

After his talk, the Pope greeted the Chapter members individually, shaking hands with them one by one as Fr Vecchi indicated their province of origin.

15.  THE PAUSE FOR EASTER

The advanced stage of the elaboration and discussion of the documents of the six commissions, the election of the Rector Major and Councillors, the sharing with the laity, and the audience with the Holy Father had brought the Chapter to Easter.

Of particular significance for the entire capitular community was to find themselves together on Holy Thursday to concelebrate the Eucharist "in Coena Domini".  The Rector Major, elected a few days earlier, presided and underlined the sense of the celebration.

In the following days of the Easter Triduum the Chapter observed a pause in its work.  A big number headed north to spend Easter at Turin and Colle Don Bosco, at the invitation of the Provincial of the Piedmont Circumscription.  Various capitulars who remained at Rome were able to participate in the ceremonies of Holy Week and Easter in union with the Holy Father at the sacred places in Rome.

16.  DRAFTING AND APPROVAL OF THE FINAL DOCUMENT

On 4 April the Moderator informed the assembly of the setting up of a "drafting group" made up of four capitulars, for the purpose of drafting a unified text which would then be submitted once again to the assembly.

The task of this "drafting group" was not that of entering into the merits of the contents, but of producing a readable and practical document, easily understood and without the characteristics of an apostolic exhortation; it was to be a working instrument for the communities.  All the definitive texts drawn up by the commissions and discussed in the assembly were handed over to the drafting-group.

On 13 April the group itself presented to the assembly a suggested form for the final document.  The Assembly decided by a majority vote that the document should recall in an introduction the date 12 April 1846, the day when Don Bosco arrived with his boys at Valdocco.

In the final week of the Chapter, the three parts of the re-drafted text were presented by the drafting-group (after some intense work) for a vote in which "iuxta modum" voting was possible.  This led to a further discussion between the Commissions, the Assembly and the drafting-group.  The document was examined personally and in groups by the capitulars and many "modi" were submitted.  This implied some further difficult work, especially in connection with the statement of the deliberations and practical guidelines for the guidance of the communities.

On 19 and 20 April the voting took place for the final approval of the document.  The individual parts and numbers were first approved separately by vote.  It was very satisfying to see that there was always a convergence much greater than the majority required.  Finally the entire document was approved as a whole and received with prolonged applause.

17.  GREETINGS AND MESSAGES

The Chapter had almost reached its end.  It was the time for sending greetings and messages as an expression of fraternity and encouragement.

It was decided to send messages to the following groups: young persons, Cooperators, Past-pupils of Don Bosco, Don Bosco Volunteers, all of whom had sent us messages of good will at the opening of the Chapter.  For the text of the messages, the Moderator had asked various members to prepare a first draft, which was then given to all the capitulars for their comments and suggestions.  These were then incorporated in a second draft which was submitted once again to the assembly and approved.

18.  CONCLUSION OF THE GC24

On Friday evening, 19 April, the Main Hall was the scene for an entertainment with all the capitulars present.  Songs and presentations by the various Regions, together with ironic references to certain moments during the Chapter, set the seal on an unforgettable experience of salesian life.

Then on the following day, Saturday 20 April, came the official conclusion.  In the morning, meeting together in assembly for the last time, the capitulars fulfilled the final requirements of the Chapter Regulations.  Then, after the reading and approval of the final minutes, the Rector Major gave his closing address.

The eucharistic celebration, in which was renewed also our entrustment to Mary Help of Christians, represented the final act of the GC24 and was at the same time the "sending" of each capitular as an envoy to transmit to the confreres and to the pastoral and educative communities the experience and message of the Chapter

APPENDIX 25

24th General Chapter

List of participants

General Council:

  1   P  VECCHI Juan Edmundo  Vicar General - President

  2   P  NICOLUSSI Giuseppe Councillor for Formation

  3   P  VAN LOOY Luc Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

  4   P  MARTINELLI Antonio                                               Councillor for SF and SC, Moderator

  5   P  ODORICO Luciano       Councillor for the Missions

  6   P  PARON Omero Economer General

  7   P  BRITSCHU Dominique Regional Councillor

  8   P  FEDRIGOTTI Giovanni Regional Councillor

  9   P  GARCIA M. Guillermo Regional Councillor

 10   P  PANAKEZHAM Thomas Regional Councillor

 11   P  RODRIGUEZ T. Antonio  Regional Councillor

 12   P  TECHERA Carlos  Regional Councillor

 13   P  MARACCANI Francesco   Secretary General

 14   P  PACHECO José Procurator General

Salesian Region: ENGLISH-SPEAKING

 15  P  NAUGHTON Patrick Sup.V-Prov. Africa Southern

 16  P  CONNELL Michael Delegate Africa Southern

 17  P  MURPHY John M. Provincial  Australia

 18  P  MURDOCH Ian  Delegate Australia

 19  P  AUTHIER Richard  Sup.V-Prov. Canada

 20  P  OCCHIO Josepf  Delegate  Canada

 21  P  CUNNINGHAM Michael Provincial Great Britain

 22  P  GALLAGHER James Delegate Great Britain

 23  P  HORAN John  Provincial Ireland

 24  P  FINNEGAN John  Delegate  Ireland

 25  P  PLOCH Timothy C. Provincial USA East

 26  P  DUNNE Thomas  Delegate  USA East

 27  P  SCHAFER William  Provincial USA West

 28  L  RASOR John  Delegate USA West

Salesian Region: ASIA

 29  P  CHEMMALAKUZHY Stepen Sup.V-Prov. Africa East

 30  P  KOCHOLICKAL George Delegate Africa East

 31  P  HO Peter Provincial  China

 32  P  HON Savio  Delegate China

 33  P  CAPELLI Luciano Provincial  Philippines North

 34  P  ALCASID Rolo Delegate  Philippines North

 35  P  ZAGO Peter Provincial Philippines South

 36  P  BUZON Patrick  Delegate  Philippines South

 37  P  MIZOBE OSAMU Francesco   Provincial Japan

 38  L  FUKAGAWA HIROAKI Francesco Delegate Japan

 39  P  D'SOUZA Joaquim Provincial India-Bombay

 40  P  D'SOUZA Tony  Delegate India-Bombay

 41  P  RODRIGUES Stephen  Delegate  India-Bombay

 42  P  POLACKAL Thomas Provincial India-Calcutta

 43  P  VELLAPPALLIL Mathai  Delegate India-Calcutta

 44  P  FERNANDES Bertie  Delegate India Calcutta             45  P  PALATHINGAL Varghese Provincial India-Dimapur

 46  P  EDAKKUDEN Joseph Delegate India-Dimapur

 47  P  JALA Dominic Provincial India-Guwahati

 48  P  CHEERAMBAN Francis Delegate India-Guwahati

 49  L  VALERI Nello Delegate India-Guwahati

 50  P  PUTHOTA Benjamin Provincial India-Hyderabad

 51  P  MADATHUMURIYIL Sebastian Delegate India-Hyderabad

 52  P  MYLADOOR Thomas  Provincial India-Bangalore

 53  P  KUTTIYANIMATTAJHIL Jose Delegate India-Bangalore

 54  P  FERNANDO Francis C.  Provincial India-Madras

 55  P  KANAGA Maria Arokiam Delegate India-Madras

 56  P  RAJ Joseph Jaswant  Delegate India-Madras

 57  P  CUVELIER Marc  Sup.V-Prov. Korea

 58  L  SEO JEONG KWAN Hilario Delegate Korea

 59  P  PRATHAN Joseph Provincial Thailand

 60  P  SOMCHAI Philip Delegate Thailand

 61  P  NGUYEN VAN De Peter Sup.V-Prov. Vietnam

 62  P  NGUYEN VAN Ty John  Delegate  Vietnam

Salesian Region: ATLANTIC

 63  P  NEGROTTI Santiago Provincial Argent.-Buenos Aires

 64  P  SOMMA Pascual Delegate Argent.-Buenos Aires

 65  P  HIPPERDINGER Ruben  Provincial Argent.-Bahia Blanca

 66  P  TIRABASSO Vicente Delegate Argent.-Bahia Blanca

 67  P  BOCALON Victor Antonio Provincial Argentina-Cordoba

 68  P  OTTOGALLI Pedro Delegate Argentina-Cordoba

 69  P  TIMOSSI Luis Provincial Argentina-La Plata

 70  P  LANGUS Jorge  Delegate Argentina-La Plata

 71  P  CANTINI Juan  Provincial Argentina-Rosario

 72  P  JORGE Eduardo Delegate Argentina-Rosario

 73  P  CARRARA Alfredo Provincial Brazil-Belo Horizonte

 74  P  SCARAMUSSA Tarcisio Delegate Brazil-Belo Horizonte

 75  P  MACIEL Joao Bosco Provincial Brazil-Campo Grande

 76  P  LIMA José Carlos  Delegate Brazil-Campo Grande

 77  P  DALLA VALLE Franco Provincial Brazil-Manaus

 78  P  MEDEIROS Damasio   Delegate Brazil-Manaus

 79  P  BARUFFI Helvecio Provincial Brazil-Porto Alegre

 80  P  TEIXEIRA José Valmor C. Delegate Brazil-Porto Alegre

 81  P  BREDA Valerio Provincial Brazil-Recife

 82  P  RODRIGUES Joao Carlos  Delegate Brazil-Recife

 83  P  ALTIERI Antonio Carlos Provincial Brazil-Sao Paulo

 84  P  PESSINATTI Nivaldo Luiz  Delegate Brazil-Sao Paulo

 85  P  LOPEZ Cristóbal  Provincial Paraguay

 86  P  P GALEANO Rufino Delegate Paraguay

 87  P  VISENTINI Amilcar Provincial Uruguay

 88  P  ALGORTA Juan  Delegate Uruguay

Salesian Region: EUROPE and CENTRAL AFRICA

 89  P  VALENTE Mario Provincial Africa Centrale

 90  P  KABWE Alexandre Delegate Africa Centrale

 91  P  KELER Josef Provincial Austria

 92  P  VOSL Josef  Delegate Austria

 93  P  VAN HECKE Albert Provincial Belgium North

 94  P  TIPS Mark Delegate Belgium North

 95  P  NIHOUL Fernand Provincial Belgium South

 96  P  JEANMART Joseph  Delegate Belgium South

 97  P  BENES Benno  Provincial Czech Republic             98  P  KOPECKY Josef Delegate Czech Republic

 99  P  BOLKOVAC Stjepan Provincial Croatia

100  P  PALOS Rudi  Delegate Croatia

101  P  JACQUEMOUD Marcel Provincial France-Lyons

102  P  WOLF Etienne Delegate France-Lyons

103  P  BEYLOT Alain  Provincial France-Paris

104  P  OLAVERRI Miguel  Delegate France-Paris

105  P  DEMMING Georg Provincial Germany-Cologne

106  L  MÜLLER Jean Paul Delegate Germany-Cologne

107  P  BIHLMAYER Herbert Provincial Germany-Munich

108  P  BILY Lothar Delegate  Germany-Munich

109  P  GRÜNNER Josef Delegate Germany-Munich

110  P  FLAPPER Wim  Provincial Holland

111  P  SPRONCK Herman  Delegate Holland

112  P  MACAK Ernest Provincial Slovakia

113  P  FEKETE Vladimir Delegate Slovakia

114  P  HOCEVAR Stanislav  Provincial Slovenia

115  P  SNOJ Alojzij Slavko Delegate Slovenia

116  P  HAVASI Josef Provincial Hungary

117  P  HALASZ Istvan Delegate Hungary

Salesian Region: SPAIN and PORTUGAL

118  P  CRUZ Pedro Simao Provincial Portugal

119  P  DURO José Adolfo Delegate Portugal

120  P  DOMENECH Antonio Provincial Spain-Barcelona

121  P  BRULLES Joan  Delegate Spain-Barcelona

122  P  DIEZ DE LA IGLESIA Isaac  Provincial Spain-Bilbao

123  P  ERRASTI José Maria Delegate Spain-Bilbao

124  P  MUÑOZ RUIZ Eusebio  Provincial Spain-Córdoba

125  P  FERNANDEZ Francisco Delegate Spain-Córdoba

126  P  SAN MARTIN José Antonio Provincial  Spain-León

127  P  RODRIGUEZ Filiberto Delegate Spain-León

128  P  MARTINEZ AGUADO Eusebio  Delegate Spain-León

129  P  LOPEZ GARCIA Pedro Provincial Spain-Madrid

130  P  GARCIA MENDEZ José Mª. Delegate Spain-Madrid

131  P  SEGURA V. Samuel Delegate Spain-Madrid

132  P  GONZALEZ Cipriano Provincial Spain-Seville

133  P  PEREZ G. Juan Carlos Delegate Spain-Seville

134  P  ORDUNA Candido Provincial Spain-Valencia

135  P  VILLALONGA R. José Delegate Spain-Valencia

Salesian Region: ITALY and MIDDLE EAST

136  P  SCAGLIONI Arnaldo  Provincial  Italy-Adriatic

137  P  SCRIVO Gaetano Delegate                   Italy-Adriatic

138  P  TESTA Luigi  Provincial Italy-Circ.Piedmont

139  P  LOTTO Francesco  Delegate Italy-Circ.Piedmont

140  L  REGHELLIN Lucio  Delegate Italy-Circ.Piedmont

141  L  FRAIRE Teresio  Delegate Italy-Circ.Piedmont

142  P  CATTANEA Mario   Delegate Italy-Circ.Piedmont

143  P  PALIZZI Giuliano  Delegate Italy-Circ.Piedmont

144  P  CEREDA Francesco  Provincial Italy-Milan

145  P  CAMERONI Pier Luigi  Delegate Italy-Milan

146  L  CARIOLI Giuseppe  Delegate Italy-Milan

147  P  MAZZALI Giovanni  Provincial Italy-Genoa

148  P  COLAJACOMO Giorgio Delegate Italy-Genoa               149  P  LATERZA Emidio  Provincial Italy-Southern

150  P  ORLANDO Vito  Delegate  Italy-Southern

151  P  IEVA Raffaele Delegate Italy-Southern

152  P  PUSSINO Gian Luigi Provincial Italy-Rome

153  P  CARNEVALE Mario  Delegate Italy-Rome

154  P  MISSORI Silvano  Delegate Italy-Rome

155  P  PIRAS Paolo  Sup.V-Prov. Italy-Sardinia

156  P  CASTI Giuseppe Delegate Italy-Sardinia

157  P  TROINA Giuseppe Provincial Italy-Sicily

158  P  FALZONE Giuseppe Delegate Italy-Sicily

159  P  PERRELLI Luigi Delegate Italy-Sicily

160  P  DISSEGNA Roberto  Provincial Italy-Venice East

161  P  TREVISAN Alberto Delegate Italy-Venice East

162  L  SANGOI Remigio   Delegate Italy-Venice East

163  P  BONATO Giannantonio Provincial Italy-Venice West

164  P  BORELLO Luciano  Delegate Italy-Venice West

165  P  ZUPPINI Luigi Del.Circ. Madagascar

166  P  PICCHIONI Alfredo Provincial Middle East

~~167  P  POZZO Vittorio  Delegate Middle East~~

Vice-Province - Salesian Pontifical University

168  P  SCHWARZ Ludwig Sup.V-Prov. UPS

169  P  FARINA Raffaele Delegate UPS

Generalate Community

170  P  ALEN Henry Delegate  RMG

Salesian Region: PACIFIC - CARIBBEAN

171  P  LINARES Juan Provincial Antilles

172  P  SOTO Angel  Delegate Antilles

173  P  IRIARTE José Provincial Bolivia

174  P  FORGUES Fernando Delegate Bolivia

175  P  HERRERA Heriberto Provincial Central America

176  L  OLMOS Mario Delegate  Central America

177  P  VITALI Natale Provincial Chile

178  P  YAÑEZ José Lino Delegate Chile

179  P  CUEVAS Sergio  Delegate  Chile

180  P  CARDENAS Luis Alfredo Provincial Colombia-Bogotá

181  P  OLARTE Julio  Delegate Colombia-Bogotá

182  P  NIEBLES Vidal Provincial Colombia-Medellín

183  P  CARDONA Hernan Delegate Colombia-Medellín

184  P  SANCHEZ Luis  Provincial Ecuador

185  P  ORTIZ Easteban Delegate Ecuador

186  P  MESIDOR Jacques  Sup.V-Prov. Haiti

187  P  JEANNOT Jean Sylvain Delegate Haiti

188  P  FLORES R. Salvador Provincial Mexico-Guadalajara

189  P  GONZALES Filiberto  Delegate Mexico-Guadalajara

190  P  ALTAMIRANO Francisco X. Provincial Mexico-México

191  P  AGUILAR Miguel Delegate Mexico-México

192  P  VERA Juan   Provincial Peru

193  P  SAAVEDRA Alejandro Delegate Peru

194  P  DIVASSON José Angel (1) Provincial Venezuela

195  P  GODOY José  Delegate Venezuela

Salesian Delegation of POLAND

196  P  WEDER Zdzislaw Del.Circ. Circ.East

197  P  MALINOWSKI Zbigniew Provincial Poland-Warsaw           198  P  NIEWEGLOWSKI Jan    Delegate Poland-Warsaw

199  P  JASKOT Grzegorz  Delegate  Poland-Warsaw

200  P  KOLYSZKO Wladyslaw Provincial Poland-Pila

201  P  BALCERZAK Antoni Delegate Poland-Pila

202  P  WOJCIESZAK Tadeusz Delegate Poland-Pila

203  P  SEMIK Stanislaw   Provincial Poland-Breslau

204  P  BIESAGA Tadeusz                                                Delegate Poland-Breslau

205  P  DZIUBINSKI Marian  Provincial Poland-Cracow

206  P  KRASON Franciszek  Delegate Poland-Cracow

207  P  MARYNIARCZYK Andrzej Delegate Poland-Cracow

208  P  BORYCZKA Piotr  Del.Circ. Circ.Zambia

Observers

1  P  DZIEDZIEL Augustyn Delegate of Rector Major for Poland

2  P  CARBONELL José  Prov.Delegate FIS for Indonesia

3  P  OLIVERAS Lluis M.  Prov.Delegate SBA for East Africa

4  L  BRZEK Zdzislaw  Poland-Cracow

5  L  GARRIDO G. Mariano  Spain-Madrid

6  L  HAVYARIMANA Diomede  Central Africa

7  L  ROMANIN Daniel  Argentina-La Plata

Translators

French          P. Lambert PETIT

English              P. George WILLIAMS

P. José REINOSO

Spanish P. Nicolas MERINO

P. Francisco BALAUDER

German Ms.Caterina TOMMASEO

Mr. Giovanni TOMMASEO

Ms. Gertrude SIVIERI

(1) Replaced by P REYES Johnny from 5 March

**HOMILIES OF THE RECTOR MAJOR**

APPENDIX 20

**Homily at the Mass**

**for the opening of the GC24**

**Rome, 19 February 1996**

This celebration leads us into our GC24 as a spiritual event.  We could not, in fact, inaugurate it without a communal act of faith in the presence of the Holy Spirit.  All the better if this can be done in the Eucharist, the memorial of Christ's Resurrection of which the Spirit is the gift, testimony and guarantee.

Here and now the presence of the Spirit is for us a reality.  We can allow ourselves to be guided by the similarity between our assembly and the one spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles.  We, like them, are gathered together in one place, coming from the farthest parts of the world.  And that is a sign of the mysterious energy which has brought us together.

But we feel ourselves united also spiritually: through the brotherhood that unites us even before we know each other; through our common project; through the common purpose which disposes us to convergence of thought;  through the unparalleled accord created by the feeling that we are all disciples of Christ and sons of Don Bosco.  The Spirit has already established between us those deep bonds of communion which the charism generates when it is welcomed and developed.

Like the disciples in the Acts we too speak different languages, we come from different cultures, we represent a whole variety of traditions and conditions of life; yet we confess and proclaim the same truths and adopt the same style of life.

We also are at the end of a period which is showing signs of accomplishment, while we await the appearance of a new era for our religious and pastoral experience.

"When the day of Pentecost was coming to an end" - so runs the text.  Other Pentecosts, or "new times of the Spirit" are following one another in the Church; they attain and realize their specific possibilities, opening up the way to further innovations.  And this happens also in our own Congregation; the period we are about to live together is certainly one of these Pentecosts.

We can see in our imagination the many people outside our present environment who are waiting to hear what we shall say to them after our reflections and spiritual experience: they are our confreres and the members of the Salesian Family, the young people and members of the faithful who are awaiting announcements in line with their hopes and needs.

Our daily experience of the Spirit's presence is confirmed in the reminiscences of the faith.  Every time the people of God, or a part of them, have gathered together to renew the covenant, they have received the Holy Spirit.  Every time Christ's disciples come together in his name to invoke the coming of the Kingdom, the Spirit is with them.

The Spirit is manifested as a power which transforms and upsets.  He moves some persons to enterprises of salvation and liberation which give dignity and new perspectives of life.  We may think of Moses or other biblical personalities, of whom it is related that they were seized by the Spirit of God and acted with the overwhelming energy of fire and wind.  And above all we may think of Jesus who, through the power of the Spirit, faces temptations and gives himself to the mission of evangelizing the poor, casting out demons, curing sickness and vanquishing evil.

The Spirit raises up and inspires the prophets and sages who keep alive the people's hopes, and on this account risk the complex and almost incomprehensible facts of history, and especially sustain the living awareness of man's vocation and final success against the temptations of the here and now, and the satisfaction of purely material needs.

The Spirit too is at the origin of priestly service, which fosters the deepest religious experience, liturgy, prayer, reality of the temple, and everything serving as a means for an encounter with God.

In their common activity, guides, prophets and pastors, spiritual sages and men of action, have given and continue to give to God's people and to the ecclesial community, identity, solidity and orientation.

\*  In the same way the Spirit continues to work in our humble Society, which is a component of humanity and of the Church.  We do well to proclaim with renewed and communal faith what we have frequently read and believed as individuals: "The Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco".  He formed in him the heart of a Father and Teacher, and in so doing gave rise to the novelty of our spirit and pastoral style, for the benefit of poor youth.

The Spirit inspired him to found the Congregation and the Salesian Family, and directed towards it numerous individuals who developed it in the course of time and today carry out its project in creative form.  In the heart of these persons the Spirit continually prompts the desire for the experience of God, for holiness and for fidelity to the charism through priestly grace.  He awakens them also through prophetic facts and voices, and leads them through guides he has chosen.

\*  But in the events and memory of faith is contained a promise of particular relevance for us.  It was made by Jesus himself:  The Spirit will guide you into all truth".

All truth!  That is no small matter in an era in which we are tempted to be satisfied with fragments, with brief publicity breaks, with fleeting samples.  The whole truth is the only equipment which allows us to get at reality with any success and read the facts of history; because this is wisdom, this is true life, and this with Jesus Christ is the source of the significance of our personal and communal existence.

To attain to it we need a ready charity which creates communion of hearts, because no one has a monopoly of truth.  And it requires also the patience which leads to words which are adequate and intelligible to all and lead to a common praxis.  It is the antithesis of Babel, not only as regards points of view but also in what concerns vocabulary.  It is not sufficient, in fact, that our inspirations coincide.  We are body as well as mind, and we need expressions which are lucid and appropriate, and deeds which are useful and meaningful.  And this is what we are promised.  We shall find the way to reach a shared vision, to speak a common language and to act in harmony.

Of this we have urgent need.  The whole truth means for us that we understand the concrete manner of expressing our apostolic consecration at the present day: that consecration through which we want to proclaim the primacy of God on our life, and on every form of life, by means of a charity which is committed to making young people aware of their vocation, and to placing ourselves at their side to enable them to fulfil it.

At the present day the 'whole truth' implies for us a fresh and shared understanding of our mission and of the choices that must be made to render it significant in different contexts.  It was the Spirit who traced the lines of Christ's mission and pointed to the works which made it understandable to men, as Jesus himself proclaimed in the Synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor". (Lk 4,18)

The same Spirit kept the mission on course, directed towards the Kingdom of God, against temptations to what is only temporal, to personal or corporate advantage, to a levelling down to current modes or a giving way to needs of the moment.

The 'whole truth' is for us a manner of understanding and expressing the radical following of Christ in a world which has legalized and well nigh exalted to the point of status symbols extreme representation of three idols: riches detached from solidarity, pleasure freed from responsibility, and freedom disjoined from service.  We are called upon to proclaim not only ascesis and moderation but also the human and cultural value, indispensable to the person, of evangelical attitudes which lead from possession to sharing, from pleasure to commitment, and from freedom to love.

The whole truth implies for us that we understand and realize the new dimensions of communion.  This in the first place within our own communities in face of the challenges made today to deep human relationships, to the family spirit, to sharing in responsibility, and to the communication of the salesian spirit which we see as the horizon of the work of the Chapter.  But it also involves the external expansion of communion too.  We are living through a time of small but numerous lacerations which call for reconciliation.  Our societies are torn asunder by fission and discrimination, by insuperable social differences and by ethnic oppositions.  The social texture disintegrates beneath the weight of selfish interests.

Our communion is called upon to be a leaven in both culture and neighbourhood, in the mentality of the young and in educational environments.

The promise we have received is that the Holy Spirit will accompany us and guide us in our seeking.  He is not going to give us the truth already wrapped and delivered.  What he will do rather is show us the typical paths to reach our objective already transformed by it.

One such path is the word: facts that have happened and lessons that have followed:  "He will remind you of all I have said to you".  Remembering, recalling, the creation of stable points of reference to which we can return, are characteristics of the Spirit.  He repeats and makes resound in the Church all Christ's words just as he pronounced them, and allows nothing to be forgotten.  This why he inspired the writing of the Gospels, why he offers them to us in liturgical celebrations and gives to ministers the grace to proclaim them.

For us too it will be important to remember events of the past.  We are not a generation without a history, nor a Family without a Father.

The charism does not begin with us.  It has already been lived, understood and expressed.  Under its inspiration has been lived out the earthly existence of many confreres, especially those outstanding in holiness.  To describe this style of life Don Bosco and his successors have written a great deal, and the community from time to time has tried to express it again.  To go back so as to draw from the source the originality of one's own being and one's own grace is another of the Spirit's ways.

But the recalling of literal memories of the past is neither his only nor his main concern.  He is also the Spirit of new understanding.  The significance of his word is inexhaustible, and continued meditation on it is a source for us of new inspirations when the Spirit brings it face to face within us with the problems which challenge us.  "I have many things still to say to you but you cannot bear them now.  He will take what is mine and explain it to you".

There are two elements which prevent us from grasping the truth of Jesus in its entirety: the times which are not yet complete, and our own level of vigilance and spiritual life.  The first matures by itself as God works within all that exists, but the second is our responsibility.  And so we are invited to look at events, to accept the invocations of humanity, and to respond to them with ready availability and faith.

Again, he is not only the Spirit of the word freshly understood, but also the Spirit of innovation and prophecy: "He will declare to you the things that are to come".  We are nearing the dawn of a new century.  Human circumstances are becoming charged with challenges and possibilities, especially in what concerns the person, religious experience, social life and ecclesial mission.  New perspectives are appearing for the Church, e.g. a new effort at evangelization, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, ethical humanism and the leavening of human relationships.

The Synod on consecrated life accepted these challenges, and to meet them called for authenticity, radical approach, vigilance over the signs of the times, and participation in the vicissitudes of the world in line with the charismatic originality concerned.

\*  \*  \*

Events, the memory of faith, and the promise are elements which suggest the attitudes with which we could follow the paths the Spirit will show us.  They are all summed up in the prayer: "Ask for the Spirit and the Father will give him to you".  Ask for the Spirit - that is what we are doing at this present moment, and that is what we shall continue to do every day in the filial assurance that his gifts will not be wanting to us.

APPENDIX 21

**Homily after election of Rector Major**

**Rome, 21 March 1996**

In these days of discernment we are living through a unique event.  I am not saying this only nor even principally in my own regard, but as regards all of us as a community,  We have always believed that discernment is something that involves all of us with equal responsibility; that its result affects all of us with equal advantages or losses.  We have all embarked on the same ship for the same voyage.

In this Eucharist our thoughts turn naturally to Don Bosco who has gently led us to this event, which embodies a future trait of his Family and his project.

The Lenten readings do not prevent us from turning our eyes to him; indeed, they offer us some interesting points in his regard.

\*  The first reading speaks of the covenant and the mediation of Moses.  The covenant with God, the pact of mutual predilection with Yahweh, was the source of the personal dignity of every component of the people of Israel and the foundation of their social identity.  On this memory and code was based the education of individuals, the building of solidarity and the strengthening of the sense of belonging.  Israel was the people which placed God, his word and his law, above every benefit, agreement, offensive and defensive resources.  For this reason, even though with much infidelity, Israel has been the "memoria Dei" which has come down to us as humanity's patrimony.

The fault of the people, and hence their misfortunes, did not follow so much from the fact of their festivities around a statue, as because they had forgotten the favour God had shown them by freeing them from slavery; they had entrusted themselves to earthly elements in seeking their lives and personal satisfaction.  When looked at like this, idolatry is not a thing of the past; it is a risk at the present day.  There are those who are of the opinion that in our own time atheism has become more widely spread.

The covenant is the situation of grace and enlightenment in which we know by intuition that God is the first, the indispensable and only one who can satisfy our thirst for life and our yearning for redemption and salvation.

We give it other names. we call it consecration, religious choice, our plan of life in God, the recognition of his presence in our existence.

It is a condition of humanity.  The latter is in a state of covenant, because it cannot explain itself nor its internal operations without acknowledging that it belongs to God and is destined to return to him, in a similar fashion to a wife who cannot think of her condition apart from the relationship that unites her with her husband.  But this is also that state of the individual who can find neither sense nor a point of anchor until he becomes rooted in God.

The Church makes her own and wants to express this love of God for humanity, and the need for God which humanity experiences.  She perceives this very clearly; it was revealed to her in the event of Christ, through which God draws humanity to himself and unites himself closely with man in the flesh and in history.

Religious are led by grace to concentrate their own existence on relationship with God and on proclaiming that his love is real and underlies history.  They live the covenant not as the story of a past event, a doctrine, a subjective sentiment, but as a personal relationship which configures their existence in time and determines their options, their commitments and their friendships.

Grave crises occur when this centre of gravity, which sustains and unifies the existence of the religious even from a psychological standpoint, loses its force; nothing else - no matter how noble - can take its place.  As a result all the other components become weakened, there is no longer a bond between them, they become disjoined and crumble.  The reasons which sustained the plan of life become obscure and no longer have the necessary force to orientate the individual.

For each of us the sense of the covenant and the attraction of God were not and never will be a matter of a unique and extraordinary moment, but rather a process of unification brought about through corresponding to many external mediations and provocations, and moved by dialogues which take place in our conscience and which lead us to make choices which are ever more total and definitive,

The covenant is a preference which grows and becomes clearer throughout life.  For some it may have begun with a sudden blinding flash in a moment of particular spiritual intensity.  But it will always need new recognition and new options.  Tiredness. forgetfulness, negligence, other attractions, are always ready to pounce in the human soul.

For most people it all happens with a gradualness which can easily be confused with chance happenings: a first taste through contact with persons or settings of a religious vein which suggested a particular impression or value; then slowly comes the discovery of the source from which such values proceed; we begin to share through friendship, collaboration and confidence. the experience of those who impressed us.  And finally we feel that we have been won over, in line with St Paul's expression: "I have been conquered by Jesus Christ".

\* In this process of the discovery of God and becoming attached to him, Don Bosco has been for us in particular a providential mediation; our first contact with him was a determining factor.

Our Constitutions tell us: "The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher".  We can remember the details of that first  contact and the graces we have subsequently received as our familiarity with him increased: how much he has enriched us with projects, feelings, ideals and rapport during the different phases of our existence: as candidates for the salesian life, as novices, during the period of initial formation, in pastoral activities and communal responsibilities, in our thinking back as adults.  His internal accompaniment has always been inspiring and encouraging.  If today we were to renounce all we have received from him, very little would remain of our spiritual life.

Truly therefore he has been *the gift of God for us.  It is true that without him there would have been others to point us towards the Lord.  But life is not made up of what might have happened, but of real events.  Even our parents might have been other people but, as it is, we have within us the genes and inherited characteristics of those who brought us into the world.*

And so in the expression we are speaking of, the word 'us' does not have a merely collective sense, as though it regarded the salesian community as a whole, but a distributive sense: to each of us, personally and individually, has been given the grace of contact with Don Bosco.

Our relationship with him is one of sons and disciples.  Don Bosco had, and continues to have at the present day, admirers, collaborators and friends.  Christ too had hearers, adherents, followers, disciples and apostles. Each of these words indicates a different kind of relationship.

We are not only admirers, collaborators and friends of Don Bosco.  The term that best defines our relationship with him is the word 'Father', but it would be a mistake to think that this is merely a term of affection related to his ability for manifesting kindness and closeness to us.

There is something here that goes beyond kindness and affection.  Its meaning is that he is the initiator of that spiritual experience we call the salesian charism.  It generates us to the following of Christ for the young.  We shall have many teachers, interpreters and even prophets of the charism, but only one Father - in the sense that Paul could say to the Corinthians: "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.  For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (1 Cor 4,15).

\* In the Gospel we have just heard read, Jesus lists the testimonies that have been concentrated on his person: John the Baptist, Moses, the Scriptures.  All of them lead to two points which are definitively convincing: his works and, in the final instance, the voice of the Father for those who are able to listen to it: "The Father who has sent me has given testimony of me" .

Certainly, for us too the definitive testimony comes from the works of Christ, from the Spirit and from the Father.  The Father has drawn us to himself with the call to faith; the works of Christ are manifest in our "liberation from evil" and in the desire to be conformed to him from our baptism; the Spirit makes us feel that we are God's children and in continual communion with him.  But it is the pedagogy and holiness of Don Bosco which has led us to these testimonies.  All holiness is a transparency of God the Father and a reflection of Christ.  That of Don Bosco has something unique about it as regards the ability to reveal God to the young.

The Constitutions express this in a crescendo of expressions: in him there appears a splendid harmony of nature and grace, a harmony progressively enlightened in a strongly unified plan of life at the service of the young; a 'motif' explains the overall unity and renders it magnificent is the concern for souls, the joy at the presence and action of God in each individual, the desire to lead the young towards God who is the source of all happiness.

Is not this perhaps what struck and attracted us too?  that God came closer to us, within our range, with a welcoming human countenance as he captivated the disciples through the humanity of Jesus.

We know from experience that someone gave strength to our desire for life, truth and commitment; and that from lawful and immediate pleasures, which please youngsters so much, he urged us on to horizons of sense, responsibility and transcendence.

Don Bosco has applied with us too the preventive system, making attractive what is good, leading us to see the beauty of the faith, showing us the happiness there is in serving God and our neighbour.

\* What he asks today of Salesians is that they live this covenant in all its joys and demands for the benefit of the young.  Its immediate and transparent testimony in word and works is the contribution we make to the evangelization of the young in a secularized world.

That the young are looking for an underlying sense to everything is evident everywhere.  That the great mass of youth follows the tide, while those who feel interiorly attracted by God are looking for travelling companions, is something that we ourselves perceive every day.  That what pleases young people is life, and they are digging in it to discover what adults have already found in contact with Christ, is one of our maxims.  It is indeed the fundamental law of the preventive system.  We must not deprive youngsters of the good news of God by limiting ourselves to the provision of safe recreation for them.

In our commitment with the laity too, the witness of our consecration will be a primary and determining factor: the Spirit attracts the lay people to the sphere of Don Bosco to bring them closer to God, through a maturing of conscience and a deeper meeting with Christ.  From those who are consecrated they expect to receive something.  What will it be?  Organization?  Professional animation?

No!  What they are looking for is rather the sense of God, the religious vision of his existence, the closeness of the Lord, the memory of his mercy.  We too need to start again from God.  What the Lord is saying to us today in the liturgy and in our family event must kelp us and make us capable of giving it effect.

May Mary, who formed the heart of Don Bosco in apostolic consecration, mould our own hearts too so that we may be able to combine in a single project the love of God and dedication to the young.

APPENDIX 22

**Homily on the Feast of the Annunciation**

**Rome, 25 March 1996**

The account of the annunciation to Mary of the birth of the Messiah is one of the most beautiful parts of St Luke's Gospel.  It relates a real fact and at the same time puts forward the sense of the history of humanity, which is our own.  It is concerned not only with the past, but is also a key for reading the present.

But before going on to any application, let us pause for a few moments in contemplation, as though we were looking at a picture or panorama.

The story is built up with snatches from the Bible which recall ancient hopes, express the expectations of the time, and anticipate the dreams of man's salvation.  All this is concentrated in Mary who in her person represents humanity called to receive God within it.

"Rejoice": this is a salutation used by the prophets when they addressed the Daughter of Zion, who was also a representative of humanity, and in particular of that portion which had made of God its inheritance and hope,

It is not just a conventional introduction, like our usual "Dear ...".  It ensures the favourable will of God, bringing with it a proof that can be verified.  Isaiah says: "Shout for joy, barren one who has borne no children!  Break into cries and shouts of joy, you who were never in labour!"

"The Lord is with you" frequently appears when God calls to a mission; it is repeated in the narration of callings which involve an important task for salvation.

Again the phrase "nothing is impossible with God" was said to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, when she was desperate about her sterility, at the beginning of the generation of believers.  It expresses God's decision to intervene in human affairs in favour of man, overcoming any limitations of nature or human liberty.

We are therefore facing the reality of an outstanding event.  We are looking at a "vocation", a call to her who through such an circumstance was to be the mediatrix and human protagonist; one who in the first place was therefore asked to believe (and that is the most difficult part!), then accept the commitment, and then give her collaboration as her life went on.

There is in the annunciation an image of God, and a certain well discussed film has tried to explore it.  It is interesting to see whether the image it finds coincides with our own image of God.  Not the one we have because we have studied it in books, but the one we live within us and often apply unconsciously in our activities.  God does not remain outside human history but works in its heart, precisely where events have their origin and become interwoven.

He sends an angel: i.e. he communicates with us and makes his designs known to us, not only (and perhaps not even mainly) through great organizations, but in the ordinary course of life:  The angel comes to Nazareth, to a private house, to a young engaged woman experiencing the love of family and responsibility.  As we see boys and girls around us we have to remember that communication with God is happening in their hearts as well.

The Annunciation is a meditation on humanity, especially on that part which is becoming aware of its own inability to attain happiness and is asking it of the Lord: they are the poor.  This part of humanity is not only the object of God's compassion and generosity, but through its desires and expectations has the ability to welcome God who sets up with them a communion even at the present time, like that which was to be realized in the Incarnation.  And it is also interesting to ask ourselves whether this vision of humanity shapes our thoughts and actions.  God becomes conceived within the events of concern to humanity.

It is a vision of the Spirit, the same Spirit who hovered with love over the primitive chaos at the beginning of creation, who kept alive the fire of expectations and desires, moving the chosen people to their partial realization.  His is the mysterious power which to the human eye seems sterile, limited or lost.  And it is a matter of a fertility which is not common, which is highly valued and esteemed, from which the children of God draw their origin.  This is an invitation to look at our faith again, in the action and strength of the Spirit.  Just as a virgin can conceive a child, so our apparently sterile world is fertile through the Spirit with possibilities which exceed our wildest dreams.

It is a presentation of Jesus with an abundance of messianic names: "Great", Son of the Most High, Son of David: the flower of humanity and its greatest expression, the definitive word of God.

\* The actors who play their parts in the annunciation are the ones who also appear in the facts which concern us personally as believers.  This is why I said that the story reflects what happens to each of us and to the Church.  The question may occur to us: what difference could there be between this account, so elaborate from a literary and religious standpoint, and the humble episode itself, hidden and perhaps externally very ordinary, in which the young Mary of Nazareth found herself involved?

The Gospel story is certainly not a fictional embellishment, nor is it just an edifying meditation, but it gives the true dimension of the event because it sees it in the light of its development after the Resurrection.  It embraces what Mary could not understand at the time.

And so we are taught to live in faith the events in which we are involved, to understand that the future consequences of options we make does not depend on their grandeur or magnificence, but on the fact that they have within them the seed of eternity, which is the sense of God and adherence to his will.

\* Artists, especially painters but not painters alone, have shown a preference for this scenario of the Annunciation.  They always include it when they are presenting the story of salvation.  But many of their efforts have left us with a feeling of exaggeration and detachment.  Before their masterpieces, as before this scene in the Gospel, we are left unmoved and thoughtful.

We would like to scrutinize Mary's soul through the lines of her countenance portrayed so delicately by artists, to detect something beyond the spoken words and the external scene; we understand that what was most important and mysterious took place in the heart and mind of Mary, a young woman of marriageable age, which at that time meant somewhere between thirteen and fifteen years.

Her conversation with the angel, whether it be seen as a revelation, vision, something she heard or only internal inspiration, is something private and hidden.  The consequences begin to unravel afterwards and they reach even to us.

One of them is her reading of history, expressed in the Magnificat, precisely in the light of this personal event.  It is the story of a poor and humble people whose vicissitudes are not found written in the books of great empires.  But they will be more decisive and powerful than the great powers.  Following on her conception came her motherhood and the education of Jesus.  In these the contemplation and understanding of human events is continually enriched.  Then Christ followed his own path, acquired his autonomous dimension which led to the realization of the redemption, precisely as God the Father had said at the Annunciation.

Our active life, be it consecrated or lay, leads to tension between internal and external activity, personal response and the transformation of reality, contemplation and service.  These things are a challenge to us, and often a temptation as well.  We always want to do more, and little by little we begin to put our trust in the means and activities, which begin to leave us internally empty, unless we link ourselves continually with the starting point from which we draw strength and significance: God's invitation to collaborate with him.

The Annunciation reminds us of the priority of what is internal.  Nothing is produced outside themselves by man or woman unless it has first been conceived and accepted interiorly.  Thoughts, feelings, desires, projects and events are elaborated in our heart.  There is to be found God's sanctuary, and from that sanctuary Mary confesses her virginity, her availability, her acceptance.  It is the moment of listening and enlightenment, not only in the sense of piety, but also as regards the best method of understanding apostolic action: it is attention, study and deeper analysis.

It is there that the Spirit is at work with his grace which renders Mary interiorly Mother of the Word, who is conceived in her soul before being conceived in her womb.  Significant is that representation of the Annunciation which shows Mary kneeling and attentively reading the Scriptures.  She is concentrating peacefully and absorbing the words.  The expression on her face shows she accepts them and rejoices.  And from this flows her openness to the future.

At the words of the angel she expresses those perplexities and difficulties which we too shall manifest; that what is asked for is not possible.  They are too fine and great, because they are measured by God's standard.  But when she understands that it is God who asks it, she believes and gets down to work.

Dear brother and sisters, Salesians and lay people, in everyone's life there is an annunciation; indeed there may be many of them linked together, which invite us to make some innovation and open ourselves to it in hope.  Our own vocation was an annunciation, and so are the subsequent calls and responsibilities in which we must entrust ourselves to God and look to the future with trust and confidence.

An annunciation too is the event of the General Chapter which we are living in these days.  There is a voice, a promise, a spirit which makes it fertile.  Our task is to believe, to dispose ourselves to participate wholeheartedly in the enterprise, and then wait in peace for the results.

Mary will teach us how to do it, as she says also to us those words: We are the servants of the Lord!  May what God has said be accomplished in us.

APPENDIX 23

**Homily of Holy Thursday**

**Rome, 4 April 1996**

Today, Holy Thursday, we recall with veneration what Jesus said and did at the last supper of his life on earth, at which he gave a meaning to spiritual sacrifice to the Father.

A number of motives are interwoven in this celebration which leads us into the Easter Triduum: the Church, the new chosen people, founded on God's pact with humanity realized in Christ, and established historically on the twelve witnesses and depositaries of the secret of Jesus; the Eucharist as the sign, memorial and actuation of this covenant in different times and places; the common priesthood of all, and in particular of those who had been with Jesus from the beginning, and at this moment were chosen by him as his family to celebrate the Passover with him; and loving service, the key to the interpretation of the Jesus event, the explanation of the Eucharist, a commandment for the community, a task and reason for the priesthood.

These motives imply and involve one another.  In the special context of the Lord's Supper it is impossible to separate them without losing a part of their significance.  Today we need to take them up again, reflecting on our priestly ministry.  It is unusual to have so many salesian priests united for a celebration of Holy Thursday.

Every year on this occasion the Pope writes a letter to priests.  Moreover we are at present engaged in a deeper study of the educative and pastoral community, the salesian family and movement, and the exchange of benefits which must take place in them.  In the last thirty years we have done a lot of thinking about the service which must be rendered by those who animate communities, and it has been emphasized that it must be enriched and inspired by priestly endowments and experience.  This has not been considered only as a preliminary condition for taking on the task, but as the very content of animation, which is not something technical but spiritual, based on grace and aimed at a more intense living of the state of grace or holiness, through the mediation which Christ conferred on his apostles.

The ordained ministry is not primarily a delegation to do something, but a vocation and charismatic gift.  Before being a satisfaction of the people's need for meetings and common prayer, it is an invitation by God to follow Christ in a certain manner.  No one accedes to the priesthood for family reasons or because of purely personal qualities, but because of an internal voice which is heard and is later discerned and accepted by the Church.  It springs from the Spirit.  We do not form a social group.  Ours is a spiritual priesthood like that of Jesus.  The Spirit's grace leads us to become conformed to Christ the Shepherd, and disposes us to offer our lives to God for men; for their salvation which consists especially in the revelation of God, in whom man succeeds in discovering his destiny.

This was the great work of Jesus, as he himself summed it up in those last supreme moments: "To them I have revealed your name..." with patience, with persistence, with pedagogy.  To this are referred all his works and actions.  They reach our corporal and psychological dimension, but especially they awaken our awareness of being children of God; they communicate the Spirit's gift, they give sense to our existence, they reconcile us with the Father.

\* The charism received by those who are called to the priestly ministry is destined for the community in four different forms.

There is the charism of foundation; it continually brings back the community to Christ by exhortation, but above all by linking it historically with the event of Christ through participation in the apostolic succession of the Bishops.  The Christian faith is not a refined religious humanism, nor is it the summation of what is best in all the existing or possible religions.  It is the acceptance in the first place of an established fact and of its consequences: the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.  To this event communities are linked through the testimony of the apostles, maintained by the Church, which reaches even as far as us through their successors.  It belongs to the priesthood to keep alive the memory of this reference and bring it about that all other concerns and initiatives of the community become linked with it.  There are many gifts and endowments in the community, but the ministry is the charism of foundation.  And it is not a matter of personal ability alone nor of professional preparation, even though these two may be of the greatest help, but of the constitution of the body of Christ as is clearly proclaimed in today's celebration.  It is the duty of every priest, through his familiarity with Jesus, to make him present so that the community may be supported and grow on solid foundations.

The priest brings a second gift to the community: he becomes the sign and energetic force of ecclesial communion, in an internal and spiritual as well as a visible sense.  The Christian community is not characterized by celebrations or by a feeling of sympathy for Christ, nor even by the content of faith alone, but by a historic belonging.  It is a people called to be an instrument of the salvation brought by Christ, not outside or beyond history but within it.  This membership or belonging has signs of identification and implies also demands of life.  It is a spiritual communion and a visible unity.  Priests do not monopolize the sense of the Church, but they certainly nourish, sustain and enrich it from the lowest level (like convergence on some human values) up to total communion.

Linked with the preceding there is a third gift: the authenticity of faith and Christian experience.  The faith of the individual and the community is a response to the proclamation of salvation and the acceptance of its conditions.  It requires both vibrant feelings and depth of reflection; it regards the Gospel, not speculations produced by the human mind, and it has a means of verification: the Church of the apostles.  It is in this proclamation and in this comparison that one must delve in order to penetrate the sense and consistency of human values in line with their ultimate destination.

On the foundation of Christ, in ecclesial communion, and with attention to authentic faith, we enter progressively into the realm of grace, of relationship with God, of the human experience of feeling ourselves children of the Father, lived also at a psychological level: it is the itinerary of the spirit within us, the understanding of the sacramental and vital mediations offered us by God.  Again, it is not a matter of powers but of a vocation and a gift, with which the Spirit makes us instruments to be vehicles of grace as he sends us to the community.

\* Priests recall the foundation; they insert others in the Church, they develop the faith and introduce others to grace through the service of the word.  All take part in the proclamation and exhortation, but the priest signifies its urgency for unveiling the mystery of life: he recalls that it culminates in Christ Jesus; he dedicates himself to embodying this in life and puts himself at its service.

In the same way he helps the individual and the community to give the generous response to God which is holiness.  All collaborate to this end, but the priest perceives it as the greatest benefit of the person; he is concerned that individuals and community progress in it for men and for God, and offers the riches of experience and grace which Christ and the Church possess.

Priests animate and guide the community to direct them towards Christ, to live in love, and to give fullness to their ecclesial membership.

Once again they do not do this alone, nor is it necessarily done from posts of administration or coordination.  It arises whenever there is clarification of rapport with the Lord and there is defined the witness of charity.  He has it at heart that the community should not live for itself but place itself at the service of others as Jesus did.  In this existence for others they must not stop at human possibilities, but grasp the divine plan revealed in Christ; that they trust not only in temporal means but in spiritual means too; that they believe in the fertility of the Spirit's presence which educates the conscience and opens up to grace.

\* To enable them to exercise these ministries not in a bureaucratic fashion but with interior joy, dedication and conviction, the Spirit equips priests with an energy which is the characteristic of their existence and spirituality: pastoral charity.  Everybody has this, but the priest receives it as his principal gift.  It is the love which leads him to contemplate and identify himself with Christ and to collaborate with him who enlightens, heals, gathers people together in unity and gives his life for them.  And not only this!  It enables him to make Christ present around him through words and gestures which are visible and intelligible, and solidly directed towards the goal of salvation.

The priesthood, understood in this fashion, is exercised not in certain specific acts, but at every moment of life.  It is the priestly existence which is the mediating element as was that of Christ, defined and described as a priest by the Epistle to the Hebrews.  The minister acts "in persona Christi" when he celebrates and (without thereby making sacred his own state) even when he walks the streets because it is his life which has been assumed by Jesus.

\* This leads us to one or two comments on our salesian priesthood.  The Lord calls us to be priests and educators.  This means taking the grace of our ministry into the field of human experience of the young and the community concerned with youth.  We exercise the ministry of the word when we preach a homily, but not less so when we speak with a youngster in the playground, when we gather together a group of animators, or when we teach a class.  As our pulpit we have chosen the school, and as the place for proclamation meeting places indoors and outdoors.  The word of God is not left isolated but is offered in a living context.  For the young person, the word of God may be a dialogue or a welcoming greeting if he finds in them enlightenment and support.

We draw profit through the energy of priestly animation when we direct communities and works towards Christ, towards a service to the faith of the young even though we may be dealing with technical questions or organizational matters.

Being priests and educators means that we never separate spirit from matter, orientation from the necessary means, objectives from mediations, the secular from the religious, life from sacrament.

We sanctify when we celebrate, but no less in our daily relationships as well.  Grace is certainly communicated through the acts of Jesus carried out by the Church, but also by our other acts which spring from a priestly heart.

\* A second comment arises from a question which at first sight seems rather disturbing, but in fact makes us decidedly optimistic.  Is it true that in the CEP there can at times be several priests, but there is little evidence of priestly gifts and service?  And if this is so, may it not be because we thought that the field of education, the educative community, the youthful environment, are not the place for the profitable use of priestly characteristics, and so we waited for Sunday to exercise the priesthood in its most religious and ritual form?  This question leads to a perspective which is encouraging.  What a wealth of enlightenment, of grace, of orientation and transformation will be unleashed when each of us, people of God and ordained ministers, sets free the energies of his priesthood.

Both youngsters and adults feel the need for this.  And it will not signify any mortification of the secular dimension, but rather its perfecting and fulfilment.

To this priestly service, which has its culmination in the Eucharist, Jesus invites us today with those words: "Do this in memory of me".

APPENDIX 24

**Homily at the Closing Mass of the GC24**

**Rome, 20 April 1996**

Our capitular experience is coming to an end, enlightened by the presence of the Risen Christ.  We have before our minds the image of Mary at the foot of the Cross.

It is a paschal icon.  It is only in comparatively recent times that the idea of the "Mater dolorosa" has come to the fore.  In the Gospel account there is no reference to tears or sadness; it says simply that she stood near the Cross, taking part in that supreme event for humanity.  A first semblance of the Help of Christians.

For St John the cross coincides with the glorification of Jesus, the culminating moment of his revelation, his going towards the Father.  "When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all things to myself".  From the cross was born the community of believers, represented by the little group gathered around it and symbolized by the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.  On the cross is founded the new unity of the human race which Christ was to realize according to the messianic promise.  In this ecclesial framework are set the words addressed to Mary which suggest rather a symbol to decipher, a mystery to unveil, than a moving statement of a fact.

The episode of Mary, in fact, is at the centre of those last scenes which have passed down to us the memory of Christ's death.  It is linked with the scene of the "seamless garment" which the soldiers did not divide, and is the symbol of reformed humanity, of the people of God definitively united through the grace of Christ.  And it is followed by the expression with which Jesus declares that the design of the Father has been fulfilled:  "Having said this Jesus, knowing that everything had been accomplished..."

It is not therefore a matter of the solicitude or filial love of Jesus, concerned about assigning to Mary someone who would support her, or of the affection of the disciple for her.  These things are true but John puts less emphasis on them.  What he is trying to do is to bring his readers to interiorize the sense of Christ's death and penetrate its salvific mystery.  He leaves aside the emotive superficial aspect of the drama and dwells rather on its effects for humanity's pilgrimage.  It is in this light that he reports the dialogue between Jesus, Mary and the disciple.

He turns first to Mary.  We have the impression, and it is precisely what happened, that it was not a case of Mary being entrusted to John, but that *he was entrusted to her as a son.  It brings to mind that Mary is not called by her own name but always referred to as "his mother".  We recall the episode of Cana when the same John says that in it "Jesus manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him".  It is the initial glory of the revelation of the Messiah which reaches its highest point in his death.  And it makes us think too of the name "woman" which takes us back to the same episode, symbol of the new nuptials.  And going further back in history, to the woman of the creation, of the temptation and of God's sentence: Eve.*

Of the *disciple, on the other hand, the name is not given.  It represents every follower of Jesus, all the disciples together, the community of his faithful followers characterized by the fact that they are friends of Christ and loved by him.*

All this makes us think that we are at the making, not of some precautionary measure, but of a solemn and sacred entrustment, a point of departure.  Jesus calls Mary to a new kind of motherhood which takes its origin from the cross and for that reason becomes fertile.  It is a new capacity for bringing men to birth in the Spirit.  We are "in the hour" of Jesus, which at Cana had not yet come.  Mary will be his Mother, not only because she bore him in her womb, but because through identifying himself totally and in every place with the community born from the cross she will conceive him continually in history in millions of individuals throughout the centuries.

Mary depicts and concentrates in herself the quality of the universal Church, and even the individual local communities.  They are all born at the foot of the cross; they are called to enjoy the riches signified in water and blood, and to bear witness to the fact with the ardent fidelity of the first nucleus.

For this reason the community of the disciples takes Mary to itself.  We see her with them as they await the coming of the Spirit.  She certainly bore a living witness to the historical existence of Jesus from the first years; but still more she was a motherly mediation for opening us to the mystery of Christ, Son of God.  From that point she is present in communities everywhere, visibly in the signs by which the community recalls its veneration of her, and in depth with a fertility which gives ever new and unforeseen signs.  This is the companionship which we too will bring to our own communities after the GC24.

She will remind us of the value of giving oneself to God as strength for pastoral charity.

We shall receive today a small statue of the "Good Shepherd" with a sheep on his shoulders.  Christ's attitudes and gestures, which we often recall as examples for ourselves (welcoming, listening, support, enlightenment, mercy), find in the cross their explanation and coronation.  The Shepherd, whom John presents in his Chapter X, is the one who gives life.  If this be ignored, pastoral charity would become a technique of approach, of public relations, a form of beneficence rather than of salvation.

Mary, incorporated interiorly through the words of Jesus into this offering, educates us to the mysterious fertility of love.

For her too everything is revealed and fulfilled in this moment.  Her concern for the growth of the Son of God takes on another dimension: from Jesus to the Church, historical and concrete, made of men and their doings; from human fertility to that of grace.  Acceptance of this was another test of her faith, almost a qualitative leap.

Mary, at the foot of the cross, reveals to us the value of the community in which our service is realized, of the community which is present at Christ's sacrifice in a unique but different manner.  She is the bearer of a memory of which she alone understands the sense.  It is more than a "group".  It is the place where God reveals salvation.

We may think in this way of the educative community which we animate, of the Salesian Family and Movement, of the churches.  We foster the reference to Christ, the unity in love and activity.  With them we invoke and await the Spirit and make ourselves attentive to his signs.

Mary at the foot of the cross reminds us of the salvation of which we want to be signs and bearers: it is the salvation that stems from Christ's Redemption, that opens us to God to receive from him the fulfilment of our own existence.  We start up many initiatives for the benefit of the young and of adults. They are all oriented to a single main end, all leavened by something included in our motto "Da mihi animas": the salvation of God, which is central to the work of Christ.

With Mary, beside the cross, we discover which are the strengths needed for the transformation God wants to work in us and in our communities: the water and blood.  The purification is the Eucharist.  The Easter season, in which we are living, is the time of sacramental pedagogy.  It is proposed in a thousand different ways by the liturgy and the pages of the Gospel.

Soon we shall pronounce the words of our entrustment to Mary.  It will be an act of faith in her assistance and the expression of our desire to take her with us.

We have celebrated the passage of 150 years since Don Bosco began the Oratory at Valdocco.  The presence of Mary runs like a golden thread through the various stages of his experience, both spiritual and pastoral: the beginning of the oratory, its definitive establishment, the foundation of the Congregation, and its expansion.  Now we find ourselves beginning a new stage.  May she still be the guarantee of our oblation, of the salvation we bear, of the communities we form.