

THE PROJECT OF LIFE
OF THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

**A GUIDE TO THE
SALESIAN CONSTITUTIONS**

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*A guide to the
Salesian Constitutions*

Rome 1986

I would like to go with you myself
but since I cannot do so
these Constitutions
will take my place.

Don Bosco to Fr. Cagliero

"I would like to go with you myself
but since I cannot do so
these Constitutions
will take my place".

Don Bosco to Fr Cagliari



"Let us imagine ourselves in the place of Don Cagliero about to set out to carry the Salesian charism to the world and let us receive from Don Bosco himself our Rule of life. The best expression of our love for him will be to translate it always and everywhere into a life of fidelity and perseverance."

Agostino Viganò

Following the thought of the GC22, the Commission has these essential aims which characterise it:

— a deeper doctrinal and practical analysis of the sense of the Constitutions.

One of the "practical directives and Deliberations" of the GC22 was the following:

"The Rector Major with his Council study the desirability of preparing a commentary on the various Constitutions which will serve to deepen their sense, make the spiritual content easier to grasp, and encourage the faithful to the practice of the virtues."

The Rector Major and his Council, in the exercise of their functions, the Chapter to be of great importance, and in December 1984 decided to study how a response could be given to the Rector Major's wish that such a task could not be completed privately, from a distance.

In the first few months of 1985 the Rector Major set up a team of some fifteen competent and available members, and distributed among them the various parts of the text, assigning to each a particular sector on which to work, indicating as the aim, that some extension to be followed in the preparation of the commentary, in which the objectives specified in the GC22 were to be taken into account.

By December of 1985 the work had reached a stage when it was possible to present to the members of the General Council a suitable first draft for their critical appraisal and comments concerning the content.

The aim of the text, this draft, together with the suggestions made, was then handed over to the Rector Major, who was asked to render the text more consistent, correct, and proportioned, and to give it the form of a presentation.

At the beginning of the present month, September 1987, the text was made up of the following: Rector Major, Don BOSCO, Clemente JAVIERA, Ramondo VENTURA, Nicanor BARRERA, MARAGANI, Francesco MOTTI, Paolo NATALI, Giuseppe NICOLISSE, Oscar SARON, Ludwig SCHWAB, Gerardo SERVO, Adriano VAN LUYK, Juan Eduardo VECCHI, and VIGANO, Egidio VIGANO.

Translated from the Italian by
Fr George Williams SDB

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DEI SALESIANI DI DON BOSCO**

Guida alla lettura
delle Costituzioni salesiane

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PRESENTATION

One of the "Practical directives and Deliberations" of the GC22 was the following: "Let the Rector Major with his Council study the desirability of preparing a commentary on the renewed Constitutions which will serve to deepen their sense, make the spiritual content easier to grasp, and encourage the confreres to live them".¹

The Rector Major and his Council considered the suggestion of the Chapter to be of great importance, and in December 1984 began to study how a response could be given; it was clear from the outset that such a task could not be completed quickly.

In the first few months of 1985 the Rector Major set up a team of some fifteen competent and available confreres, and distributed among them the various Parts of the text, assigning to each a particular sector on which to work,² indicating at the same time some criteria to be followed in the preparation of the commentary so as to achieve the objectives specified by the GC22.

By December of 1985 the work had reached a stage where it was possible to present to the members of the General Council a sizable first draft for their critical appraisal and comments concerning the overall structure of the text. This draft, together with the observations and suggestions made, was then handed over to the Secretary General, Fr Francis Maraccani, who was asked to render the text homogeneous, coherent, consistent and properly proportioned, and to provide it with adequate documentation.

At the beginning of the present month, September 1986, all the material was ready for the press.

¹ GC22, 4: Directive 1.4

² The team was made up of the following confreres: Joseph AUBRY, Cesare BISSOLI, Giovanni Battista BOSCO, Clemente FRANZINI, Raimondo FRAITALLONE, Nicolò LOSS, Francesco MARACCANI, Francesco MOTTO, Paolo NATALI, Giuseppe NICOLUSSI, Omero PARON, Ludwig SCHWARZ, Gaetano SCRIVO, Adriaan VAN LUYN, Juan Edmundo VECCHI, Angelo VIGANÒ, Egidio VIGANÒ

Following the thought of the GC22, the Commentary has three essential aims which characterize it:

- a deeper doctrinal and practical analysis of the sense of the Constitutions;
- a compelling perception of their spiritual implications;
- a convincing incentive for daily life.

From the editorial point of view it was decided to provide a commentary article by article, except for the Fourth Part concerning the structures of animation and government. While due attention has been given to the placing of each article in its own proper context (chapter and part) and in the Constitutions as a whole, its contents have been examined more deeply in relationship to their ecclesial and salesian sources, and helpful suggestions have been made for meditation and practice.

The commentary on the individual articles is preceded by a general Introduction on the significance of the Rule in religious life, a summary of the historical development of our Constitutions, and an organic view of the overall structure of the revised text.

A brief synthesis has also been introduced at the beginning of each Part to provide a brief and appropriate explanation of the biblical quotations at the head of the individual chapters, and to throw light on the intrinsic connection between the Constitutions and general Regulations.

To highlight the spiritual content of the Commentary prayers have also been included, which will be of help in expressing the implications of each article in devotional form.

Among the criteria guiding the elaboration of the Commentary were the following:

- attention to the exactness of doctrine and objectivity of historical aspects;
- the background to be Vatican II and the directives of the Church's Magisterium;

- *the foundation to be laid as far as possible on our documents of greater authority (references to Don Bosco and salesian sources, to General Chapters, Acts of the General Council, the 'Ratio', to writings of witnesses of particular significance etc.);*
- *emphasis to be given to aspects of the following of Christ, fidelity to the Founder, and a prophetic response to the problems of the present day;*
- *attention in each article to the overall unity of the text, of each part, and of each chapter;*
- *the whole to be expressed as far as possible in a clear and didactic style.*

From all this it is clear at once that the work has no scientific pretensions, but is founded nevertheless on serious and demanding study and research by a team of co-authors, endowed with salesian sensitivity and competence in the contents of the sector assigned to each.

Because it is a book which comments on a constitutional text which was worked out in a "community fashion" (and hence showing certain differences of style and sensitivity, despite the efforts of the special commission which carried out a careful work of unification), the Commentary displays the same characteristics of collegial collaboration, and it is not difficult to detect a certain diversity in the style of the various contributions.

But from another point of view this variety enriches the objective value of the contents, which have the purpose (like the Constitutions themselves) of inspiring a manner of life based more on lived community experience than on personal logic or unified style.

This is not a book to be read through at one sitting like a novel, but rather a text for meditation following on the reading of selected articles. It may therefore be found particularly useful for reflection — and prayer — made either personally or in community.

It should be noted too that it is not an official document, discussed and approved paragraph by paragraph by the Rector Major with his Council; it is an authoritative text, in whose composition and revision the Rector Major and the individual members of the General Council

have had a hand. It therefore enjoys no small authority and value in connection with spiritual direction and the salesian formation of the confreres. *Gaudium et spes* — Vatican II

While inviting all confreres to make use of the Commentary, I express sincere thanks to the Secretary General who has coordinated the work, and to each of the worthy collaborators, through whose generous dedication the Congregation now has available this valuable and competent aid which can be of help to both individuals and communities in successfully following the way of renewal indicated by Vatican II.

Rome, 24 September 1986.

Fr Egidio Viganò
Rector Major

ms.	Manuscript	ASG
v.	Volume	ASG
NT	New Testament	ASG
c.c.	Canon (of CIO)	ASG
JO	John Bosco	ASG
TO	Congregation for Catholic Education	ASG
p.	page	ASG
par.	paragraph	ASG
PC	Perfectae Caritatis (1987)	ASG
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis	ASG
R	Regulationes (1971)	ASG
RC	Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes	ASG
Reg	Regulationes (1971)	ASG
RFIS	Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis	ASG
RRM	Report of Rector Major	ASG
RSS	Regulationes (1971)	ASG
Sac	Collectio Litterarum Don Boscæ	ASG
SC	Ecclésiastice (1968)	ASG
SCA	Salesian Centennial	ASG
SGC	Humanae (1971)	ASG
n	Constitutioni della Società di Salesiani	ASG
	1858-1875, critical edn. F. MOTTU, LAS Rome, 1982	ASG
	Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco (Rome), 1982	ASG
	General Chapter	ASG
	Acts of 19th General Chapter	ASG
	Documents of 21st General Chapter	ASG

SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> — Vatican II
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AA. <i>VV</i>	Various authors
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> — Vatican II
AGC	Acts of the General Council
art.	article
ASC	Acts of the Superior Council / Chapter
BM	<i>Biographical Memoirs</i> (English translation)
C	<i>Constitutions</i> (article of)
can.	Canon (of CIC)
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> — Vatican II
CEC	Congregation for Catholic Education
<i>Cf., cf.</i>	compare
Ch.	Chapter
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> , 1983
Const.	<i>Constitutions</i>
CP	<i>Communio et progressio</i> , 1971
CRIS	Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
CT	<i>Catechesi tradendae</i> , 1979
<i>Doc., doc.</i>	Document
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> — Vatican II
EN	<i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i> , 1975
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Collected Letters of Don Bosco</i> , 4 vols. (edited Ceria)
ES	<i>Ecclesiae Sanctae</i> , 1966
ET	<i>Evangelica testificatio</i> , 1971
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , 1981
F. MOTTO	<i>Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales 1858-1875</i> , critical edtn. F. MOTTO, LAS Rome, 1982
FSDB	<i>Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco ("Ratio")</i> , 1985
GC	General Chapter
GC19	Acts of 19th General Chapter
GC21	Documents of 21st General Chapter

GC22	Art.	Documents of 22nd General Chapter	CONTENTS
GE	Art.	<i>Gravissimum educationis</i> — Vatican II	282
GS	Art.	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> — Vatican II	282
<i>Ibid.</i> , <i>ibid.</i>		ibidem	212
IGLH	Art.	<i>Instructio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum</i> , 1971	282
IM	Art.	<i>Inter Mirifica</i> — Vatican II	282
<i>l.c.</i>	Art.	in the place quoted	282
LG		<i>Lumen gentium</i> — Vatican II	282
MB	III	<i>Memorie Biografiche</i> (Italian)	242
MC	Art.	<i>Marialis cultus</i> , 1974	242
MO	Art.	<i>Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales</i>	242
MR	Art.	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , CRIS 1978	242
<i>ms.</i>	Art.	manuscript	282
<i>n.</i>		number	282
NT		New Testament	THE "FOREWORD"
<i>o.c.</i>		in the work quoted	FIRST PART
OE		John Bosco, <i>Opere Edite</i> , LAS Rome	THE SALESIANS
OT		<i>Optatam totius</i> — Vatican II	272
<i>p.</i>		page	CA I
<i>para.</i>		paragraph	CA I
PC		<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> — Vatican II	Art. 1
PO	Section	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> — Vatican II	Art. 2
R		<i>Regulations</i> (article of)	Art. 3
RC		<i>Renovationis causam</i> , CRIS 1969	Art. 4
Reg.		<i>Regulations</i>	Art. 5
RFIS		<i>Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis</i> , 1970	Art. 6
RRM		Report of Rector Major to General Chapter	Art. 7
RSS		Periodical of Salesian Historical Institute	Art. 8
<i>Sac C</i>		<i>Sacerdotalis caelibatus</i> , 1967	Art. 9
SC		<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> — Vatican II	Art. 10
SCA	Section	Salesian Central Archives	Art. 11
SGC	Art.	Special General Chapter (GC 20)	CA II
<i>v.</i>	Art.	'vide' (see)	Art. 10
166	Art.	34	Art. 11
173	Art.	35	Art. 12
180	Art.	36	Art. 13
188	Art.	37	Art. 14

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE CONSTITUTIONS

These Constitutions provide an authentic description of the *apostolic project of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (cf. C 192). They are their "identity card" in the Church, and their "book of life" as they follow the Lord.

In his spiritual testament Don Bosco tells us that the Salesian Congregation will have a happy future and that its vitality will endure as long as the rules are faithfully observed. The Apostolic See considers them to be our "fundamental code"¹, which becomes the yardstick for measuring the baptismal authenticity of anyone professing them.

The Constitutions therefore occupy a special place in both the personal conscience of every salesian and the life of the Congregation as a whole.

Hence the importance of a clear knowledge of their content and of the commitment to assimilate interiorly the values they contain.

Different meanings of the term "Constitutions"

Etymologically the word "Constitutions" comes from the Latin verb "*constituere*".

Among the various meanings of this verb we find: "to organize, to create, to found a group or a society".

The use in the singular of the derived term ("*Constitution*") serves to indicate, in the case of a society which is a state, the complexus of

¹ Cf. CIC, can. 587

laws which form the basis of its juridical organization.

When used in the plural on the other hand ("Constitutions") and in the ecclesiastical sector, it refers specifically to a basic document of Religious Life, which gives details for the way of life of the members of an institute as they follow Christ.

In this sense the term has had through the years a different meaning from one institute of consecrated life to another. Its use has been established only from the thirteenth century; before that the term in more general use was the "Rule". When, on account of their antiquity and authority, the famous Rules of St Benedict and St Augustine (of the ninth and eleventh centuries respectively) were declared un-touchable, other supplementary documents were placed alongside the venerable book of the Rule with the purpose of interpreting its inspirations, guidelines and norms in ways more suited to times and places. These texts frequently came to be known as "Constitutions", as well as "Institutions" or "Institutes", "Statutes", "Regulations", etc.

After the Lateran Council IV (13th cent.), which restructured Religious Life in the Church — by that time it had become very complicated — it was laid down that for official recognition of any new religious project, the express approval of the Apostolic See was required.

Pontifical approval gave authenticity to the fundamental document of the new foundations; and this document could then be accompanied by other supplementary texts. And so, for example, the Company of Jesus (founded in the 16th cent.) has its "Formula Instituti" as the basic document which lays down the structure of the Order; then come the "Constitutions" which complete and apply it; and then also, with the passage of time, the "Decrees" emerging from the legislative enactments of the General Congregations (= General Chapters).

It was only later, at a time when the "modern Congregations" began to appear (so called because of their "simple vows"), the term "Constitutions" came into ordinary use to indicate the fundamental document of their project of religious life.

The process that a Founder had to follow to obtain pontifical approval remained more or less uniform in ecclesiastical practice, with fixed juridical steps to be taken, especially from the 19th cent. to the Code of Canon Law of 1917. This obliged the author to conform to

an already established model and to sum up in a very synthetic form what was original in his own spirit and mission.

And so Don Bosco, for example, in drawing up his Constitutions had neither the freedom of the ancient Founders nor the providential charismatic inspiration of Vatican II.

Evolution of its real meaning

Before answering the question: "What are the Constitutions for the Salesians of Don Bosco?", it will be well to keep in mind the notable evolution that has taken place as regards the real meaning of the term, and hence in the way we use it today.

Three principal stages can be distinguished in the evolution of its meaning. The Constitutions have been successively understood as:

- a. An *Application Document* to accompany the Rule: this is the sense indicated above in the case of the old Orders with solemn vows;
- b. A *Basic Statute* which described the religious structure of a modern Congregation of simple vows, according to the strict scheme of the prevailing ecclesiastical practice (19th century and CIC 1917). (Members of apostolic Congregations of simple vows were considered in practice as second-class Religious);
- c. A *Fundamental Charter or Code*, which included the classical sense of "Rule" and described the identity, evangelical qualities and particular character of the religious project of an institute of consecrated life. This marks a qualitative leap in the real meaning of the term, which made possible the renewal desired by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican.

The present text of our Constitutions comes under this last heading. The passage from the second to the third stage (which raised the Constitutions to the status of a true Rule) made necessary a careful and laborious return to the origins for a faithful re-thinking of the entire charisma of the Founder in view of the new and very rich perspective of being able to describe it in the constitutional text.

To obtain a concrete idea of the difference between the second and third stages it is useful to compare, for example, the requirements of the "Normae secundum quas" (of 1901, and substantially confirmed in 1921), which institutionalized the ecclesiastical practice then obtaining, with the 'Motu proprio' "Ecclesiae Sanctae" (1966), which specified for us the way in which the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" was to be applied.

"Normae secundum quas" (1901) "Ecclesiae Sanctae" (1966)

Elements to be excluded from the text of the Constitutions: *The Constitutions should contain the following elements:*

"(27) Quotations from Holy Scripture, the Councils and the Fathers are to be excluded.

(29) There should be no mention of civil laws, regulations of local civil authorities, governmental approvals and similar matters.

(31) Questions of dogmatic or moral theology, decisions concerning doctrinal discussions, should be removed, especially if they refer to the matter of the vows.

(33) There is no place in the Constitutions for ascetical teaching, spiritual exhortations as such, and mystical considerations... Hence the Constitutions should

"(a) The evangelical and theological principles concerning religious life and its incorporation in the Church, and an apt and accurate formulation in which the spirit and aims of the founder should be clearly recognized and faithfully preserved, as indeed should each institute's sound traditions, for all of these constitute the patrimony of an institute (PC 2b);

contain only the constitutive laws of the Congregation and the norms which govern community acts, both those concerning government and those which refer to discipline and manner of life".²

(b) The juridical norms necessary to define the character, aims and means employed by the institute. Such rules must not be multiplied unduly, but should always be clearly formulated."³

The new Code of Canon Law (1983) has codified this last real meaning, expressed by "Ecclesiae Sanctae"⁴: it fosters and protects the originality of the specific character of each institute, its spiritual patrimony, its particular apostolic qualities. The Code does indeed set out some general principles for the identification of consecrated and religious life, even from a juridical aspect, but it leaves and even demands that there be the necessary elbow room for the identity of the particular charisma. It lays down, and it is well that it does so, that the fundamental structures of an institute should be clearly and precisely stated; that its form should correspond to the genuine will of the Founder; that the organization of the communities at different levels and the exercise of authority should be at the service of its vocational objectives, and that the principles of shared responsibility and subsidiarity should function adequately.

In the light of the evolution that has taken place it is clear that there has been a radical change. It brings to mind the comparison used by Don Bosco when he spoke of the "rough copy" and the "fair copy".⁵

The Council did not want a manipulation of the text of the Founder but a full and faithful updating of his "spiritual and apostolic experience" for the present day. Aware of today's social and cultural changes and knowing the limitations that many constitutional texts

² Cf. "Normae secundum quas S. Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis novis Institutis votum simplicium"

³ ES II, 12

⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 587, 598, 631, 662

⁵ Cf. BM XI, 289

had had to cope with, the Council wanted the Constitutions to reinstate the whole of the Founder's original patrimony.

This meant that the text of the Constitutions could no longer be reduced to a simple juridical statute, made up substantially of canons and norms; neither was it to become a generic doctrinal treatise of consecrated life. The text had to be drawn up again in such a way as to provide a clear "typological description" of the particular character of the institute, or in other words it had to provide a descriptive picture of the traits characterizing the model or kind of experience lived at the beginnings and tried and proven through living tradition.

It is true that "Ecclesiae Sanctae" wanted the Constitutions to be rich in evangelical, theological and ecclesial principles, not indeed as artificial insertions from outside but rather as a natural emphasis and explanation arising from within the project as lived and described, and in no way detached from an adequate basic structure.

A text, therefore, which would not be simply the fruit of the work of an able legislator nor even of a master scholar, but that of a leader of a genial school of sanctity and apostolate.

And so for us at the present day the Constitutions are the authoritative description of an original plan of consecrated life; they indicate the fundamental principles for the following of Christ and its ecclesial dimension according to the characteristic spirit of the Founder. They present a harmonious integration of gospel inspiration and concrete structures. They go beyond mere institutional requirements and indispensable norms, and highlight the experience of the Holy Spirit lived by the Founder and passed on by him to the institute.

We can say that our present Constitutions are a "Fundamental Code", more spiritual than juridical, more distinctive than generic, more apostolic than "conventual".

St John Bosco, the Founder

As we have already said, the Constitutions of a Congregation are intimately linked with the Founder.

We see this clearly in Don Bosco. It is a good thing to reflect on the laborious negotiations he carried out over nearly twenty years before obtaining the desired pontifical approval of April 1874.⁶

We could say that he made every possible effort to transfuse his very self into the Constitutions, not in the sense of substituting himself for them but so as to leave a "living testament" which would serve as a mirror to reflect his more characteristic features. Rightly was he able to assert that to love Don Bosco is to love the Constitutions;⁷ and when he handed a copy of them to Fr Cagliero, leader of the first missionary expedition, he was able to say in effect and with convincing emotion: "Here is Don Bosco going with you" (cf. Const. Foreword).

The authentic understanding of the Constitutions always and necessarily harks back to the living reality of the Founder, who remains the true model (C 21, 97, 186), the genuine standpoint and indispensable key for the reading of the constitutional text. There is an intrinsic complementarity between the Founder Don Bosco and the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, which calls for a living knowledge of Don Bosco and of his life in the one who reads them.

But of their very nature the Constitutions have need of other supplementary texts, and this for two very practical reasons.

The first arises from the impossibility of including in the brief text of the Constitutions all the riches of the spiritual patrimony, especially when one thinks of the limitations due to the ecclesiastical practice of the time; for this reason it is important to keep before the mind other writings of the Founder of particular significance (cf. for example, the appendix to the present book of the Constitutions, entitled "Writings of Don Bosco").

The second reason stems from the fact that the Constitutions are meant to present a concrete plan for the following of Christ, with a specific ascetic discipline and a particular apostolic methodology. Now (the fundamental importance of the Constitutions for us, but we must not forget the significance of the other normative texts.

⁶ Cf. F. MOTTO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales 1858-1875*, LAS Rome 1982; cf. also the chapter of this commentary on the history of our Constitutions: p. 36 ff.

⁷ Cf. MB XVII, 258, quoted in the Foreword to the Constitutions

if they describe chiefly no more than the fundamental features of the specific nature of the Congregation, they need to be completed by practical and normative illustrations taken from living tradition and progressively condensed in some other complementary document. Don Bosco attached particular importance to methodological aspects of behaviour, and considered as indispensable the sense of an adequate religious discipline constantly updated.

And so a good number of our General Chapters, beginning from the first ones when the Founder was still alive, have drawn up concrete regulations.⁸ Suffice it to recall (before the Code of 1917) the General Chapters I (1877), II (1880), IV (1887), and X (1904), in which the legislative activity of the Congregation was particularly marked.

This led little by little to the drawing up of the General Regulations; these also were fundamentally re-drafted and reorganized after Vatican II. They come within the orbit of the Constitutions, which they apply and render specific in more than a few practical aspects. As the Rector Major wrote in an important circular letter: "The requisite knowledge of the Constitutions will not be complete and genuine without an adequate study of the Regulations as well. The difference in nature of the two texts does not imply any disparity of importance, but rather the need for mutual integration. How could one assign any methodical force to the Constitutions if one misunderstood or disregarded the Regulations?"⁹

Constitutions and Rule of life

We have seen that in the ancient Orders the "Rule" was an authoritative and classical text, and therefore venerated and untouchable, which went back to the first beginnings (St Benedict, St Augustine in the West), but alongside of which were placed other texts,

St John Bosco, the Founder

⁸ Cf. this commentary: "A brief History of the text", p. 52-53

⁹ E. VIGANÒ, "The renewed text of our Rule of life", AGC 312, 1985, p. 45

of a more precise and binding character which served for its interpretation and application.

With the appearance of new kinds of Religious Life new kinds of Rule also appeared.

St Francis of Assisi, for example, did not want to adopt any of the traditional Rules as a model for his own Order, but created a new Rule (with various initial drafts) more suited to his own evangelical project.

As we have already said, St Ignatius of Loyola too wanted a "Formula Instituti" as the basic text, distinct from the classical Rules, with alongside it the Constitutions and the successive enactments of the Decrees of the legislative organ of the Society (the "General Congregation").

The drawing up of the Rules of the other Orders too has a complex history with different procedures and texts, whose objective was always that of ensuring both the originality of their own evangelical inspiration and a concrete style of discipline of life.

All this confirms that there has in fact been a continual evolution in the very concept of "Rule", which has remained somewhat fluid and adaptable to the individual institutes.

In the modern Congregations (of simple vows) which have the Constitutions as their fundamental document, the concept of Rule is primarily linked with the Constitutions, but then becomes broadened to a certain extent so as to include the other texts which flank them for the purpose of "regulating" the life of the members.

In our own domestic use, in line with our salesian tradition, the term "Rule" (or "the Rules") is often synonymous with "Constitutions"; Don Bosco used it in that sense at a time before the general Regulations existed. This serves to emphasize once again (in harmony with secular usage) the fundamental importance of the Constitutions for us, but we must not forget the significance of the other normative texts.

To make clearer the concrete meaning of "Rule of life" the distinction and mutually complementary relationship between Constitutions and Regulations are worth pointing out.

According to the new Code of Canon Law *the Constitutions* of a religious institute represent its "basic charter" and must contain:

- The intention of the Founder and what he laid down concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, as well as its wholesome traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the institute itself.¹⁰
- Basic norms about the governance of the institute, the discipline of the members, the admission and formation of members, and the proper object of their sacred bonds¹¹. From a juridical point of view, the Constitutions become true ecclesiastical laws; they are approved by competent ecclesiastical authority and can be changed only with its consent.¹²
- In the Constitutions, finally, the spiritual and juridical elements are to be aptly harmonized.¹³

The *General Regulations* on the other hand, which flank the Constitutions, regulate the practical life, discipline and activity of our Society. "They contain the concrete practical applications of the Constitutions to matters of universal import, and are consequently valid throughout the Congregation".¹⁴

From a juridical point of view the General Regulations are also ecclesiastical laws¹⁵ approved by the General Chapter. Since at times some norms are formulated to meet determined historical circumstances which are of their nature changeable, the Regulations are naturally easier to modify.

In conclusion the concrete religious life project, i.e. the original gospel inspiration and the practical norms which translate it into a way of life, imply the need to specify the different aspects which "regulate"

¹⁰ CIC, can. 578

¹¹ CIC, can. 587.1

¹² CIC, can. 587.2

¹³ CIC, can. 587.3

¹⁴ GC21, 381

¹⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 587.4

the life of the members. Such specification finds expression in various but complementary texts.

One can see therefore a certain elasticity and evolution in the meaning of the term "Rule" which, in practice, has led to a wider use of the expression "Rule of life", in line with what is stated in the text of our present Constitutions: "The life and activity of communities and confreres are *regulated* by the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Society" (C 191).

In fact, if by "*Rule of life*" is meant not only the description of the particular gospel inspiration but also the practical norms of religious conduct, i.e. a concrete manner of following Christ with a spiritual discipline and a particular apostolic method which provides a guide for the daily personal and community behaviour of the members, its use appears more suitable for indicating simultaneously both the Constitutions and the General Regulations and including also other texts forming part of the particular law (cf. C 191).

Various modern Congregations use the term in this sense, and in this sense too it has been used by our Rector Major, as for instance in his closing address to the GC22,¹⁶ in his circular letter of 29 October 1984, presenting to the Congregation the re-written version of the Constitutions and Regulations,¹⁷ and in the official presentation of the renewed text of our Rule.¹⁸

We can say, therefore, that for us the term "Constitutions" indicates specifically and exclusively the "Fundamental Code" of our way of consecrated life (which is precisely the objective of the reflections contained in this Commentary); while the expression "Rule of life" (or "our Rules") although indicating principally and substantially the Constitutions, includes in practice also the General Regulations, and in a wide sense extends also to other directives and deliberations of our particular law (cf. C 191).

¹⁶ Cf. GC22, *Documents*, 91.

¹⁷ Cf. AGC 312, 1985, especially p. 20-21.

¹⁸ Cf. *Constitutions 1984*, Presentation, p. 5-7.

Process of interior assimilation

The Constitutions are not a library book; neither are they a talisman, nor yet a magic manual; they are a "book of life": "they are for us, the Lord's disciples, a way that leads to Love" (C 196). For this reason they must be meditated on and assimilated in a constant process of interiorization which makes of every professed member an emulator of Don Rua who became known as "the living Rule".

The Constitutions "define the apostolic project" of Don Bosco (cf. C 2, 192).

The word "*project*" implies freedom and creativity in personally assuming a well defined orbit of life and action.

The professed member is not incorporated in the Congregation in the same way that a cog is inserted in a machine; nor is he called upon to apply once and for all a detailed and fixed programme which will then function in a monotonous manner; what he does is choose an evangelical orbit in which to function according to dynamic criteria which the Constitutions indicate to his spirit of initiative and to the commitment of his faith. The project determines the spiritual trajectory in which he is launched and offers him the criteria and methods needed to attain the objectives of the mission assigned to him. In this way the member takes on an adventure to be lived rather than a standardized plan to be followed out.

The project is also *apostolic*, i.e. characterized by the following of Christ, true Apostle of the Father. This in turn implies sensitivity and attraction towards two inseparable poles: the mystery of God, to be reached in the fullness of personal faculties, and the history of man in which to submerge oneself with saving ardour: two poles which are always new and which exclude any standing still or acquired habit.

And then the apostolic project in question is that of Don Bosco: i.e. an experience to be lived in the reality of history, not to repeat a stereotyped experience of the past but to incite with the same means and efficacy the development of the man of the present day under the impulse of the same dynamism of the Holy Spirit, tested and proved by the holiness and brilliance of the Founder.

These are all aspects which call for personal initiative and commitment of mind and heart, i.e. for a continued living interiorization of the institutional text.

The vital qualities and components of this project demand certain personal and community attitudes towards the Constitutions, of which the principal ones are: knowledge, harmony, devotion and living practice.

— *Knowledge*: decisions and free commitment always presuppose that the project is known; one cannot commit oneself to the realization of a plan of which the contents are unknown. Hence a careful study of the Constitutions is indispensable. When an institute begins to decline the root cause is indifference and ignorance among the members with regard to the Constitutions.

— *Harmony*: serious study leads spontaneously to a recognition of a connatural vocational ethos which brings with it feelings of esteem, attraction and love, i.e. an attitude of cordial harmony. The member looks on the Constitutions as a precious family legacy, as a sign of divine predilection and enlightenment for his personal existence, as a spiritual secret which leads him to the discovery of the treasures of the Gospel. They constitute the specific viewpoint from which he contemplates the face of Christ, and the key to the understanding of the whole of Revelation. In fact, "our living Rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour announced in the Gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young" (C 196).

— *Devotion*: knowing that "every human institution", as Paul VI wrote, "is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism" and that "external regularity is not by itself sufficient to guarantee the value of a life and its inner consistency",¹⁹ it is indispensable that the content of the Constitutions should penetrate into life and that harmony with them should mature into an attitude of prayer: not a parallel external prayer but a prayerful reading of the text itself

¹⁹ On the diligent and loving practice of the Rule, v. the impassioned circular letter of Don Bosco to his dear and well-loved children, of 6 Jan. 1884; cf. *Lettere* (Turin), pp. 248-250.

which will transform study of the articles into a dialogue with God. It is important to be able to "pray the Constitutions", i.e. introduce them in a vital manner into the spiritual dynamism of our devotion to Jesus Christ. A similar attitude will enable the member to find his way into the very heart of Don Bosco so as to feel its evangelical inspiration as the permanent creative source of the whole of his apostolic project.

— *Living practice*: knowledge, harmony and devotion cannot stop at a purely affective level, but must necessarily lead to practical application in life. It is not a question of a mere legal observance which, as we have heard from Paul VI, can become fossilized.

How, for instance, are we to "observe" article 40, which presents Don Bosco's Oratory to us as the "lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works"? It is a question of translating the experience of Don Bosco into the life of the present day.²⁰

"Living practice" is much more than simple observance; it calls for fidelity supported by personal witness, by communion of life in the house, by a pastoral creativity to meet the challenges of the times, by an awareness of the local and universal Church, by a predilection for today's needy youngsters, and by a tireless spirit of self-sacrifice every day of the year.

It is not the purpose of our Constitutions to lead us into a convent, there to live as observant religious; they call upon us to "stand at Don Bosco's side" to be "missionaries of the young". Rightly could Fr Rinaldi assert: "The new spirit which Don Bosco gave to the Constitutions, a spirit which was the harbinger of times yet to come, put many obstacles in the way of approval... The idea in his mind was that of a Pious Society which would be a true religious Congregation, but without the traditional external aspect. Flexibility in adapting to all

i.e. an experience to be lived in the reality of history, not to repeat a stereotyped experience of the past but to incite with the same means

²⁰ On the diligent and loving practice of the Rule, v. the impassioned circular letter of Don Bosco to his "dear and well loved children", of 6 Jan. 1884; cf. *Collected letters IV*, pp. 248-250

the forms of good which are continually coming to birth in humanity is the distinguishing spirit of our Constitutions.²¹

This is why the process of interior assimilation of the Constitutions is in the last analysis the real basic commitment of our religious profession, to be lived out and developed all through our lives.

From Baptism to profession

To understand fully the significance of the Constitutions in the life of the salesian one needs to reflect on the fact that they are specifically ordered to religious profession. In fact in the free and total offering he makes of himself to God, the professed member commits himself to live "according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions" (C 24). From this option, "one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make" (C 23), derives for the member the binding force of the Constitutions, "freely assumed before the Church" (C 193).

Profession expresses the will to belong to the Congregation, the decision to "remain with Don Bosco", to share the responsibility for its apostolic project, translating his own baptismal commitment into the intention to follow Jesus Christ as Don Bosco followed him!

As will be seen in the commentary on the text itself, profession is "an act which recalls and endorses the mystery of the baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression" (C 23).²²

The "new life" of Baptism is determined in the salesian by the manner of commitment expressed in the Constitutions; they become the authentic description of the way in which he lives the mystery of his Baptism. "There are not two levels (in his option to follow Christ): that of religious life which is a little higher, and that of christian life

²¹ ASC 17, 1923, p. 41

²² Cf. also C. 60; LG 44; PC 5

which is a little lower. For the religious, testifying to the spirit of the beatitudes with the profession of the vows is his only manner of living out his baptism.²³

And so for the professed the Constitutions enter in fact into the great biblical concept of the covenant.

From baptism to profession his existence moves along the track of a concrete covenant with God: on God's part it implies the seal of consecration by the power of his Spirit which makes baptismal life possible through the integral practice of the Constitutions,²⁴ and on the part of the professed member it implies the total offering of himself not simply by the making of vows, but by the overall assumption of the entire constitutional project (cf. C 3, 24).

The following out of this covenant, made by a disciple of Christ with a strong Church awareness, is marked and enlightened by the Constitutions as a characteristic reading of the Gospel. Rightly could Don Rua assert: "The Constitutions, coming from the fatherly heart of Don Bosco and approved by the Church, are for us the marrow of the Gospel, the way of perfection, the key to paradise, the pact of our covenant with God".²⁵

The Constitutions "a pledge of hope"

The results of a constant process of interior assimilation which leads us to live the Constitutions with zeal and reassurance of the covenant, make of them a "pledge of hope" (C 196).

The members in fact, "placed at the heart of the Church" (C 6), become "through the action of the Spirit" (C 25), a "sign of the power of the resurrection" (C 63); the practice of the evangelical counsels helps

²³ SGC 106

²⁴ Cf. AGC 312, 1985, p. 22-23 and 30-34

²⁵ D. RUA, Lettera sull'osservanza delle Costituzioni, December 1909, *Circulars*, p. 499

them "to discern God's action in history" and transforms them into educators "who proclaim to the young 'new heavens and a new earth'" (C 63). Furthermore the prospect of their perseverance which "is founded entirely on the fidelity of God", is daily made possible because "it is nourished by the grace of his consecration" (C 195): "I will run the way of your commands, because you give freedom to my heart" (Ps 119, 32).

The Constitutions become too, in the life of the members, a "pledge of hope" especially for the young.

The Church herself recognizes in the evangelical path they trace out "a special benefit for the whole People of God" (C 192). By the practice of the evangelical counsels the members become witnesses to a world to come, "awakening (in the young) hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise" (C 63); their consecrated life becomes in this way "the most precious gift we can offer to the young" (C 25).

Don Bosco's apostolic plan in fact aims at leading the members "to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2).

The young can then feel that God loves them, and they will give joyful thanks to him every time they see that today's Salesians have become "for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope" (C 196).

Marian aspect

As a conclusion to these brief introductory remarks, it will be useful to recall the Marian aspect of the present Constitutions.

Don Bosco was convinced that his particular spiritual and apostolic experience was a gift that came to him through the motherly hands of the Madonna: "The Blessed Virgin is our foundress. She will also be our support".²⁶

²⁶ BM VII, 197

Because of this the Constitutions display a certain Marian slant.

They assert in fact:

- that the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco "through the motherly intervention of Mary" (C 1);
- that "the Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work, especially in the foundation of our Society" (C 8);
- that "under the guidance of Mary his teacher, Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the 'Preventive System'" (C 20);
- that "Mary Immaculate, Help of Christians, leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord and gives us courage for the service of our brethren" (C 92).

Furthermore, the Constitutions explicitly proclaim the filial entrustment to Mary which characterizes every professed member (cf. C 8) and the whole Congregation as such (cf. C 9).

In fact, "led by Mary, we willingly accept the Constitutions as Don Bosco's will and testament, for us our book of life and for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope" (C 196). She it is, the Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, who helps us in faith to make of this text a book of prayer and commitment: our "way that leads to Love" (C 196).

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEXT

A synthetic presentation of the history of the text of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, from the first draft of 1858 to the approval of the renewed Constitutions after Vatican II in 1984, is equivalent to following in a certain perspective the life and work of Don Bosco and his Successors, the social and cultural vicissitudes over more than a century, and the ecclesiastical legislation enacted during the same period.

There are three components, so to speak, which affect the formation of the Constitutions of a religious institute:

1. *The Founder*, who brings the charisms he has received from God: he receives the divine call and determines the scope and spirit of "his" institute. This is the charismatic element which is proper to the Founder and which continues in the Congregation.

2. *The circumstances* which made the divine will clear to the Founder and led him to start work. The historical elements specify the objective and have an effect on the legislative form. These circumstances of time and place could be called the human element.

3. *Ecclesiastical legislation*: the life of an institute, born in the Church and for the Church, needs the doctrinal and moral security which only the Apostolic See can guarantee. This is the juridical element.

Salesian life too had these components which gave life to a fruitful legislation. It is not possible within the space of a short chapter to provide a complete, systematic and exhaustive treatment of more than a hundred years of civil, religious and salesian history. In view of the purpose of this Commentary, we shall limit ourselves to some remarks of a historical character which, by presenting the chief points in the history of the text we now have in our hands, will enable us

to better understand its significance and appreciate its values. Detailed bibliography dealing with the same argument can readily be found.¹

If we consider as milestones on the road of the salesian Constitutions the dates of 1874 (the year of approval of the Constitutions written by the Founder), 1923 (the year of approval of the text after it had been updated in the light of the Code of Canon Law of 1917, and 1984 (the year of the definitive approval of the renewed Constitutions after Vatican II), the history of our text can be divided into the following three periods or phases:

1. 1858-1875: the phase of the elaboration of the Constitutions through the work of Don Bosco himself.
2. 1875-1968: the phase of additions and corrections to the text to make it more precise.
3. 1968-1984: the phase of revision and redrafting of the Constitutions after Vatican II.

1. THE DRAWING UP OF THE CONSTITUTIONS BY DON BOSCO HIMSELF (1858-1875)

In this first phase, which lasted seventeen years, the most important steps in the development of the constitutional text are marked by two dates:

1.1 1864: The issue of the "Decretum laudis" and the formulation of the first 13 "animadversiones" by the competent Roman Congregation.

1.2 1874: The approval of the Constitutions of the Founder.

¹V. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE at the end of this Commentary

1.1 1864: The "Decretum laudis" and the formulation of the "animadversiones"

The first constitutional text drawn up by Don Bosco, on the basis of precise literary sources and after consultation in person and by letter with various civil and religious authorities of the time, dates from 1858. From it all future versions are derived by successive additions and corrections.

Of the 58 articles which made up that first text, 21 referred to the vows, 14 to government, 5 to the purpose of the Congregation, and 4 to the acceptance of members. The chapter on the "form of the Society" also included some articles of a heterogeneous nature. In addition to the "Introduction" which expressed motivations of a general character, of particular importance was the first chapter on the origin of the Society. There in rapid synthesis was found an account of the catechistical vicissitudes of the Oratory of Valdocco from 1841 onwards, which in the eyes of the salesians would have constituted the charismatic and normative experience which shaped their future.

That this however was no more than a provisional text is evident from the great lack of precision in juridical norms, notable lacunae concerning the relationship with religious authorities at diocesan and pontifical level, and the lack of indications concerning the prayer life of members of the Society. And so it happened that even before 18 December 1859 (the date of the formal birth of the Congregation of the Salesians), the first draft had already been modified by an addition to the objectives of the Society (the care of vocations), changes about the procedure for the election of councillors of the Rector Major, and the drafting of a chapter on the "practices of piety".

The revision of the text in the four years between the sending of the manuscript to the Archbishop of Turin and its transmission to the Holy See (1860-1864) already reflected the negotiations with the diocesan authorities concerning the opening of new houses and the official legislation of the Church, made known to everyone through the "Collectanea"

of Bizzarri.² The number of articles rose from 58 to 107 distributed over 15 chapters, in addition to the short introductory chapter and the formula for religious profession which was placed at the end. Norms were added for the religious government of the Society, the election of the Rector Major, the practices of piety, the habit of the confreres, and the "external" members.

On 23 February 1864 the Roman Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued the "Decretum laudis" by which it officially recognized the existence of the new Society. The decree was accompanied by 13 "animadversiones" to be taken into account in preparing the Constitutions for future approval.

1.2 1864-1875: Approval of the Constitutions and their publication in two languages

In the decade following the "Decree of praise" Don Bosco carried out continuous direct and indirect negotiations with the religious authorities at both central and local level, with a view to getting the Constitutions of the Society approved.

As soon as he received the 13 "animadversiones" he set to work to conform the text to the requests made by Rome. Some of these requests he accepted unreservedly; in the case of others he expressed clearly motivated objections. In particular he did not share the perplexity expressed by the Roman Congregations concerning the articles which gave the Superior General the faculty to dispense from vows, to issue dimissorial letters for sacred ordinations, to alienate goods and contract debts without the consent of the Holy See, to open new houses

² Until approx. 1860, Rome had left the numerous Congregations, that were springing up more or less everywhere in those years, a certain freedom in drawing up their own Statutes, reserving only the right to check them and suggest modifications if necessary; but in 1863 the "*Collectanea in usum Secretariae Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium*" (Rome 1863) was issued, which contained common norms wherein Founders would have to find models and inspiration

and to take on the direction of seminaries with the simple permission of the Ordinary.

The new text, in Latin, which was presented in 1867 together with a petition for the "approval of the Institute and of its Constitutions", received in Rome exactly the same observations as that of 1864. The good offices of Bishops and Cardinals favourable to Don Bosco had no effect on the competent Roman authorities who, on the basis of critical observations made among others by the new Archbishop of Turin, emphasized the little reliability of the ecclesiastical formation given in salesian houses. Another point that met with strong opposition was the formulation of the vow of poverty which allowed the members to keep their property while giving up by rule its use and enjoyment. But the objections of the Roman Curia did not prevent the approval of the Congregation by the Bishop of Casale in 1868 and the pontifical approval which followed a year later.

This approval in 1869 marked an important point in the history of the Salesian Congregation, but there remained a further step to be taken: the definitive approval of the Constitutions.

Don Bosco took in hand once again the printed text of 1867, made some small modifications to it and with the backing of more than twenty Bishops presented it once more in person to the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who in turn passed it to a new consultant for examination. The latter made 38 observations, subsequently reduced by the Secretary to 28, most of which were included by Don Bosco in the new text of 1873. He asked nevertheless that some of the requests be toned down, while others he strongly opposed in both official "Declarationes" and informal discussions during his visit to Rome at the beginning of 1874. On this occasion he took the opportunity to try to persuade Bishops and Cardinals not inclined to favour the definitive approval of the salesian Constitutions to change their minds, especially after the reception of an alarmist dossier of Mgr Gastaldi, in which he not only made precise criticisms about the religious and cultural formation of the Salesians but also asked that the Ordinary be given effective control over the communities of the Congregation.

Finally on 3 April 1874, with some further modifications, the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales were approved.

As compared with the first draft of 1858, and even that presented to Rome in 1864, the changes introduced were many and in some sectors quite radical. The increased number of juridical norms had obscured to some extent the basic inspiration of a spiritual nature that had characterized the first drafts. In particular, the foreword and the chapter on the history of the Congregation had been eliminated. The vows were to be triennial, before being renewed for a similar period or made in perpetuity. Admission to Orders "titulo Congregationis" would be possible only for members in perpetual vows. Norms were included for the convoking of the General Chapter and those who should take part in it, and for the election of members of the Superior Chapter. The articles on the vow of poverty had been completely rewritten along the lines of the Constitutions of the Marist Fathers, approved the previous year. Two new chapters had been introduced, one on studies and the other on the novitiate (which was to last an entire year, under the guidance of a Master of Novices and in a house erected for the purpose).

The Constitutions thus amended comprised 137 articles in 15 chapters, made up as follows:

Chap. I	Purpose of the Society	6 articles
Chap. II	Form of the Society	8 articles
Chap. III	The vow of obedience	5 articles
Chap. IV	The vow of poverty	7 articles
Chap. V	The vow of chastity	6 articles
Chap. VI	Religious government	7 articles
Chap. VII	Internal government	8 articles
Chap. VIII	Election of the Rector Major	9 articles
Chap. IX	The other superiors	17 articles
Chap. X	The individual houses	17 articles
Chap. XI	The acceptance of members	10 articles
Chap. XII	Studies	6 articles
Chap. XIII	Practices of piety	11 articles
Chap. XIV	The novitiate and master of novices	17 articles
Chap. XV	The habit	3 articles

The formula of profession and a "conclusion" on whether or not observance of the Constitutions was binding under pain of sin completed the manuscript text authenticated by the Apostolic See.

On his return from Rome Don Bosco saw to the printing, in the very same year, of the text into which he himself, with Prof. Lanfranchi, had introduced some slight modifications. The so-called "amendments of style and language" (wrongly attributed to the Barnabite Innocenzo Gobio) amounted in fact to a toning down of some of the normative prescriptions and gave a particular emphasis to some of the points Don Bosco had originally wanted, and which had become obscured during the approval process.³

The following year (1875), in the Italian edition, Don Bosco again retouched some of the norms already approved and published in Latin, and brought back some of the dispositions that had got lost in the previous drafting phases — this in virtue of an indult "vivae vocis oraculo" given him by the Pope.⁴ Considerable modification was made in particular to the chapter dealing with the novitiate (reduced from 17 to 7 articles). An "Introduction" of a doctrinal and theological nature, compiled by Don Bosco and in part by Don Barberis, preceded the constitutional text in the printed edition, which would be used by the Salesians and remain unaltered for the next thirty years.

2. THE CONSTITUTIONS MADE MORE PRECISE:

JURIDICAL REVISION AND AMPLIFICATION (1875-1968)

Immediately after the approval of the Constitutions, Don Bosco, as has already been said, amended them in virtue of the faculty given him "vivae vocis oraculo" by the Pope. In the course of the next eighty years the text underwent further modifications, and this despite the express intention of the Salesians to be faithful to Don Bosco and their almost instinctive fear of touching such venerable texts.

There were two main reasons which led to this. The first was the development of the Congregation: from a few dozen members living

³ The whole criteria underlying corrections to this text were presented by G. PROVERBIO in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane", n. 4 (January-June 1984) pp. 93-109

⁴ Cf. F. MOTTO, p. 20, with note 47

in Piedmont and Liguria in 1874, the Society grew by the 60's of the present century to more than 20,000, spread over nearly one hundred countries in all five continents; different countries and different times meant situations quite different from those in which Don Bosco had lived and worked, and these called for enlargement and more detailed statements in some sectors of our code of life.

To the internal development of the Congregation there was soon added a second motive of an ecclesiastical and juridical nature: the promulgation by the Apostolic See of documents expressly requesting religious institutes to make changes in the text of their Constitutions so as to bring them up to date; we may note in particular the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901, and the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917.

The immediate instruments for bringing about the necessary legislative interventions were the General Chapters of the Society with the series of their deliberations. It is quite true to say, in fact, that during this period it is impossible to follow the history of the Constitutions without detailing, at least in part, the history of the General Chapters.

There are however three events of fundamental importance which mark the history of the constitutional text during these eighty years:

2.1 1905: approval by the Holy See of the "deliberations ... which are to be considered organic in nature".

2.2 1923: approval of the Constitutions, modified so as to bring them into line with the Code of Canon Law of 1917.

2.3 1966: approval of the modifications made by the GC19 of 1965.

Reference will be made later (2.4) to the work of modifying the General Regulations, which went on in parallel with the successive revisions of the Constitutions.

2.1 1905: Approval of the "organic deliberations" to be inserted in the constitutional text of 1875

On 1 September 1905 the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued a decree approving the "Deliberations of the General Chapters

of the Pious Salesian Society, to be considered organic", which the Procurator General at the time (Fr Giovanni Marengo) had presented together with the Acts of the GC10. Let us take a brief look at what had happened in the previous thirty years.⁵

a. *During the lifetime of Don Bosco.*

With the approval of the Constitutions in April 1874, the Salesian Congregation became fully entitled to its place in the list of religious families which were publicly and officially recognized. Riding high on the Founder's charisma and the enthusiasm generated by the approval that gave it "a firm, secure and, we may add, infallible basis",⁶ the Society grew rapidly in membership and extended in all directions in both Europe and Latin America. But such expansion, accompanied by an equally wonderful growth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Salesian Cooperators, raised problems about its organization and consolidation. Even though very frequent, the verbal and written exhortations of Don Bosco, with which he took care to assist his Congregation in its early days, were no longer sufficient for the purpose.⁷ A regular process for the making of rules became imperative, and was in fact foreseen by the Constitutions: "In order to treat of things of greater moment, and to provide for all that the needs of the Society, the times and the places demand, a meeting of the General Chapter shall ordinarily be held once every three years" (chap. V, art. 3). "The General Chapter can furthermore propose any

⁵ A panorama of the historical evolution of the Constitutions from the first draft of 1858 to the death of Don Bosco (1888) is offered by P. STELLA, *Le Costituzioni salesiane fino al 1888*, in *Fedeltà e rinnovamento. Studi sulle costituzioni salesiane*, LAS - Roma, 1984, pp. 15-54. For the following period cf. in the same volume, the article by F. DESRAMAUT, *Le Costituzioni salesiane dal 1888 al 1966*, pp. 55-101.

⁶ Cf. Don Bosco's introduction to the Constitutions approved in 1874.

⁷ Until the GC1, life in salesian houses was regulated (in addition to the Constitutions) by the *"Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales"*, published in several editions, by the *"Regolamento per le Case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales"*, printed in 1877 after several manuscript editions, and by the Deliberations made in the so-called annual rectors' 'conferences'.

addition to the Constitutions, and any other such changes as it may consider to be desirable" (chap. V, art. 4).

And so in 1877 the First General Chapter of the Salesian Society issued in the space of a month more than 300 "deliberations", which were published in the following year.⁸ They covered five sectors of salesian life: study (5 chapters), common life (11 chapters), morality (4 chapters), economy (6 chapters) and regulations for provincials (4 chapters). Various appendices contained norms and regulations for the theatre, for rectors, for General Chapters, for the Association of Cooperators, and for the communities of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Three years later the GC2 re-examined all the previous legislation, both that emanating from the Chapters and that formulated in rectors' "conferences". The collection of new deliberations (more than 400 in number), which would be printed in 1882⁹ still appeared in five distinct sections, i.e.: special regulations (for the General Chapter, the Superior Chapter, the provincial, the rector, etc.), common life, piety and morality, studies, economy.

A subsequent publication of chapter deliberations took place in 1887¹⁰ at the end of the GC4 (the GC3 lasted only seven days and produced no special documents): these deliberations dealt with new aspects, and developed others which had been merely touched on previously. Some one hundred deliberations included detailed regulations for parishes, and also norms for sacred ordinations, festive oratories, the Salesian Bulletin, the preservation of the religious spirit, and vocations among the coadjutors and artisans.

⁸ *"Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877"*. Tipografia e libreria salesiana, Torino 1878 (96 p.)

⁹ *"Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880"*. Tipografia e libreria salesiana, Torino 1882 (88 p.)

¹⁰ *"Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-1886"*. Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1887 (28 p.)

b. *After the death of Don Bosco.*

After the death of the Founder, the legislative activity of the Society continued under his successor, Fr Michael Rua. The small volume printed in 1890¹¹, which contained the collected decisions of the GC5 held in the preceding year, comprised 11 chapters with a total of 117 articles. They contained legislation for philosophical and theological studies, and for confreres on military service; there were norms for the autumn vacations, for the administration of property, for the prefect of arts and trades, and a relatively large space (40 articles) was dedicated to regulations for parishes.

A further four years were to pass before the production of a systematic presentation of salesian law, in logical and detailed form, which would make possible the observance of the numerous decisions of the various General Chapters and coordinate them with the Constitutions. The work of the GC6, and of a commission that was occupied in the task for an entire year, led to the formulation of 712 "deliberations of the first six General Chapters", published both separately and also in a volume which contained the Constitutions of 1875 and Don Bosco's doctrinal "Introduction" as well.¹² As far as possible the order followed was that adopted by Don Bosco in the GC2, i.e.: *Special regulations* (art. 1-243); *common life* (art. 244-347); *piety* (art. 348-393); *morality* (art. 394-537); *studies* (art. 538-617); *economy* (art. 618-712).

The GC7 (1895) and GC8 (1898) made no special deliberations; the matters dealt with were those studied in previous Chapters and were published in the "Acts", so that the members (as Don Rua wrote in 1896) could be aware of the method of working of the capitular

¹¹ "Deliberazioni del quinto Capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuto in Valsalice presso Torino nel settembre 1889". Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1890 (36 p.)

¹² "Deliberazioni dei sei primi Capitoli generali della Pia Società salesiana precedute dalle Regole e Costituzioni della medesima". Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1894 (384 p.)

assembly, and be more rapidly informed of the decisions taken.¹³ Of importance for the history of the Constitutional text was the decision taken in the GC8 to proceed as soon as possible to a revision of the text of the Constitutions itself, on the basis of the text originally approved by the Holy See¹⁴, so as to insert in them some important deliberations of the General Chapters.

On 1 September 1901 the GC9 began. This was the last General Chapter in which all the rectors took part, together with the delegates of the individual houses; they were to put in order the deliberations made in the past, and in particular were to modify the decisions that had been made about rectors being confessors of their subjects, in obedience to the decree of the Holy Office of 24 April 1901.

But notwithstanding the good intentions of the chapter members and the self-sacrificing labours of the commission appointed for the purpose, they were unsuccessful and in the course of 1901 another edition of the Constitutions and preceding Deliberations was published, with nothing more than a recomposition of the sheets containing articles touched on in the previous Decree.

And so we reach the GC10, a Chapter which was to assume great importance. To meet the desire expressed by the GC9¹⁵ and on the

¹³ *"Deliberazioni del settimo Capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana"*. Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1896 (5 p.). It should be remembered that in all the Chapters ample powers were given to the Rector Major to enable him to revise, complete and put in order the decisions of the General Chapters. This caused delay in the publication of the deliberations. In an analogous manner in the GC7 certain themes (e.g. the relationship between the provincial and the rector of the provincial house, between provincials and families of Sisters dependent on them, etc.) were entrusted to the study of the Rector Major, who proposed them some months later in experimental articles to be submitted for approval at the next General Chapter

¹⁴ Cf. *"Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii"*. Ex officina asceterii salesiani. Augustae Taurinorum 1900, (54 p.). From 1903 onwards all editions of the Constitutions will adopt *'exemplum hoc Constitutionum ... ex earundem codice autographo penes Congregationem Episcoporum et Regularium asservato per quam diligentissime descriptum ac recognitum'*

¹⁵ "Let the Rector Major set up a permanent Commission which will see to the tidying up of those deliberations of previous General Chapters which are of a general character and complementary to our Constitutions, omitting those which are merely exhortative in character.

basis of the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901¹⁶, it had the task of re-ordering the entire body of earlier legislation, separating the deliberations of a general character and those complementing the Constitutions from others which merely expressed desires or simply provided guidelines. The work of the Chapter, which met from 23 August to 13 September of 1904, led to the publication of two texts fundamental for the history of the Society: *the "organic" deliberations and the "preceptive" ones*, both kinds being presented to the Holy See.

The first group, 111 in all, had been compiled and discussed in the Chapter's general assembly; they gained the approval of the Apostolic See and all became articles of the Constitutions.¹⁷ After being first published in a booklet of 50 pages,¹⁸ in 1907 they were

The remaining deliberations chosen by the Commission must be submitted once again to the next General Chapter before being sent to Rome for approval": GC9, 1 - 5 September 1901, Torino (no date) p. 9

¹⁶ Faced with the ever growing number of religious Congregations seeking from Rome the approval of their Constitutions, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the organ of the Holy See responsible for the approval of such institutes, drew up in the second half of the nineteenth century a juridical procedure for approval, which in 1901 became institutionalized in the "*Normae secundum quas S. Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium*". The document provided a model with minute details for the drawing up of Constitutions for new Institutes. This facilitated interventions of a juridical and administrative nature by the Roman Congregations, but at the same time made possible a dangerous levelling down of constitutional texts to a general uniformity

¹⁷ D. RUA, *Circulars*, p. 398. The term "organic", often used in the course of the General Chapters, and especially in the GC10, was never given by them a precise juridical meaning, but seems to have been considered synonymous with "constitutional". The synonym went back to the time of Don Bosco (cf. introduction to the deliberations of the GC1). The adjective in fact confirmed the concept already expressed in the noun to which it referred, i.e. "deliberation". The latter was to be considered as a constitutional article (Deliberation 33b). Very probably, in the mind of the legislators, the adjective was to be applied to those deliberations which added to or changed the Constitutions, and received their force of law only after the approval of the Apostolic See. The remaining deliberations on the other hand, which were not meant to change or add anything to the Constitutions even though general and permanent in character, were to be considered "preceptive" or "disciplinary" and were binding on all members as soon as they had been promulgated by the Rector Major. The sole purpose of the "*Regolamenti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales*" (Torino - Tipografia salesiana 1906) was to coordinate the preceptive deliberations

¹⁸ "*Deliberazioni dei Capitoli generali della Pia Società salesiana da ritenersi come organiche*". Tipografia salesiana - Torino 1905 (50 p.)

translated into Latin and published in a single bilingual edition with the extra articles inserted at the foot of the page;¹⁹ an asterisk was used to indicate the article of the Constitutions to which each deliberation referred.

All the chapters of the Constitutions, with the exception of chap. VIII (the election of the Rector Major), XII (studies) and XV (the habit) were amplified and enriched with further details and interpretations. In this way every aspect of salesian life underwent modification and integration at constitutional level. Here too should be emphasized some innovations which were to exert a noteworthy influence on future legislation in the Congregation. In chap. I two deliberations broadened the field of work open to the members to include the foreign missions (§1 h) and parishes (§6.4 "which as a rule we shall not accept"). In the chapters on the vows, details were given for a more rigorous separation between the community and externs, for a greater uniformity of life between the different houses, etc. In chapter VI were included precise regulations for General Chapters, and in chap. IX articles were inserted on the provinces and provincials, unknown before 1874.

The influence of the "Normae secundum quas" is clearly discernible, especially in the deliberations dealing with the vows, in quotations from ecclesial documents and in the Appendix to the edition of 1907, which carried the full text of the decrees '*Auctis admodum*' and '*Romani Pontifices*'.

2.2 1923: Approval of the Constitutions after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law

The promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 and the circular of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars of 26 August

¹⁹ "Constitutions of the Society of St Francis of Sales preceded by an Introduction written by the Founder Don John Bosco". Tipografia salesiana - Torine 1907 (304 p.). English translation, Salesian Press, London 1907

1918, in which religious institutes were directed to bring their Constitutions into conformity with the Church's laws and present them for re-approval,²⁰ set salesian canonists to work. Hardly three years passed before Pope Benedict XV approved a "new" constitutional text made up of 240 articles. It brought together the 137 of the first Constitutions of Don Bosco and the 111 'organic' articles approved in 1905, which had been completed in the General Chapter of 1910 by the addition of two others: one on the Procurator General for dealings with the Holy See, and one concerning the Secretary of the Superior Chapter. The whole was enriched too with specific contributions from the Code.

Although the Rector Major, Fr Philip Rinaldi, in his letter of 24 September 1921 wrote that "no substantial changes" had been introduced, he acknowledged nevertheless that some of the modifications were not without considerable importance, e.g. those concerning the rendiconto, the manner of admitting candidates to profession and sacred orders, and administration.²¹

It should be noted that although the rapidity with which the requests of the Apostolic See were complied with bore witness to the immediate submission to the new indications of the Church and respect for the prescriptions of the new Code of Canon Law, on the other hand it meant that the result was far from perfect. Only 16 months after the pontifical approval, we find the same Don Rinaldi writing: "(The edition of 1921) appears defective in several points: there is a lack of logical connection in the way the different items are arranged, and both partial and total repetitions occur with a certain frequency: defects which arose in the course of the work necessary to bring everything into line with the new Code. Moreover although the General Chapter had the authority to make changes other than those imposed by the Church, some articles have been allowed to remain in the Constitutions which

²⁰ *Ad normam Canonis 489 Codicis Juris Canonici 'Regulae et particulares Constitutiones singularum religionum, canonibus Codicis non contrariae, vim suam servant; quae vero eisdem opponuntur, abrogatae sunt' ac proinde earum textus emendandus erit*. AAS 1918, p. 290

²¹ ACS n. 6, 24 September 1921, p. 261

have by now been rendered out of date in practice because of the overall organization of our Society".²²

The GC12, convoked in 1922, worked to eliminate these defects and was encouraged by a new declaration of the Sacred Congregation (26 October 1921) which advised legislative organisms of religious institutes to take the opportunity offered by the necessity of bringing the constitutional text into line with the new Code, to introduce also other changes that were thought useful. The results of the chapter's work, entrusted at the end to a special commission for a final polishing as regards language and style, led in fact to a complete revision of the Constitutions: it was a case of rearranging all the material in chapters according to the original division, of disposing the articles in logical fashion within the individual chapters, of eliminating repetitions, of correcting the literary form, and of introducing small modifications called for by the times and by the development of the Society.

Approved on 19 June 1923, the new text contained 201 articles (39 fewer than its predecessor), distributed in 17 chapters. Without going into a detailed analysis of the modifications made in the editing phase,²³ one may note:

a) the reorganization of chapters: two chapters of the original Constitutions have been joined up to make one (chap. VI: religious government; chap. VII: internal government); the articles with the "organic deliberations" on the General Chapter and on the provinces, formerly inserted among the heterogeneous articles, were given autonomy in two specific chapters: the Provinces (chap. IX), and the General Chapter (chap. XI). In this way the titles of the individual chapters acquired greater logical precision, more suited to their actual content;

b) a more explicit statement concerning the single concept of authority: a constitutional definition of the figure of the Provincial was given, by analogy with that of the Rector Major;

²² ACS n. 17, 6 January 1923, p. 42

²³ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, "Le Costituzioni salesiane", op. cit. pp. 80-96

c) important interventions in the field of formation, and particularly with respect to the novitiate: there was an almost literal insertion of some statements of the Code, but attention was concentrated rather on the spiritual progress of the young confrere.

The principal options of the mission of the Society, of its works and of religious life were not changed in any way.

2.3 1966: Approval of the modifications made by the GC19

In contrast with what happened in the case of the Regulations, which were revised at various times, the Constitutions approved in 1923 remained practically unchanged for something like forty years. The GC15 of 1938 suppressed an item concerning the participation of Vicars and Prefects Apostolic in the General Chapter. The GC16 (1947) raised the number of members of the Superior Chapter to five from the three that had been laid down in 1923. The edition of the Constitutions prepared in 1954 was a reprint of earlier editions, with some small modifications of no great importance.

Much greater significance, on the other hand, attaches to the GC19, held at Rome in the new buildings of the salesian Atheneum. This one could be seen as a link between previous General Chapters and the Special Chapter of 1971.

Viewed as a whole the legislative set-up of 1923 did not undergo any radical change but small revisions were numerous and sometimes of no little significance, especially as regards structures, reflecting as they did an opening up to the conciliar renewal already under way. It is important to recall in this connection the attention given by this Chapter to the figure of the salesian, the care for preserving unity of the Congregation in decentralization, the explicit recognition of the role of the General Chapter (to the Regulations for which considerable time was given), the particular importance given to the Cooperators, the increase in number of the members of the Superior Council (previously called Superior Chapter) by the addition of Regional Councillors, the new figures of Vice-Provincial and Vice-Rector, etc.

The modifications to the Constitutions and Regulations introduced by the GC19 were published under the following headings:²⁴

1. Substantial modifications of a definitive kind: the revision of 11 articles and the formulation of 2 new ones (one on the periodic publication of the 'Acts of the Superior Council' and one on the election of the members of the Superior Council which was to take place at a certain length of time after the beginning of the General Chapter).

2. Experimental modifications: concerning the number of members of the Superior Council and a different structure within the Council itself.

3. Juridical updating and revision (involving 7 articles).

There were also some changes of a purely formal nature, while some other proposed variations (in 6 articles) were not approved.

But this was no more than a prelude: four months after the ending of the GC19 the Council Fathers of Vatican II approved the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which called upon all religious institutes to make an "opportune renewal" by means of an "appropriate revision" of the Constitutions, Directories and other official books and codes "in line with conciliar documents" (PC 3;4).

2.4 A note on the drawing up of the General Regulations

The legislative organs of the Congregation did not limit their work to the Constitutions, which had to be revised in accordance with the laws of the Church and the development of the Society. They had also to make parallel interventions from another aspect, that of the General Regulations.

As we have already seen, a first systematic arrangement of salesian law came into effect in 1894 with the publication of the

²⁴ ASC 244, January 1966, pp. 221-236

"Deliberazioni dei primi sei Capitoli generali della Pia Società Salesiana". In 1906, following the work of the GC10, an edition of the *General Regulations* was published, which brought together all the previous editions and also all the decisions of the General Chapters that had taken place up to that time.

A further important moment in the drawing up of the Regulations followed the GC12. The need to "1. eliminate everything considered useless or too cumbersome; 2. introduce the necessary modifications and additions; 3. arrange everything in the most logical way"²⁵ resulted in the reduction to 416 articles in the 1924 edition of the previous massive number of 1406 in the previous text. This codification remained practically unchanged in its main aspects until the Special General Chapter. The more substantial modifications were inserted in the editions of 1954 and 1966. The former included the collected deliberations of the GC15, GC16 and GC17 referring especially to the houses of formation (aspirantate, novitiate, studentates and houses for further training of coadjutors), while the latter carried the decisions of the GC19 relating to numerous articles. The themes most in need of adaptation to the evolution of times and places included those of formation, the practices of piety, the Union of Salesian Cooperators and the Pontifical Salesian Atheneum. But despite this the basic arrangement remained more or less unchanged.

3. THE REDRAFTING AND DEFINITIVE APPROVAL OF THE CONSTITUTIONS (1968-1984)

The text of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society which we now possess received pontifical approval after a long period of reflection, study and decisions, which the entire Society, from individual confreres scattered around the world to Chapter members gathered in representative assembly at the highest level, undertook in response to

²⁵ Cf. General Introduction, p. 20-21

²⁶ *"Special 20th General Chapter of the Salesian Society"*, Rome 1971 (658 p.). A brief history

²⁵ D. RINALDI, Introduction to the *"Regolamenti della Società salesiana"*, Epifania del Signore, Torino 1924

the guidelines given by Vatican II. The work took seventeen years, during which time the Congregation made a sustained effort of situational analysis and constitutional synthesis unmatched over the previous hundred years of life.

In this period there were three principal phases:

3.1 1968-1972: this was the most decisive phase of the renewal; it was centred around the Special General Chapter (GC20) and led to the renewed text of the Constitutions which was approved for an experimental period on 5 January 1972.

3.2 1977-1978: the GC21 began the revision of the preceding text.

3.3 1984: the GC22 brought the twelve years of experimentation to an end.

3.1 1971-1972 The Constitutions renewed experimentally by the SGC

The "reshaping" programmes outlined by the GC19 remained to some extent on paper. Six months after the decree "Perfectae caritatis" there appeared another document of great importance, "Ecclesiae Sanctae", a practical direct and authoritative application of some of the decrees of Vatican II, which prescribed that in the course of the next two or three years every religious institute should convoke a "special" General Chapter for the purpose of revising the Constitutions without prejudice to the scope, nature and character of the institute.²⁶

After being authorized by the Holy See to postpone its beginning (but not beyond the normal interval between Chapters of six years), in October 1968 the salesians started on the preparatory work for this Special Chapter which began in June 1971.

It should be noted that Ecclesiae Sanctae did not ask only for a simple updating of legislation in harmony with the needs of the times,

²⁶ ES II 3; 6

and specify who bore the responsibility for such renewal. It also spelled out the elements that were to be brought together in the renewed text. It was a question, in fact, of making notable modifications to the very concept of religious constitutions and to their literary genre: from being primarily juridical as in the past, they had to be given a slant which respected, and even highlighted, the charismatic reality of the religious. The change of perspective becomes very clear, as was stated in the introduction,²⁷ from a comparison between the directives of the "Normae secundum quas" and those of "Ecclesiae Sanctae".

The prescriptions of the Council were clear and the whole Congregation set about preparing for the celebration of the Special General Chapter with three years of work, at a basic level through the consultation and sensitization of every community, and at intermediate level through the convocation of two provincial chapters and various preparatory commissions and subcommissions. All the research, studies and proposals eventually reached the 202 members of the General Chapter which, through its own commissions and subcommissions, made a deep study of all the main themes regarding salesian identity and mission, and finished up (after nearly seven months of intense work and no fewer than 140 plenary assemblies) by approving a profoundly "renewed" constitutional text. Every chapter, every article, every phrase had been examined and corrected in a search for a precision of language, a brevity and clarity of expression which would highlight all the richness of the salesian vocation. Not for nothing was the true and final drafting of the text preceded by long theological, historical and pastoral reflection, with the purpose of throwing light on situations and perspectives and the consequent choices, even of an editorial nature.²⁸

²⁷ Cf. General Introduction, p. 20-21

²⁸ "Special 20th General Chapter of the Salesian Society", Rome 1971 (658 p.). A brief history of the renewed Constitutions is given by J. AUBRY: "Come sono nate le nuove costituzioni. Iter dei lavori dal 1968 al 1972" in "Fedeltà e rinnovamento ...", LAS 1974, pp. 205-216

Here it will be sufficient to draw attention to some of the more salient points, leaving a complete analysis of the Chapter's work to more specific studies:²⁹

1. The general plan of the Constitutions remained more or less unchanged, though some topics were given greater space while others appeared for the first time at constitutional level: among the latter, for example, were the treatment of the Salesian Family, the salesian spirit, work for collective human advancement, a different approach to the parish as a salesian work, a more complete description of the complementary nature of the members (priest and brother), the educative community, a particular emphasis on collective poverty, ongoing formation, principles and criteria for the organization of the Society, etc.

2. More than 150 articles of the Constitutions of 1966 found expression in as many articles of the renewed Constitutions. Of the other 50, some 15 were suppressed, while 35 were transferred to the General Regulations in conformity with the directives of *Ecclesiae Sanctae* and the evolution of Canon Law. It should be noted, however, that although the total number of articles remained identical this was not true of their content, which was notably enriched in ecclesial and salesian doctrine.

3. Even a cursory examination reveals that there had been a retrieval in depth of the thought of Don Bosco and a century of salesian tradition: this was especially evident with regard to the unity of life of the Salesian ("inseparably apostolic and religious"); the values of communion, friendship and reciprocal trust; the fundamental elements of the salesian spirit which pervade the whole text. It was evident too from a literary standpoint in the frequent implicit and explicit quotations from the Constitutions as written by the Founder and from other sources which go back to Don Bosco and his first collaborators.

4. At a deeper level one may note that the perspective and theological structure underlying the new text of the Constitutions had

²⁹ *ibid.* pp. 217-250

changed, in harmony with the ecclesiology and doctrine on religious life of Vatican II.

5. Finally the style of linguistic expression had been changed to meet the demands of the conciliar renewal. But the vocabulary adopted did not always harmonize the need to express new concepts and new realities with our traditional simplicity of style. One of the tasks of the following General Chapter would be to produce a stylistic redrafting for greater clarity of expression and simplicity of tone.

3.2 1977-1978: The beginning of the revision of the Constitutions and the work of the GC21

A fundamental task of the GC21 was to revise the Constitutions (and Regulations) approved experimentally by the SGC on 4 January 1972. At the end of the first six-year experimental period, provincial chapters and individual confreres had in fact sent to the General Chapter their observations and suggestions.

On the basis of precise working criteria, the observations expressed "requests for clarification of certain concepts or more precise terminology; they also suggested stylistic improvements in the text of the Constitutions. A limited number of proposals were made concerning more fundamental aspects of certain texts".³⁰

The GC21 noted the overall acceptance of the Constitutions by the confreres, but in the awareness too that the text had not yet become fully known, assimilated and tried out, it made the following decisions:

1. It confirmed the text approved by the SGC and extended the experimental period for a further six years.
2. It introduced some modifications considered necessary to fill lacunae or to make the text more precise and complete. In particular it introduced four new articles: one on the intellectual formation of

³⁰ *Declaration of the GC21 in "Chapter Documents"*, Rome 1978, n. 371

the members, and three on the structure of "Delegations". Other modifications made concerned the laity who share responsibility in the salesian mission, the formula of profession, the role of the Superior in community discussions, the formation of young confreres in "formation communities", a better definition of the roles of three of the Councillors General (for formation, youth pastoral work, and the Salesian Family). Six other articles were made more precise from a juridical standpoint.

The GC21 also decided to pass the working documents drawn up by the "Commission for the revision of the Constitutions and Regulations" to the next General Chapter, which would prepare the revised text to be submitted for definitive approval.

Similar decisions were made in respect of the General Regulations.

3.3 1984: Definitive approval of the new text of the Constitutions

The preparations for the next phase of work, with a view to the drafting of the definitive text, began as early as June 1978, when a "Constitutions Group" was set up with the task of highlighting the historical continuity of the renewed text with the preceding editions, of emphasizing its charismatic and normative content, and of studying its doctrinal foundations.

Two volumes of aids were prepared,³¹ the first of which carried the document of the "Constitutions and Regulations" Commission of the GC21 and a synthesis of the points of greater importance which had come to light in the GC20 and GC21. These, together with the critical edition of the "Constitutions of Don Bosco" were made available both to provincial chapters and to the members of the new General Chapter. They provided an instrument which fostered continuity in the work of revision.

³¹ *"Contributi di studio su Costituzioni e Regolamenti SDB"* 1, 2. Rome 1982

Considerable influence on the revision of the Constitutions was also exerted by the great texts of the magisterium and legislation of the Church (of which the last in chronological order was the Code of Canon Law published a few months before the GC22 began), of the GC21, of salesian directives (Acts of the Superior Council and aids prepared by various Departments), of studies carried out in the Congregation in widely different places by individual experts and by research groups.

The GC22, which opened on 14 January 1984, also had available two volumes of "Schemi precapitolari": a complete dossier of more than 1000 pages containing an orderly presentation of the contributions of provincial chapters and individual confreres, together with indications and proposals designed to make easier the work of revision for the members of the Chapter.

The fact that the text promulgated by the SGC had met with a very positive acceptance by the Congregation — this had been confirmed by the replies to a questionnaire completed by members of provincial chapters — made easier the work of the capitular assembly, which carried out its work in a perspective of continuity with the SGC and the text it had drawn up.

Through the general assemblies and commissions through which it works, and in continual contact with a central commission for the drafting of the text (which had the duty of correcting differences of style and language, and especially of suggesting general criteria for the work of revision), the GC22 first decided on the general structure of the text,³² and then proceeded to a careful analysis of each chapter and article, so as to reach eventually the approval of a definitive text. Approved too were some deliberations and practical guidelines, together with a small booklet "An Aid to the Constitutions and Regulations" which, while not involving the authority of the Chapter, had the purpose of making it easier for the confreres, in the period immediately following the GC22, to understand the new structure of the constitu-

³² Cf. chap. III of this commentary on the general structure of the text, p. 61 ff.

tional text, emphasizing the aspects that had been more deeply analysed, modified and reformulated.

The work of the Chapter ended on 12 May, after having entrusted to the Rector Major and his Council a final literary revision of the text and its presentation to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for definitive approval.³³ Between the end of May and the end of November there were various meetings of the General Council and of the relevant organs of the competent Roman Congregation for a dialogue from which was to emerge the approved text.³⁴

On 25 November 1984, after modifications to some thirty articles which had taken place in the course of this dialogue (concerned mainly with greater juridical exactness), the text was definitively approved. On the following 8 December it was promulgated by the Rector Major. And so came to an end the process of redrafting the Constitutions which had kept the Congregation busy at every level for more than fifteen years.

³³ Already from 1834 the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had been using a process for approval similar to that in use at the present time, i.e. a first phase at the level of consultors, followed by a second at the level of a "Congress of the Sacred Congregation", at which the request for approval was decided on with the drawing up of the relevant decree

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

After reviewing the principal events in the history of our Constitutions so as to gather all their spiritual and salesian richness, it will be useful to look at the overall structure of the text, i.e. the general plan lying behind both the organization and distribution of the contents and the mode of presenting them, so as to make of them an authentic salesian Rule.

One may note at the outset that the question of structure was the object of deep and interesting analysis in the SGC and also in the GC22 which carried out the work of final revision.

As was said earlier in the historical remarks, the SGC heeded the bidding of Vatican II, and opted for a profoundly renewed text, rooted in the inspired intuitions of Don Bosco as they were expressed in the Constitutions he wrote himself, but reconstructed according to the theology and ecclesiology of the Council. At the end of its work, the SGC itself declared: "The extent of the work undertaken made it necessary to divide up the material in a different way, so that one can now speak of a new text even though in large part it presents the substance of the former Constitutions, but in an up to date manner".¹ The SGC also had the task of deciding on the language and literary style considered most suitable for a true and stimulating Rule of life.

The GC22 too dedicated various capitular discussions to an examination of the general structure of the text, and if on the one hand it confirmed the line taken by the SGC as regards the doctrinal and charismatic presentation, on the other it made a deeper study of how the material should be distributed so as to produce a more organic and unified arrangement.

¹ Cf. FC 23

² Cf. *Radiografia delle relazioni dei Capitoli episcopali speciali*, Roma 1969, especially pp. 162-169

³ Cf. ES II, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

¹ *Declaration of the Special General Chapter XX* in "Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales" 1972, pp. 11-12

From this brief preamble, still historical in character, one can understand something of the significance of the structure of the text. In fact the manner of organizing and presenting the contents gives to the salesian apostolic project set out in the Constitutions the typical and strongly unified physiognomy which is characteristic of our Society.

We shall now dwell briefly on the criteria lying behind the drafting of the text, and on some elements concerning the organization of the material.

1. The criteria for drawing up the text of the Constitutions

For a clearer understanding of the general plan of our Rule, as it emerged from the General Chapter's revision, it is important to keep in mind the CRITERIA underlying the analysis of the contents and the entire work of revision.

These criteria follow substantially from the guidelines of Vatican II, but also to some extent from requests made by the confreres and hence coming from the experience of the Congregation itself.

As far as the documents of the Magisterium are concerned, it is well-known that Vatican II, and subsequently *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, had provided authoritative guidelines for the revision of the texts of Constitutions.² In particular the decree "Perfectae caritatis", while asking religious institutes to revise their Constitutions in the light of the Council documents, had indicated among the principles of the renewal of religious life to be kept in mind: "a constant return to the sources of the whole of the christian life", and hence "the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel"; a return to "the primitive inspiration of the institute" and "therefore the spirit and aims of each Founder should be faithfully accepted and retained, as indeed should each

² Cf. PC 2,3; ES II, 12-14

institute's sound traditions"; and finally "adaptation to the changed conditions of the times".³

These criteria, dictated by the Church's Magisterium, corresponded in fact to the requests put forward by confreres from different parts of the Congregation, precisely in view of the work of revision.

What was asked for essentially was that the text of the Constitutions should have a more explicit biblical, theological and ecclesial foundation, and that at the same time its salesian inspiration should be clearly evident, in fidelity to the spirit and purpose of our Founder and the traditions of our Society. It was also asked that the Constitutions should contain only those juridical norms which were of universal application and essential for preserving the unity of the Congregation, thus accepting the principles of flexibility and decentralization as an expression of adaptation to different times and places.⁴

Starting from the indications of the Council and the points made by the confreres, and in the light also of the Code of Canon Law, the GC22 formulated the fundamental criteria which guided the definitive revision and gave shape to the overall arrangement of the text.

A rapid review of them may prove useful:

— *The evangelical and ecclesial criterion:*

this judges whether the text respects the evangelical and theological principles of the religious life, its charismatic nature as the "sequela Christi" and its sharing in the mystery and mission of the Church.⁵

— *The historical and salesian criterion:*

this determines whether, in addition to passing historical expressions, there are present those values which constitute the spiritual "patrimony" of our Society.⁶

³ Cf. PC 2,3

⁴ Cf. "Radiografia delle relazioni dei Capitoli ispettoriali speciali", Roma 1969, especially pp. 162-169

⁵ Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

⁶ Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

— *The juridical and normative criterion:*

this guarantees the presence and clear expression in the text of the essential juridical norms needed to define the character, objective and means of the institute.⁷

As well as these and with reference to the content, other criteria concern the *literary style*, which calls for: simple and modern language, and concern for conciseness and an organic arrangement of the material.

A further criterion of a general character ("*differentiating criterion for normative texts*") judges whether a particular item forms part of the fundamental code (i.e. Constitutions), or should more properly belong to other texts of our "particular law" (General Regulations or Directories).

Finally, the importance should be kept in mind of the so-called "*criterion of experience*" which makes use of the rich experience gathered in twelve years of experiment and expressed by both provincial chapters and confreres.⁸

2. The ordering of the content of the text

We shall not delay at this point to examine to what extent the constitutional text conforms to these criteria; the commentary in its various parts and chapters will provide exhaustive evidence in this respect. But it will be useful to point out how the above criteria have shaped the overall structure.

In the first place it is quite easy to see, as was said in the brief historical excursus, that the general theological setting of the new constitutional text fully reflects the theology and ecclesiology of Vatican II.⁹ This is evident not only from the ample and constant references

⁷ Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

⁸ Cf. ASC 305 (1982), p. 43

⁹ Cf. chap. II of this commentary: "A brief History of the text", pp. 54-57

to conciliar and pontifical teaching (using the Council's theological terminology), but especially from the fact that the whole salesian apostolic project is presented against the background of the conciliar ecclesiology: in the Church, a people gathered together in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", which is the "universal sacrament of salvation", the humble salesian Society which "came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C 1) is called to be a sacrament of salvation for youth ("signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" - C 2).

Fidelity to the origins, i.e. to the evangelical patrimony of the Founder, is also evident throughout the constitutional text.

Not only is there frequent and rich reference, direct or indirect,¹⁰ to the word of Don Bosco, but it is clear that the text is a description of the spiritual and apostolic experience of the Founder, continued by his sons. Salesian life at the present day is constantly presented and assessed in the light of Don Bosco, his sanctity and his charism as a Founder: in this way the Constitutions represent the vital continuity of the spirit and practice of Don Bosco in the activity of his disciples today.

Worth recalling too is the effort made all through the work of revision to maintain an opportune and duly proportioned blending of spiritual and juridical elements, as desired by Vatican II and by the Code of Canon Law itself.¹¹ One of the objectives kept carefully in mind by the General Chapters was that of making the Constitution a real volume of spiritual life: a book which provides an interior prompting to follow Jesus in the style of Don Bosco, a book of meditation and prayer (cf. C 196). And so the juridical norms in the text have been reduced to a minimum, leaving only those needed for a clear definition of the purpose of the Institute, the bonds which bind members to the Society, and the community structures necessary for

¹⁰ In the text of the Constitutions there are 31 explicit quotations (often literal) of the words of Don Bosco (cf. Foreword, and articles 1. 4. 8. 13. 14. 15. 17. 18. 19. 26. 29. 34. 38. 39. 50. 52. 64. 65. 71. 72. 79. 81. 83. 85. 91). In addition there are 45 other explicit references to Don Bosco and his thought in as many other articles.

¹¹ Cf. CIC, can. 587.3

the life and activity of the Society itself. Norms, even of universal application, which deal with the application of general principles expressed in the Constitutions, have been transferred to the Regulations.

These considerations help to the better understanding of the general plan governing the distribution and ordering of the contents in the renewed text.

While emphasizing, as has been said, the substantial continuity of the great themes which define the Salesian project in the various editions of the Rule (themes which can be grouped around certain key words: *mission, community, evangelical counsels, formation, service of authority*), one cannot fail to note the structural changes introduced by the SGC and later by the GC22. While in fact the Constitutions written by the Founder (and the subsequent editions until 1966) developed the themes of salesian religious life in successive chapters without further divisions, the Constitutions approved in 1984 contain *14 chapters distributed in four parts*, as is clear from the general index:¹²

FOREWORD

First part

THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN THE CHURCH

Chap. I - III: art. 1-25 (25 articles)

Second part

SENT TO THE YOUNG - IN COMMUNITIES - FOLLOWING CHRIST

Chap. IV - VII: art. 26-95 (70 articles)

¹² Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales 1984*, pp. 340-341

Third part
FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS
Chap. VIII - IX: art. 96-119 (24 articles)

Fourth part
THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN OUR SOCIETY
Chap. X - XIV: art. 120-190 (71 articles)

CONCLUSION
Art. 191-196 (6 articles)

As can be seen, the four parts have been preceded by a FOREWORD and followed by a CONCLUSION.

On examining this General Index the question spontaneously arises: what was the *FUNDAMENTAL IDEA* which led the GC22 to arrange the contents of the Rule of life in this way? i.e. what is the motivation underlying the structure of the text?

Such motivation, which became clear from the capitular discussions but which is also evident from an analysis of the text itself, is that of the *unity of our life of consecrated apostles*: that of unity of the salesian vocation, which the SGC speaks of as a "grace" given us by the Spirit.¹³

This motive of the "unity" of the salesian vocation was certainly present in the original text written by our Founder: it is evident from the very first article which presents the "scope" of the salesian Society in its essential elements.

Concern for the unity of the salesian project was continually present in the SGC, which already gave some thought to the arrangement

The FOURTH PART is dedicated to a precise definition of authority with the structures necessary for the organization of the Society. Although our Congregation is charismatic in origin, it is made up of individuals gathered together in concrete communities and

¹³ Cf. SGC 127: "The Holy Spirit calls the salesian to an option of christian existence which is at the same time apostolic and religious. Thus he gives him the *grace of unity* to live the dynamism of apostolic action and the fullness of religious life in a single movement of charity towards God and his neighbour"

of the contents of the Rule, from which it followed that "by a unique call Christ invites us to follow him in his saving work and in the life of celibacy and poverty he chose for himself".¹⁴

In the GC22 and hence in the text finally approved by the Apostolic See, the unity of our life is shown even more clearly through the deeper analysis of our APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION.

Religious consecration, which has its deep roots in baptismal consecration of which it is a fuller expression,¹⁵ is presented in its original significance as an initiative of the love of God which invests all our life: God calls us, "consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young" (C 3). In this consecration is manifested the powerful action of grace which helps us to live the vocation as a gift of God for the Church and for the world, a gift which in our case passes through Don Bosco and his spirit. For our part the "consecrated" life, with the obligations we assume before God and the Church, becomes a single, free and total offering to God in Christ and through Christ, to work with him for the building of the Kingdom.

We shall see in greater detail, in the commentary on art. 3, how the deep unity of the different elements which constitute the response of our consecrated life is described: apostolic mission, fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels: they are lived "in a single movement of love".

We can say that *the general plan of the Constitutions draws its inspiration from this basic third article*: the overall structure and the arrangement of the parts and chapters was chosen so as to provide an organic treatment which would make immediately clear the unity of our vocation.

Later we shall look at the development of the individual parts, but even at this stage we can make a synthetic appraisal of their fundamental significance.

¹⁴ Cf. *Constitutions* 1972, art. 68

¹⁵ Cf. PC 5

After a brief FOREWORD of a historical nature, which shows from the outset the importance of the Rule for us in the thought of Don Bosco himself, the FIRST PART (which could be called "*introductive and foundational*") traces out the basic outline of the salesian vocation with its distinguishing notes, and describes its place in the Salesian Family, in the Church and in the world. It is the function of this part too to highlight some essential traits which enter and characterize other parts of the text: in particular the "salesian spirit" (chap. II) and the profession of the salesian (chap. III).

Next comes the lengthy SECOND PART which presents the "*central body*", as it were, of the salesian religious project: it describes in detail the various "inseparable" elements of the salesian vocation: the apostolic mission, the fraternal community and evangelical life according to the counsels, dialogue with the Lord. It is especially in this second part that there appears very clearly that unity of the apostolic consecrated life of which we spoke above: the different aspects of our vocation, in fact, integrate and throw light on each other, and contribute together to outlining the physiognomy of the true salesian.

The two parts which follow might seem at first sight to be less strongly linked with the vocational identity described in the first and second parts, but this is not really the case: although the themes dealt with are of a more practical character (and therefore call necessarily for more juridical elements) they integrate fully in the apostolic project traced out in the Constitutions as a whole.

The THIRD PART deals with the incorporation of members in the Society and their initial and ongoing formation. The Congregation lives in its members and must offer them the means to develop the salesian charism and to acquire daily the necessary ability for the life and mission: this is the task of "*formation*".

The FOURTH PART is dedicated to a presentation of *the service of authority* with the structures necessary for the organization of the Society. Although our Congregation is charismatic in origin, it is made up of individuals gathered together in concrete communities and carrying out precise educational and pastoral tasks: like the Church, spiritual and juridical at the same time, it needs structures for its constitution and government, for efficacious activity and the maintaining

of its vitality: this is the particular obligation of those who are called to exercise the service of authority.

The text ends with some articles placed as a CONCLUSION; if on the one hand they make more precise some juridical norms for the interpretation of the text, on the other they provide a stimulus to follow faithfully the way of Love, in a generous response to the Lord who has first loved us.

3. Some characteristics of the editing process

Before ending these reflections on the general structure of the Constitutions it may be useful to add a comment on some characteristics of the editing process which help to give to the text its particular and original appearance. We refer especially to the "titles" of the parts, chapters and individual articles, to the terminology and style, and to the biblical inspirational texts placed at the beginning of chapters and sections.

3.1 The "titles" used in the text

Both the SGC and the GC22 made a careful choice of the titles for the various parts and chapters, so that they would correspond faithfully to the matters dealt with: an indication of the care taken is evidenced by the fact that although the titles were not to be voted on, they were nevertheless examined and discussed in the study commissions and in the general assembly of the Chapter.

It will be of use to point out the personal tone given to the titles of the different parts (and especially the first three) of the text as definitively approved: a reading of the titles in succession provides a synthesis of the path the salesians (individuals and communities) are called upon to follow so as to respond faithfully to their vocation: *"The Salesians of Don Bosco ... sent to the young, in communities, following Christ ... formed for the mission of pastors and educators"*.

The sub-titles attached to individual articles were an innovation introduced by the SGC: they provide brief and immediate indications, in the margin of each article, of its essential content and underlying idea, and enable a synthetic vision to be obtained of the succession of the material in the chapters.

The titles therefore, whether of parts, chapters or single articles, act as guides in the understanding of the text and the committing of its contents to memory.

3.2 Style and terminology

As we have already said, among the requests that came from the confreres in view of the revision of the Constitutions was one for a language that would be simple and easily understood, but at the same time suitable for a legislative text and adequate for the new requirements. The criteria laid down by both the SGC and the GC22 showed concern for simplicity of style combined with the need for the terminology to be in harmony with the conciliar doctrine and have the spiritual tone proper to a Rule of life.

It is quite easy to see from a reading of the text the effort that was made and the evident change of style that resulted, as compared with earlier editions.

This is evident right from the Foreword which begins: "*For us Salesians* our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament". There is an innovation here in the very first words. Earlier editions of the Constitutions were expressed in the third person: "The Society ..., the members ..., the member ..." and formulated norms in the imperative or exhortative form, expressed in the future or subjunctive tense: "The members will attend to the perfecting of themselves... Let brotherly union be maintained... Let the time-table be so arranged that...". The new text has quite a different and more stimulating tone; quite deliberately "we" has been used more often and the declaratory form of the present indicative has been preferred. Instead of saying: "the salesian will do this", or "let him do this", or "the salesian must do this", it is more generally

expressed now in the form: "we do this", or "the salesian does this", where the sense is: "we have decided together to do this", "we accept that we should do this", "we loyally make the effort to do this". This kind of formulation does not in the least mean that the normative force of the Constitutions has been diminished, but rather implies the active intervention of conscience with respect to the law; it means that the Rule has been freely accepted by people who have said 'yes' to a plan of life and are united in its realization; it also expresses the fact that the salesians are in agreement about their identity, and that through their fidelity they feel their permanent and shared responsibility for the personal and community success of the mission God has entrusted to them.

4. The Bible and the Constitutions

A lengthy and more complete discussion would really be needed as regards the biblical quotations which are present in the constitutional text in abundance, and which in a certain way provide a biblical inspiration for reading and meditating with fruit on our Rule of life.

This is another innovation in the text renewed according to the Council's teaching: the great riches of the "Word of God" in it means that we are in contact with a text totally based on the Gospel. We shall have abundant evidence of this in the commentary on the individual parts; here we shall do no more than make some reflections of a general character which will help us to better understand its value.

4.1 An act of fidelity to God, to the Church and to the Council

"In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them".¹⁶ This in brief is the real

¹⁶ DV, 21

reason why Vatican II invites us "earnestly and insistently" to be "continually in touch with the Scriptures" so as to learn "the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ" (Phil 3,8).¹⁷

In faithful response to the Church and the Council, and drawing explicitly from its texts, the renewed Constitutions recall the primacy of the Word of the living God in gathering together God's people¹⁸— which for us in practice means the salesian community — in so far as the Word is at once "a source of spiritual life, food for prayer, light to see God's will in the events of life, and strength to live out our vocation faithfully" (C 87). From this follows the logical and necessary consequence that the Rule of salesian life must have a full and fruitful biblical inspiration: "With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand (PC 6), we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart, so that it will bear fruit and we may proclaim it with zeal" (C 87).

4.2 A substantial biblical thread

A strong biblical thread runs like a backbone all through the Constitutions of the Salesians; it may be simple in appearance but it is real and carefully woven: in this respect the Constitutions are true not only to a dictate of the Council, but also to a family legacy, as can be seen from the "Writings of Don Bosco" in the appendix to the Constitutions themselves.

Among these, by express desire of the GC22 a particularly meaningful place is occupied by those quotations deliberately placed at the beginning of each chapter or section. These are par excellence the biblical inspirations underlying the text, and to them we shall give special attention.

¹⁷ Cf. DV 23

¹⁸ Cf. PO 4

4.3 In the unity of the history of salvation and the action of the same spirit

More important than a happy awareness of a precise biblical background is the ability to see the connection between the biblical quotations and the constitutional articles concerned. This connection is not only nominal and extrinsic, nor yet merely decorative and devotional, nor is it of a technical nature as though from the literal biblical sense one could directly deduce the salesian sense. The relationship is more complex than that, but only in this way can it be theologically correct and spiritually productive.

Faith teaches us that the historic plan of salvation is unique: it has its roots in the People of God of the Bible, with at the centre Jesus of Nazareth who died and rose again, the definitive Word of God; it is manifested sacramentally in the Church, through which it extends through the world until the second coming of Christ. In this economy the one Spirit of God is at work, the Holy Spirit who inspires and assists God's work, sealing with the charisma of a specific inspiration the events of the foundation of salvation codified in the Sacred Books. But his inspiration and assistance continue at the present day in repositing the sacred "memory" of Jesus Christ (and of his disciples) (Jn 14, 26), and guaranteeing their application at the present day in the life of the Church.

In this way whatever is good and holy in the ecclesial community after Christ's Passover, is a true and vital development of the Word of God of the beginnings; in a certain way it is the biblical story which continues under other codes. It is thus in the case of the Constitutions approved officially by the Church, in the wake — it must be said — of the recognition of the Founder, whose charism is always a perception of the Holy Spirit as a prolongation and application of the divine inspiration in a specific historical period (cf. C 1).

From this it follows that linking the biblical word with that of the Constitutions in no way renders useless or dependent the Word of God in the Bible, but rather by taking it from a narrow prescriptive role, its prophetic character is assured, a deep spiritual background against which the formulations of the Rule can be understood.

In practice it means the recognition that the Constitutions possess a sure guarantee of authenticity and carry a mystery of grace (it is the same Spirit of the Holy Book who proposes the living sense of the Constitutions); furthermore it means accepting the words of the Rule with the attitude due to the greater, richer and more radical Word expressed in Scripture: an attitude of attentive and faithful listening (cf. e.g. Deut 4-6; Mt 7, 24-26), in the joy that comes from the observance of the Word of God (Rome 15,4); it means drawing on the inspiration of the Bible when we are challenged, when we compare our actual conduct with God's design for us, when we have that feeling of crisis that the living Word of God produces (cf. Heb 4, 12-13) when it penetrates into us.

A deep spiritual sense, a call to conversion and at the same time a strengthening of hope: these are some of the interior resonant vibrations experienced by the salesian when he reads the Constitutions in the wider context of biblical memory.

In this vital process of interaction between the word of the Bible and the word of the Constitutions, the salesian carries out the double-barrelled process which alone guarantees a genuine and life-giving acceptance of the Word of God: he learns to read the Constitutions in the light of the Bible, and at the same time read the Bible in the light of the Constitutions in the spirit of Don Bosco and salesian tradition. And so, while we recognize with the Church that in Scripture is found the source and origin of the Word of God, we see in the Constitutions as a point of arrival the practical impact of the Word on ourselves, a meeting with the Father "who is in heaven and comes lovingly to meet his children and talk with them". It is a case therefore neither of identity nor of separation, but of substantial continuity in the one saving Mystery, even in the justifiable diversity of words.

the circumstances surrounding the foundation.

Don Bosco too wanted to premise the Text of the Constitutions with an introduction, which we find in all the editions from the first draft of 1858 to that of 1873 (the second printed Latin text, after the re-presentation of the Roman 'animadversiones'). This

4.4 As in a mirror

The extremely synthetic literary genre of the Constitutions, although situated in an environment totally animated by biblical inspiration, obviously does not allow of explicit reference to the Scrip-

tures except through emblematic "fragments", as a reflection of a broader picture. As can easily be verified, the biblical data is not falsely exploited but there remains the clear obligation to place each quotation in the wider homogeneous context from which it is taken.

A deeper study at a purely exegetical level, going from the Bible to the Constitutions, would not be sufficient. Because of the unity of divine action, through which (as Jesus says) both tree and fruit are vitally recognized (Mt 7, 16-19), it becomes necessary to remember some examples at least which seem to prompt some particular slant on our reading of Scripture (as for instance in art. 11 of the Constitutions). In this way the richness of the Word of truth, which God intends to make known to us through the evangelical experience of our spiritual Family, will appear with greater clarity.