

**THE PROJECT OF LIFE**  
**OF THE SALESIANS**  
**OF DON BOSCO**

*A guide to the  
Salesian Constitutions*

Rome 1986



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

Agostino 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".<sup>1</sup>*

*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,<sup>2</sup> 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.*

<sup>1</sup> GC22, 4: Directive 1.4

<sup>2</sup> The team was made up of the following confreres: Joseph AUBRY, Cesare BISSOLI, Giovanni Battista BOSCO, Clemente FRANZINI, Raimondo FRATTALLONE, 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.*

*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*

## SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> — Vatican II
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AA. <i>IV</i>	Various authors
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> — Vatican II
AGC	Acts of the General Council
<i>art.</i>	article
ASC	Acts of the Superior Council / Chapter
BM	<i>Biographical Memoirs</i> (English translation)
C	<i>Constitutions</i> (article of)
<i>can.</i>	Canon (of CIC)
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> — Vatican II
CEC	Congregation for Catholic Education
<i>Cf., cf.</i>	compare
<i>Ch.</i>	Chapter
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> , 1983
<i>Const.</i>	<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	Documents of 22nd General Chapter
GE	<i>Gravissimum educationis</i> — Vatican II
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> — Vatican II
<i>Ibid., ibid.</i>	ibidem
IGLH	<i>Instructio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum</i> , 1971
IM	<i>Inter Mirifica</i> — Vatican II
<i>l.c.</i>	in the place quoted
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i> — Vatican II
MB	<i>Memorie Biografiche</i> (Italian)
MC	<i>Marialis cultus</i> , 1974
MO	<i>Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales</i>
MR	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , CRIS 1978
<i>ms.</i>	manuscript
<i>n.</i>	number
NT	New Testament
<i>o.c.</i>	in the work quoted
OE	John Bosco, <i>Opere Edite</i> , LAS Rome
OT	<i>Optatam totius</i> — Vatican II
<i>p.</i>	page
<i>para.</i>	paragraph
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> — Vatican II
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> — Vatican II
R	<i>Regulations</i> (article of)
RC	<i>Renovationis causam</i> , CRIS 1969
Reg.	<i>Regulations</i>
RFIS	<i>Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis</i> , 1970
RRM	Report of Rector Major to General Chapter
RSS	Periodical of Salesian Historical Institute
<i>Sac C</i>	<i>Sacerdotalis caelibatus</i> , 1967
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> — Vatican II
SCA	Salesian Central Archives
SGC	Special General Chapter (GC 20)
<i>v.</i>	'vide' (see)

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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"<sup>1</sup>, 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

<sup>1</sup> 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".<sup>2</sup>

(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."<sup>3</sup>

The new Code of Canon Law (1983) has codified this last real meaning, expressed by "Ecclesiae Sanctae"<sup>4</sup>: 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".<sup>5</sup>

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

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

<sup>3</sup> ES II, 12

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 587, 598, 631, 662

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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;<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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?"<sup>9</sup>

## 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 un-touchable, which went back to the first beginnings (St Benedict, St Augustine in the West), but alongside of which were placed other texts,

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

<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>
- 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 bonds<sup>11</sup>. 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.<sup>12</sup>
- In the Constitutions, finally, the spiritual and juridical elements are to be aptly harmonized.<sup>13</sup>

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".<sup>14</sup>

From a juridical point of view the General Regulations are also ecclesiastical laws<sup>15</sup> 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"

<sup>10</sup> CIC, can. 578

<sup>11</sup> CIC, can. 587,1

<sup>12</sup> CIC, can. 587,2

<sup>13</sup> CIC, can. 587,3

<sup>14</sup> GC21, 381

<sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>16</sup> in his circular letter of 29 October 1984, presenting to the Congregation the re-written version of the Constitutions and Regulations,<sup>17</sup> and in the official presentation of the renewed text of our Rule.<sup>18</sup>

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).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. GC22, *Documents*, 91

<sup>17</sup> Cf. AGC 312, 1985, especially p. 20-21

<sup>18</sup> 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",<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>19</sup> ET 12

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.<sup>20</sup>

"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

<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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).<sup>22</sup>

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

<sup>21</sup> ASC 17, 1923, p. 41

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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,<sup>24</sup> 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".<sup>25</sup>

### **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

<sup>23</sup> SGC 106

<sup>24</sup> Cf. AGC 312, 1985, p. 22-23 and 30-34

<sup>25</sup> 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".<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> V. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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 "Declarations" 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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",<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Don Bosco's introduction to the Constitutions approved in 1874

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 1882<sup>9</sup> 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 1887<sup>10</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>10</sup> *"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 1890<sup>11</sup>, 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.<sup>12</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> "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.)

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

assembly, and be more rapidly informed of the decisions taken.<sup>13</sup> 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 See<sup>14</sup>, 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 GC9<sup>15</sup> and on the

<sup>13</sup> *"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

<sup>14</sup> 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 eorumdem codice autographo penes Congregationem Episcoporum et Regularium asservato per quam diligentissime descriptum ac recognitum"*

<sup>15</sup> "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 1901<sup>16</sup>, 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.<sup>17</sup> After being first published in a booklet of 50 pages,<sup>18</sup> 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

<sup>16</sup> 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

<sup>17</sup> 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

<sup>18</sup> "*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;<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>19</sup> "*Constitutions of the Society of St Francis of Sales preceded by an Introduction written by the Founder Don John Bosco*". Tipografia salesiana - Torino 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,<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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

<sup>20</sup> "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

<sup>21</sup> 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".<sup>22</sup>

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,<sup>23</sup> 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;

<sup>22</sup> ACS n. 17, 6 January 1923, p. 42

<sup>23</sup> 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:<sup>24</sup>

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

<sup>24</sup> 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"<sup>25</sup> 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

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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,

<sup>26</sup> 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,<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cf. General Introduction, p. 20-21

<sup>28</sup> *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:<sup>29</sup>

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

<sup>29</sup> *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".<sup>30</sup>

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

<sup>30</sup> *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,<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> *"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,<sup>32</sup> 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-

<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.

<sup>33</sup> 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".<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> *"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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PC 2,3; ES II, 12-14

institute s sound traditions"; and finally "adaptation to the changed conditions of the times".<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

— *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.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 2,3

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

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

## 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.<sup>9</sup> This is evident not only from the ample and constant references

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ASC 305 (1982), p. 43

<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>10</sup> 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

<sup>11</sup> 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:<sup>12</sup>

## 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)

<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> 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".<sup>14</sup>

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,<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Constitutions* 1972, art. 68

<sup>15</sup> 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".<sup>16</sup> This in brief is the real

<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup>

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 people<sup>18</sup>— 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.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. DV 23

<sup>18</sup> 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.

#### 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.

## THE "FOREWORD"

For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament. "If you have loved me in the past," he tells us, "continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions".<sup>1</sup>

Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, reminds us: "When Don Bosco sent his first sons to America he had himself photographed in the act of handing Fr John Cagliero, who headed the expedition, the book of the Constitutions as though to say: 'I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place. Keep them as you would a precious treasure!'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MB XVII, 258

<sup>2</sup> cf. DON RUA, 1 Dec. 1909

The great "Rules" of the ancient religious Orders are frequently preceded by a Prologue or Foreword of a doctrinal and spiritual nature, with the purpose of creating a deeply evangelical atmosphere so as to induce the reader to meditate on and put into fruitful practice the book of life which is being proposed to him.

The religious Congregations of more recent origin also, especially some of those born in the nineteenth century, sometimes put at the head of their Constitutions an Introduction or Foreword, generally of a historical kind, so as to present the Congregation as it was in its origins and better preserve the memory of the Founder and the circumstances surrounding the foundation.

Don Bosco too wanted to premise the Text of the Constitutions he had written 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 Introduction was made up of a Foreword on the importance of educating the young and a chapter headed "Origins of this Society" in which the Founder tried to emphasize the continuity between what had been

going on in Turin since 1841 and the Salesian Society, for whose Constitutions the approval of the Holy See was being sought.<sup>1</sup>

But the canonical practice of the time had changed and was against "Introductions" of this kind, which preceded the true and normative part, and this frequently gave rise to the observation met by new texts: "Prologi expungantur" ("Cut out the Introduction"). We find in fact among the "animadversiones" made on the Constitutions of the Salesian Society as submitted by Don Bosco, the following remark: "It is not the practice to approve in the Constitutions a foreword and a historical appraisal of the Institute; both should therefore be removed."

In conformity with the decision of the Roman congregation Don Bosco removed both the Foreword and the introductory historical chapter, with the result that the text approved in 1874 began immediately with the first chapter: "Societatis salesianae finis" ("Scope of the Society of St Francis de Sales").

It may be pointed out that subsequently the practice of the Roman congregations became even more demanding, to the extent of not even allowing the Founder's name to be mentioned in the Constitutions of religious institutes ("In general the Founder's name is not to be mentioned in the Constitutions, nor can quotations of his words be approved").<sup>2</sup> In the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901 this norm became codified as follows: "Constitutions should not contain any preface, introduction, foreword, historical information, letter of exhortation or commendation".<sup>3</sup>

Vatican II, as we have seen, restored to the Constitutions of religious institutes their most authentic significance, and strongly emphasized that at their origin there is the spiritual experience of the Founder;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales, 1858-1875*, edited by F. MOTTO, pp. 58-71

<sup>2</sup> "In Constitutionibus generatim non fit mentio de Fundatore nec probari possunt verba", Normae secundum quas n. 26. This was one of the "animadversiones" made to the Constitutions of the "Soeurs de St Joseph", Annecy, 12 May 1897, ad 1

<sup>3</sup> "Non admittantur in Constitutionibus praefationes, introductiones, proemia, notitiae historicae, litterae hortatoriae vel laudatoriae". Normae secundum quas, n. 26

it reopened the way for texts to highlight the archetypal inspiration of the particular charisma.

Against this background the Special General Chapter, having in mind the first draft of the Constitutions made by our Founder, decided to put in a "Foreword" as an introduction to the text. This Foreword was delicately spiritual in tone, being a brief but efficacious explanation of the sense of the Rule and an invitation to follow it with love.

But already in the GC21 and later during the preparation for the GC22 suggestions were made that the Foreword should be given a more historical slant and recall the living presence of Don Bosco from the beginnings through the book of the Rule: the religious plan is manifested in fact in a life of adherence to the spirit of the Founder.

The GC22 made its own some of the proposals that had been received, and decided to transfer to the end of the revised text the contents of the Foreword to the 1972 Constitutions, and to compose a new Foreword with an historical and spiritual flavour.

From a structural point of view the present Foreword is very simple: it is made up of two brief quotations, one from Don Bosco himself, and one from his first successor, Blessed Michael Rua. The same thought and consideration runs through both: fidelity to the Founder Don Bosco after his death or wherever he cannot be personally present is seen and manifested in the observance of the Constitutions.

The attention to the Founder, required by Vatican II in the revised texts of Constitutions, is thus made explicit from the very first words, which are immediately further impressed on the mind by the photograph of Don Bosco handing the book of the Rule to Fr John Cagliero, leader of the first missionary expedition: this historic photograph is an integral part of the Foreword itself.

Let us look briefly at the two paragraphs of the text.

The opening quotation is taken from Don Bosco's moving "farewell letter" to his "dear and beloved sons in Jesus Christ". The whole letter becomes part of the fundamental document of salesian spirituality, pedagogy and practice to which tradition has given the name of the "spiritual testimony" of Don Bosco, and which has been published once

again in its incisive, clear-cut and very significant form, in the Appendix to the constitutional text.<sup>4</sup>

And so the living word of Don Bosco finds a place as an introduction to the entire Rule: "*If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions*".<sup>5</sup> Their content and the position they occupy make of these words of our Father not only a beacon by whose light we shall be able to avoid falling into misunderstandings but also an effective key of discernment for understanding the sense and worth of the Constitutions.

The reality of the Salesian Congregation would in fact remain vague and indecipherable if the great doctrinal riches of the revised Constitutions were not wisely read as the expression of Don Bosco's will and of the charism to which through him the Spirit has given rise. Without a relationship with Don Bosco, efficacious both in its institutional and juridical reality (observance of the Constitutions) and in its affective and spiritual nature ("If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me..."), the Salesians would have no foothold in the religious life, because they would have been cut off from their roots.

The text expresses all this too by the significant statement: "*For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament*". How often did Don Bosco present the Rule as the living remembrance accompanying his sons: "Observe our holy rules; that is the greatest and dearest souvenir that your poor old father can leave you".<sup>6</sup> "Consider every item of the rule as a memento of me", he said also to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.<sup>7</sup> And it has been the constant conviction in salesian tradition, that in the Constitutions there have been always present Don Bosco, his spirit and his sanctity. It is enough in this connection to recall the words of Fr Philip Rinaldi, who wrote: "The Con-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1984*, Appendix, pp. 267-270

From the time of Don Rua the "farewell letter" was always included in the volume "*Practices of Piety for use in Salesian Houses*"; after the SGC it was placed in the Appendix to the text of the Constitutions together with other extracts from the "spiritual testament" (cf. RSS, year IV, 1985, N.1, p. 82)

<sup>5</sup> MB XVII, 258

<sup>6</sup> MB XVII, 296

<sup>7</sup> BM X, 293

stitutions, my dear confreres, are the soul of our Society and this was the moving spirit of all Don Bosco's life; and so their story coincides with the life story of Don Bosco. We can even say that in the Constitutions we have the whole of Don Bosco; they contain his single ideal of the salvation of souls; in them is found perfection through the holy vows; in them is his spirit of kindness that made him so much loved, of tolerance, of piety, of charity and of sacrifice...".<sup>8</sup>

The second paragraph provides confirmation of this conviction through the testimony of Don Bosco's first successor. Don Rua recalls the touching episode of the departure of the first missionaries and the significant gesture of the Father who handed the book of the Constitutions to the leader of the expedition, Fr John Cagliero. Don Rua himself gives us the explanation: "How many things Don Bosco expressed in that simple gesture! It was as though he was saying: You will cross the seas and oceans, you will find your way to unknown lands, you will have to deal with people of very different languages and customs, you may even be exposed to serious dangers. I would like to come with you myself to strengthen and console you, to protect you. But what I cannot do in person I shall do with this little book. Keep it as you would a precious treasure".<sup>9</sup> He could not have said more clearly that Don Bosco is truly present in the Rule, and at the side of anyone who wants to embark on the salesian adventure, to guide, encourage and support him.

It should be noted that Don Rua proposes observance of the Constitutions not only as an expression of attachment to Don Bosco, but also as evidence of obedience to his word: "*Keep them as you would a precious treasure*".<sup>9</sup> Don Bosco himself asks us to preserve the spiritual treasure which the Lord has deigned to give to the Salesian Congregation: a treasure because God himself, with his Holy Mother, was their inspiration; a treasure because they are a gospel path of charity; a treasure because by their means numerous confreres have found the way to holiness. Don Rua, in the same circular in which he relates the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ASC, n. 23, 24 January 1924, p. 177

<sup>9</sup> D. RUA, Letter of 1.12.1909 in *Lettere Circolari*, p. 498

above episode, adds: "They are the book of life, the hope of salvation, the marrow of the Gospel, the road to perfection, the key of Paradise, *the pact of our covenant with God*".

In conclusion we may say that this brief Foreword gives us an immediate intuition of what it means to "*stay with Don Bosco*", being heirs of his spiritual testament. Don Rua's comments speak of a deep and affectionate communion in family cordiality with a Father always present amongst us, who guides, stimulates, enlightens and intercedes for us, so that we may never cease, wherever we are and whatever we do, to be tireless and faithful "*missionaries of the young*".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312, 1985, p. 22



## FIRST PART

### THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN THE CHURCH

The first part of the Constitutions must be seen as an *introduction* or *foundation* for the whole Rule of life: before details are given of the main principles and norms which govern the mission, community life, evangelical practice, formation etc., this first part sets out to "*define*" the Society and to *indicate its precise place* within the overall Salesian Family, in the Church and in the world. It represents a "foundation", because it forms the basis of the whole salesian edifice and outlines the salient traits of our identity in the Church.

It should be noted that this part has been entirely rethought in the two Chapters GC20 and GC22. The SGC had planned a first introductory chapter containing the basic elements descriptive of the physiognomy of the Salesian Congregation in the Church and before the world. The very title given to this chapter, "*the Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church*" (which has now become the title of the entire first part, and coincides with the title of the first document of the SGC), indicated the intention to outline in a general if rudimentary way the Congregation's identity: it corresponds substantially to what the former Constitutions had presented under the heading "object and aim of the salesian Society".

The GC22, adopting the overall plan of the constitutional text drawn up by the SGC, inserted in the first part two other chapters containing aspects of the salesian vocation which must be considered "fundamental" for the entire apostolic project of the Society: the characteristic traits of the salesian spirit (chap. II) and the vital commitment of the profession (chap. III). In this way the first part gives the genuine salesian tone to the whole text. It presents a unified vision of our style of sanctification and apostolate, directing our attention immediately to the Founder as our model, so as to discover in the

charisma he received from God and in his heart rich in pastoral charity the essence and unity of the salesian vocation.<sup>1</sup>

From a structural point of view the first part is made up of three chapters, in which are successively defined:

- Chap. I: *the nature, purpose and mission of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the world;
- Chap. II: the characteristic "*spirit*" which animates it and of which it is the bearer;
- Chap. III: the *religious "profession"* which seals the encounter between the love of God who calls and the personal response of each confrere who enters the Society and sets out on a path to holiness.

Taken as a whole, this first part is like the response to a series of questions for the reader to reflect upon: Who are the Salesians? How did they arise? What is their place and purpose in the Church? What significance attaches to the phrase "of Don Bosco"? What is the commitment made freely and publicly by every salesian when he enters the Society? The resulting response which emerges and forms the content of this part can rightly be called the "*identity card*" of our Society.<sup>2</sup>

These indications serve us as a guide in reading the pages which follow. Every time we encounter in the text an expression like "*we, the Salesians of Don Bosco*" we think of the complexus of distinctive notes and the personal and public commitment which the first three chapters combine to highlight. The following parts will take up and develop more completely the concrete aspects of the life and mission of the salesian, but always in the light of that spirit which has been clearly outlined from the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312, 1985, p. 22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

*"I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out... I will set up over them one shepherd... He will feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezek 34, 11.23).*

The quotation from Ezekiel at the beginning of the first chapter of the Constitutions is highly significant as a proclamation of the love of God manifested in Jesus the Good Shepherd, and in Don Bosco whose aim was to be a living image of the Good Shepherd.

The image of the shepherd as a 'guide' and 'leader' is a very ancient tradition in all the early Middle East. In Israel it was applied to God (e.g. Ps 23, 80), and to the king as a sign of God, and specifically to David (Ps 78). Ezekiel in chap. 34 provides a broad and strong picture of the shepherd, following a historical and salvific development embracing three aspects:

— the denunciation of faithless shepherds of the people of God, who maltreat the sick sheep and cause the dispersal of the flock (vv. 1-6);

— God's decision to take care of the sheep himself with a delicate love foreseeing their needs, but also providing a strong protection against evil-doers (vv. 7-22);

— the choice of an ideal and visible shepherd, who will begin a new covenant between God and his people, and through whom God will take specific and personal care of his flock (vv. 23-31).

A comparison with other texts (e.g. 2 Sam 7,5-7; Is 9,1-6; Jer 23,1-6) makes clear the messianic character of our text. Jesus, in solemnly proclaiming himself the "Good Shepherd" (Jn 10), is declaring himself to be the eschatological fulfilment of the divine pronouncement. And it is in this role that he will appear in the quotation from Mk 6,34 in chap. IV of the Constitutions in connection with those to whom our mission is directed. Those with a "shepherd's" role in the community shall be faithful to him as their exclusive model in fulfilling their ministry (cf. 1 Pet 5,2-3, which is used as the inspirational text at the head of chap. XI).

The fact that Christ is the eschatological fulfilment brings an entirely new dimension to the role of Shepherd as presented in the New Covenant. He is

the one true model of pastoral activity in the Church, with extremely original characteristics which call for courage and creativity in their realization.<sup>1</sup>

Recalling the figure of Don Bosco to whom, right from his dream at the age of nine, the Lord revealed that his vocation was to be a pastoral one, and who was a shepherd all his life (C 10), we can understand why there is placed at the head of the Constitutions the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, which in a certain sense constitutes the deep identity of the "Society of St Francis de Sales". All the following articles, permeated as they are with 'pastoral' connotations, will be understood as a faithful fulfilment of this prophecy.

\* \* \*

Within the overall context of the first part, this chapter serves the purpose of presenting in synthesis the apostolic project of the Society of St Francis de Sales, making clear its charismatic origin and deep identity, and describing its specific mission in the Church: for the salvation of the young.

The arrangement of the chapter, which is that already desired by the SGC, is quite straightforward; it is organized around two series of articles: arts. 1-4, which aim at a precise definition of our Society in itself (origins, nature and mission, ecclesial form); and arts. 5-9 which try to define it in its relationship with an ever wider reality: the Salesian Family, the pilgrim Church, the contemporary world, the heavenly Jerusalem, and especially with her whom the Lord has given us as Mother and Helper.

If on the one hand the whole chapter is intended to be a development of the first article of the Constitutions written by our Founder on the "object and aim of the Society", on the other hand the influence of Vatican II is evident in the organization of the material.

The Church, according to the conciliar doctrine:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. AGC 316, (1986) pp. 15-18

- is first of all the result of a free *choice, calling and sanctification on the part of God*, which harks back to the presence in her of the Spirit of the risen Christ;
- is constitutionally a mystery of *communion*, i.e. of union of men with God and with each other, as a result of the Word and the Sacraments, of faith and charity;
- is essentially *missionary*, participating in the mission of Christ and his Spirit, and therefore sent out to the world;
- fulfils her mission in *service or ministry to mankind*, since she is the "universal sacrament of salvation";
- knows that all her members are called to one and the same *holiness*, which consists in the perfection of charity, to be realized in various ministries and charismata, and in different forms of life;
- is the People of God, pilgrims in history, called to continual renewal and sustained by hope on their path to their eschatological conclusion; on this path she is accompanied by Mary, Virgin and Mother, and by the Saints.

The first chapter of the Constitutions defines the salesian Society by reference to the essential aspects of the mystery of the Church:

- it speaks of *the origin and divine vocation of the Congregation*: "we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C 1);
- it recalls the mystery of communion which unites the members with each other and with the Church: "We, the Salesians of Don Bosco, *form a community of the baptized*" (C 2); "the salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church" (C 6);
- it shows the *missionary nature* of the Salesian Society. arts. 2 & 3 speak of "the Founder's apostolic plan" and of the "mission" (a participation in that of the Church) entrusted to the Salesians, emphasizing its "sacramental" nature: "to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2);
- recalls that in the Society all the members are *called to holiness in a specific form of consecrated life* (C 2, 3);

- affirms that the salesian vocation, by calling us to be “evangelizers of the young”, inserts us in the great “sacrament of salvation” for the world (C 6, 7), in union with other groups of the Salesian Family (C 5);
- recalls, in consequence, that the Salesian Society, a living part of the Church, is in her and with her as a pilgrim in time and going forward in hope: in this process it has at its side Mary, Mother and Helper, and the Saints who have been given to it as Patrons and Protectors (C 8, 9).

This scheme makes it easier for us to understand how the contents of the chapter have been arranged:

- *The charismatic origin of our Society*
  - God’s action in the foundation and life of our Society: *art. 1*
- *The identity of our Society*
  - at the level of being and action: *art. 2*
  - at the ecclesial level: *art. 3*
  - at the juridical and institutional level: *art. 4*
- *The position and role of our Society*
  - in the service of the Salesian Family: *art. 5*
  - in the service of the Church: *art. 6*
  - in the service of the contemporary world: *art. 7*
- *Our Society in communion with the heavenly Jerusalem*
  - the singular presence of Mary: *art. 8*
  - the intercession of Patrons and Protectors: *art. 9*

We should add the further observation that in this chapter the attention is concentrated specifically on the Society of St Francis de Sales in its community and ecclesial project; but it does this nevertheless from a personal perspective, in the sense that its members after committing themselves by their profession feel that they are directly and individually involved: “we salesians of Don Bosco form... we offer... we are evangelizers... we are educators... we pay special attention...

we proclaim... we contribute... we entrust ourselves... we hold in veneration...".

We cannot fully understand many of the assertions in the text unless we look at them with the heart of Don Bosco and with the love he had for the Society, which he knew was willed by God. The Congregation, he used to say, "took no step that had not been suggested by some supernatural occurrence, and approved no change, improvement or expansion that was not prompted by God".<sup>2</sup> "When speaking to the salesians Don Bosco spoke as a prophet foretelling the future, using expressions he never used when speaking with others. In doing this he was concerned to link the problem of the individual with the collective problem of the Society. To be with Don Bosco was to be part of a divine plan".<sup>3</sup>

When in 1869 the Pious Society was definitively approved, Don Bosco said: "Our Congregation is approved; we are mutually bound to each other... God has accepted our services. We are no longer private individuals but a Society, a visible body: ... the whole world is watching us and the Church is entitled to our services".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 52

<sup>3</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, PAS-Verlag 1969, p. 379-382

<sup>4</sup> BM IX, 267

## ART. 1 GOD'S ACTION IN THE FOUNDATION AND LIFE OF OUR SOCIETY

With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God.<sup>1</sup> Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, "that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise".<sup>2</sup>

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".<sup>3</sup>

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic projects, first among them our Society.

The Church has acknowledged God's hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope.

<sup>1</sup> cf. MO 16

<sup>2</sup> MB II, 45. BM II, 35

<sup>3</sup> MB XVIII, 258

The first article of the salesian Rule begins with an act of faith and of gratitude to God: it recognizes officially that the Congregation is a gift of the Spirit "to contribute to the salvation of youth".

The five paragraphs describe aspects of this charismatic reality, but the main stress is on the recognition of the "active presence of the Holy Spirit" both at the origins of the Congregation and in its present life.



## The initiative of God in the foundation of our Society

The salesian, who reads the Constitutions with faith and "humble gratitude", believes that the Salesian Society cannot be explained merely as the result of human ingenuity and natural generosity. The Spirit of the Lord intervened to bring it to birth and give it a place in the movement of the history of salvation.

Don Bosco himself had this same conviction of faith. "The persuasion that he was under a quite particular divine pressure dominated the life of Don Bosco... He had a firm and deep belief that he was God's instrument for a unique mission... This was the foundation of his characteristic religious attitude of the 'biblical servant', of the 'prophet' who cannot escape from the divine will".<sup>1</sup> Typical is the reflection of Don Cafasso: "He is a real mystery to me, but I am convinced that God alone is his guide".<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco himself said in a conference he gave to the rectors on 2 February 1876: "... let us say it here among ourselves — other religious congregations and orders have had inspirations, visions or supernatural happenings in their beginnings which gave a thrust to their start and secured their establishment, but for the most part they were limited to a single happening or, at best, just a few. With us the story is different. We may say that nothing has happened which was not known in advance".<sup>3</sup>

To express the charismatic nature of the Society the text uses the expression: "*by the initiative of God*". This refers to the action of the Trinity: it is to be understood, in fact, as a plan of the Father for the salvation of youth; as an action of the Son who, after calling John by name, told him to place himself at the head of the children in the dream;<sup>4</sup> and as an intervention of the Holy Spirit who formed him as the "Father and teacher of the young".

<sup>1</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, II, PAS - Verlag 1969, p. 32

<sup>2</sup> BM IV, 411

<sup>3</sup> BM XII, 52

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM I, 95

We should note the expression "*to contribute to the salvation of youth*": the verb "contribute" indicates humbly but realistically how the work of Don Bosco and the salesians must be seen in the perspective of God, "without whom we can do nothing", and in the light of our collaboration with the Church whose pastoral activity includes numerous other strengths as well: we give our contribution.

It should be noted too that the "salvation" mentioned here, as will be explained at greater length further on in the Constitutions, is not only the salvation of the soul but the salvation of the youngster in his totality, with which is connected the improvement of society itself.

All this can be well summed up in the words of Pius IX to Don Bosco in the audience of 21 January 1877: "I believe it is a secret I am disclosing to you. I am convinced that God has raised up your Congregation in these times to reveal his power. I am certain that God has deliberately kept this important secret hidden until the present, a secret unknown to ages past and to many a bygone congregation. Your Congregation is the first of a new kind of religious order, born in this age, whose style makes it possible for it to be both religious and secular. It has the vow of poverty and keeps personal ownership at one and the same time; it shares both world and monastery, and its members are both religious and secular, cloistered and yet free citizens. The Lord has revealed this in our day and I disclose it to you now. Your Congregation has been raised up ... in order that the world may give glory to God. It has been raised up so that all may see that there is a way of giving to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> BM XIII, 62

## Don Bosco, a Founder raised up and formed by the Spirit

*The Spirit's action is shown first and foremost in Don Bosco.* The article gives prominence to three aspects of this intervention of the Spirit at the beginnings of the Congregation.

He "*raises up*" a man who dedicates himself completely to the good of the young, "that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise". It is the Spirit of the Lord who acts, but from the start the Constitutions emphasize the motherly presence of Mary: "I will give you a Teacher, under whose guidance you will learn".<sup>6</sup>

He "*forms*" in him the qualities needed for the mission he has been called to carry out: ("God gave him a heart as great as the sands of the seashore",<sup>7</sup> the heart of a "father and teacher",<sup>8</sup> "capable of total self-giving". In this process of formation the dynamic sense of Don Bosco, who let himself be moulded, is evident.

He "*inspires him to initiate...*", i.e. guides him to be the "Founder" of various apostolic projects. The power of the Spirit reveals one of the ways in which is expressed in history the inexhaustible creativity of the "soul of the Church". Don Bosco the Founder, docile to the Spirit, took on a mission which he would carry out faithfully: the personal charism became transformed into a charism for the service of the Church. This meant that he became a man of the Church, so that he is not our exclusive property but belongs to the "Church's patrimony".

Don Bosco's response to this voice of the Spirit is well synthesized in his own words by which he expressed his unconditional assent: "*I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys*",<sup>9</sup> words through which shine the deep fatherly love of Don Bosco and his total dedication.

<sup>6</sup> BM I, 95

<sup>7</sup> Entrance antiphon of the former liturgy in honour of St John Bosco

<sup>8</sup> From the collect of the old Mass of St John Bosco

<sup>9</sup> MB XVIII, 258

## The various apostolic forces to which Don Bosco gave rise

By raising up Don Bosco, the Holy Spirit is at the origin of a number of apostolic forces, first among them the Salesian Society, which work for the salvation of youth.

This is the first reference to the salesian "Movement" and "Family" (cf. C 5), whose purpose is to "prolong in the future" what Don Bosco began in his own lifetime.

The Founder is the bearer of a plan of life to be realized not only in his own time but also in the future.<sup>10</sup> He looks out on wide horizons, he is convinced that the plans of God, of which he has caught a glimpse, are sure and certain: "The Lord expects great things from you. I see them clearly and distinctly in all their phases and could tell you of them one by one".<sup>11</sup> "The field is wide open",<sup>12</sup> the horizons will extend with the passage of time "not only in this century, but in the next and other centuries yet to come".<sup>13</sup>

## In the Church and for the Church

The Church has recognized by a double act this presence of the divine both in Don Bosco and in his work: by the approval of the Constitutions and through the canonization of the Founder.

*The approval of the Rule* by ecclesiastical authority proved to be neither rapid nor easy for the Founder. "The difficulties continued for no less than 16 years, and had it not been for the special assistance

<sup>10</sup> Cf. MR 11: "The 'charism of the Founders' (ET 11) appears as an 'experience of the Spirit transmitted to their followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth'

<sup>11</sup> BM XII, 64

<sup>12</sup> BM IX, 334

<sup>13</sup> BM XII, 338

of heaven he would never have overcome them".<sup>14</sup> But when approval came, Don Bosco could say: "We should welcome this fact as among the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that, in observing our rules, we rest upon a firm, secure and, I may add, infallible basis".<sup>15</sup>

*Recognition by the Church of the sanctity of the Founder* was not long in coming: the People of God esteemed him as a saint and Pope Pius XI solemnly canonized him on Easter Sunday 1934. The Catholic world rejoiced at the proclamation, and doors opened to the Congregation on every side. The Founder is the incarnation of the Rule and the Rule sets out the pact of our covenant with God: Don Bosco, the Saint, becomes the model for our own sanctity, and his Rule is the signpost on our path to holiness. Both the one and the other are treasures to be offered to the particular Churches.

### **The Holy Spirit was present not only at the beginnings, but his presence continues now and always**

The Salesians, whom the Spirit has called to work with Don Bosco, receive continually from the same Spirit the necessary energy to prolong faithfully his work and his sanctity. The Congregation is a charismatic reality: in the Spirit she has the one who was responsible for the origins, and in him she continues to have the responsible Protagonist of her mission in history, to the extent that she remains attentive and docile to his incentives.

In this perspective emphasis must be laid on the fundamental spiritual attitude for a Society which recognizes in itself the active presence of the Holy Spirit: docility to the Spirit's voice. God's action is evidently not consistent with a passive approach; rather does it in-

<sup>14</sup> D. RINALDI, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 180

<sup>15</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, 15 August 1875; cf. appendix to the Constitutions, 1984, p. 227

crease our responsibility, and our daily collaboration with him becomes all the more necessary.

The Rule reminds us that faith in the "active presence" of the Spirit gives rise to two very positive attitudes: hope and fidelity:

— In the first place the Salesian Society does not intend to rely on itself, its own resources and its successes, but on God who sustains it: and so *it is nourished by hope*; hope it is that fosters its apostolic commitment and that the salesian is called to radiate among the young (cf. C 17.62).

— The Salesian Society knows that it will be faithful to Don Bosco in the measure that it is faithful to the Spirit who raised up Don Bosco; for this reason *it constantly seeks nourishment for its fidelity* at the fountains of Love.

*Father, in your infinite goodness  
you have always called men  
to collaborate in your work of salvation.  
We thank you for raising up Don Bosco;  
you gave him the heart of a father and apostle  
and guided him, through the motherly assistance of Mary,  
in the foundation of our Society.  
Grant also to us,  
who have been called to continue the same mission,  
the strength and joy of the Holy Spirit,  
so that like Don Bosco  
we may be able to give ourselves entirely  
to young people and to you.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 2 NATURE AND MISSION OF OUR SOCIETY

We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor.

By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness.

To the question: "Who are the Salesians?", the Constitutions give the following reply:

- we are a community of the baptized, docile to the voice of the Spirit;
- we live a specific form of religious life;
- we intend to carry out Don Bosco's plan: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor;
- we find our way to holiness by fulfilling this mission.

Here is expressed in more modern language the substance of the former first article which spoke of the "object and aim of the Society" (or "scope of the Society" as Don Bosco expressed it). The Society is defined according to its nature of a community which willingly listens to the voice of the Spirit with reference to the objectives it intends to pursue.

It is in fact impossible to say what the Society is without specifying to whom it is sent and for what purpose. This is expressed by the term 'mission' which we meet here in the Constitutions for a second time, and which is one of the key words of the vocabulary of the SGC;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 23-30

it implies various elements: Someone who sends; someone who is sent; those to whom the one sent (the 'missionary') is directed; the service he is sent to carry out; in what way and by what means this is to be done. All this is expressed in condensed form in art. 2 and will be amply illustrated in chapter IV.

## **We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB): who we are**

— *We are a community of the baptized, submissive to the bidding of the Spirit.*

Our Society is defined as a "community": the Congregation is a community, the Province (or Vice-Province) is a community, the local nucleus (or "house") operating in a particular territory is a community.

The community unites at various levels living individuals, on the basis of human life, baptism and salesian profession. Don Bosco expressed this reality in some well chosen words which he wrote on a separate sheet included with the letter he sent on 12 February 1864 to Pius IX seeking approval of the Constitutions. The sheet was headed: "Things that should be noted concerning the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales: "The purpose of this Society, considered in its members, is simply an invitation to unite in spirit to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, prompted by the saying of St Augustine: 'the most divine of all divine things is to work to save souls'".<sup>2</sup>

Such union is brought about by the Holy Spirit (cf. C 1): he it was who brought us in contact with a vocation or calling; and he sustains our communion by his "inspirations". And so we want to be docile to his voice.

<sup>2</sup> MB VII, 622



— *Our intention is to carry out Don Bosco's plan in the Church.*

The apostolic plan is contained in the calling we have received and which has brought us together in unity. Here is expressed in different terms what Don Bosco wrote: "every spiritual and corporal work of charity directed to the young, especially those who are poor".<sup>3</sup>

The new text of the Constitutions sees the Congregation as part of the "Church-Sacrament" and defines the plan in that sense. In fact, when the Council was defining the "nature and universal mission of the Church" in the Constitution "Lumen Gentium", it had recourse to the broad notion of "sacrament" which included the double reality of a clear sign and efficacious means. The Church is there defined as the visible sign which bears witness to Christ living in the midst of the world and an instrument in his hands for realizing his plan of salvation: the communion of all men with the Father and with each other.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense our Society, as a living part of the Church, is defined as participating in the sacramental nature of the Church for young people and especially for those who are poor: Salesians are called to be signs and witnesses of the risen Christ (the text says 'of God', but God is revealed through his Son Jesus Christ), and active bearers of his intensely salvific love at the present day.

*"To be signs and bearers of the love of God for young people":* this is a wonderful definition, and the Constitutions use it several times:<sup>5</sup> but it is also a very demanding obligation, because it requires the whole of each individual member, all his life and all the activity of the Salesians, detaching them from themselves so as to centre them at the same time on the two poles of the living Christ and of youth, and on the meeting of the two in love. It obliges the Salesians to a double service: to Christ who sends them and to the young to whom they are sent, to reveal to them the loving call of Christ and to stir up the loving response of youth. This, in the last analysis, is the meaning of all their "spiritual and corporal works of charity"!

<sup>3</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, I,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 73)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. LG, 1. 9. 48

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C 8. 14. 20. 49. 61. 81. 195

— *In a specific form of religious life.*

The salesian apostolic plan, the plan of Don Bosco himself, is lived in the *totality and radicality that belongs to religious consecration*. From the outset the Constitutions make it clear that the coherence of the salesian community at every level depends on a triple commitment: to agree on the salesian apostolic plan, to intend to carry it out together, and to adhere to it fully with the availability created in us by obedience, poverty and evangelical chastity. None of these three aspects can be left aside: art. 3 which follows and the whole of the second part will explain this principle at length.

There are other "salesian" groups, among the "various apostolic projects" referred to in art. 1, which are called to carry out Don Bosco's plan without religious consecration, e.g. the Salesian Cooperators: we are distinguished from them by the manner and degree of commitment, even though we are solid in the objective to be attained and the spirit to which we bear witness.

## **Our way to holiness in the realization of our mission**

*"By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness".* "Sanctification" (rather than "sanctity") indicates a path of progressive growth, which implies effort and exertion. A path like this of sanctification, or growth in charity, was formulated in the old Constitutions as follows: "... its members, while striving to attain christian perfection, shall be engaged in works of charity ... on behalf of the young".<sup>6</sup>

The salesian is always face to face with these two commitments: service of the young and his own personal sanctification, two goals which are inseparable. Theological and spiritual writing before the Council was satisfied to analyse, not without subtle distinctions, the difference

<sup>6</sup> *Constitutions 1966*, art. 1

between primary and secondary ends, with the risk of opposing one to the other and so producing distortions in the soul of the religious.

The conciliar doctrine sets aside such distinctions and is set out in a much simpler and more concordant manner: the two goals (personal holiness and missionary commitment) are equally important and cannot be separated: neither of them is simply a "means" for attaining the other. In practice every apostle achieves his own personal sanctification by fulfilling his mission; each one lives out his love of God and neighbour through the practice of his daily duty.

The theology of the religious life is insistent nowadays on this characteristic spirituality of institutes of active life, which is called *apostolic spirituality* and has its root in the "*grace of unity*";<sup>7</sup> which is sustained and nourished by it.

The salesian therefore grows in holiness and charity to the extent to which he carries out authentic works of charity, and it must be emphasized that they must indeed be "authentic". The text of the Constitutions has been formulated to reflect this perspective: the salesian attains his personal aim by achieving his apostolic aim: he finds his own holiness by fulfilling his mission in the Church.

In the first draft of the Constitutions of 1858, Don Bosco expressed his thought as follows: "The purpose of this Society is to gather together its members ... to perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Saviour, especially in charity to poor youth".<sup>8</sup> This was what the Saint had already advised Dominic Savio: "The first thing he was advised to do in order to become a saint was to try to win souls to God."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SGC, 127; PC 8; PO 13-14; cf. Mt 25; 1 Jn 3,16-17

<sup>8</sup> *Costituzioni 1858*, I,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 72)

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Turin 1858, p. 53 (OE vol XI, 203)

*Father,  
attentive to the voice of your Spirit,  
we want to be in the Church, like our Founder,  
signs and bearers of your love for the young,  
and especially for the poor among them.  
Grant that in the fulfilment of this mission  
we may find our own sure path to holiness,  
for the glory of your Name.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

### ART. 3 OUR APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION

We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us<sup>1</sup> through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young.

Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom. Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers.

Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families.

<sup>1</sup> cf. LG 44

The second article presented the nature and mission of the Salesian Society against the broad background of the Church seen as the "sacrament of salvation"; this third article takes us more deeply into the salesian vocation, at both individual and community level, and considers it in the light of "religious consecration".

The reality of religious consecration, an essential element of our identity as apostolic religious, is introduced by the Rule at this point with a precise global meaning. We know, in fact, that in the period that has followed the Council the concept of consecration, in the sense of a consecrating action on the part of God through the mediation of the Church, has become progressively clearer: to it there corresponds the free commitment of the religious, who offers all his person and his life to God and the Kingdom. Celebration of profession implies these two inseparable aspects, which are the expression of the covenant pact between the Lord and the disciple.

Understood in this sense, the consecration highlights the unity of our existence, enveloped as it is in a gift of God: it affects every aspect and every moment of our life. It has therefore an all-embracing

significance, like that of baptismal consecration, of which it is a full and radical expression.

We shall make a detailed examination of the various elements offered us by the Rule.

## "Consecration", a gift of the Lord

In the Constitutions as they came from the pen of Don Bosco the word "consecration" does not occur, even though its reality is certainly present; but the line taken by Vatican II and the consequent development of theology of the religious life have turned to full account the idea of consecration, which has thus entered the text of the Constitutions. Art. 3, in fact, in presenting our life as a "grace of the Father who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit", makes explicit reference to the text of the Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium", which speaks of the religious as being "*consecrated by God to his service in a more thoroughgoing way*".<sup>1</sup>

The GC22 made a clear choice: by making its own the Council's doctrine on religious consecration, the Chapter intended to emphasize primarily the initiative of God, who is at the origin of our salesian vocation and continually sustains us by the grace of his Spirit. Strictly speaking, in fact, "consecration" is an act which of its nature is reserved to God: he it is who chooses, calls and "sets aside" an individual or a group, to constitute it in a stable relationship to himself for the purpose of his divine plans. In the words of the Rector Major, he "blesses us and takes us entirely for himself, pledging himself to protect us and give us his daily help and guidance so that we may move forward on the gospel path we have professed. The object for the reception of the benefits flowing from the divine action is our own professed person,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. LG 44. In connection with the doctrine of the Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*" on consecration, v. also the references made by the Rector Major in his closing address to the GC22 (GC22 Documents, 63)

in so far as in reply to his call we offer ourselves totally to him, so that our whole existence becomes a 'consecrated life'.<sup>2</sup>

Understood in this sense, consecration is an adequate expression of the theological dimension of our life, which is subjected entirely to the action of God who has called us and set us aside for a particular participation in the Church's mission.

To the initiative of God, who calls and consecrates, the salesian responds by his profession, offering himself and his life to God and the Kingdom: having been placed in a "consecrated" state he dedicates himself by vow to the entire service of Him who has chosen him.

One cannot emphasize too strongly the global and all-embracing character of religious consecration: it covers every aspect of life. When the conciliar texts speak of "consecrated" persons, they say that their self-donation is made by profession of the evangelical counsels: this is the common denominator to all forms of consecrated life. But in speaking of institutes "dedicated to apostolic works", the Council declares that the very apostolic activity and works of charity carried out as a sacred mission received from God, are "of the very nature of religious life".<sup>3</sup>

In this way "*salesian religious consecration*", understood in its proper and global sense, shows forth the unity of our whole existence. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the salesian offers his whole life, planned according to the apostolic design set out in the Rule. And so every element and every aspect of life are submissive to the action of God, and this is very important in our concrete practice.

Two further reflections will not be out of place.

In the first place it must be remembered that religious consecration, in its deepest meaning, strongly recalls the basis of the fundamental option of faith made in baptism. According to the conciliar texts,

<sup>2</sup> E. VIGANÒ, "*The renewed text of our Rule of life*", AGC 312 (1985) pp. 22-23

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 8

in fact, religious consecration brings about a more radical interior foundation ("*intimius consecratur*", "*intimius radicatur*") and a richer exterior expression ("*plenius exprimit*") of the baptismal consecration.<sup>4</sup> We shall take up this idea again when speaking of life according to the counsels (cf. C 60).

Secondly, the particular character of consecration should be noted as the meeting of two loves, two freedoms which merge and combine: the "Father who consecrates us" and we who "offer ourselves totally to him". In this fusion of friendship the initiative for the Covenant comes from God, but is confirmed by our free response: he it is who has called us and helped us to respond, but we on our side give ourselves. He it is who consecrates us, envelops us with his Spirit, who captures us for himself and makes us become entirely his, floods us with grace so as to bring all our resources to bear on his great plan for the salvation of the world; but it is we who centre ourselves on him, we listen to him and bear witness to him. All this gives rise in us to a very close and characteristic relationship with him, one which fills our psychology or inner being as "consecrated persons", which becomes the subject of our contemplation, the object of our affections and the mainspring which unleashes our tireless exertions.<sup>5</sup>

### The three constituent elements of the unity of profession

To the call of God we respond by offering ourselves and all our life. By our profession to live according to the "evangelical counsels" we commit ourselves to the "apostolic mission" and to the "common life". The second paragraph explains at greater length the unity of our life under the sign of religious consecration.

The Salesian Society exists in virtue of the meeting together of three "*inseparable elements*": it is a "*community*" — "*of consecrated*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. LG 44; PC 5; ET 7; RD 7

<sup>5</sup> Cf. AGC 312 (1985) pp. 32-33



persons" — "sent on a mission". It cannot lose sight of any of these three characteristics without at the same time losing its physiognomy.

We live these three realities in the practical unity of our life dedicated to the young. They are correlative and mutually enrich each other. Our community finds the strength of cohesion in its common consecration and apostolic zeal; the following of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ is realized in practice in charity towards God and our neighbour, and especially the young; and finally our mission in the Church is strengthened by community solidarity and from availability in a life which is fundamentally evangelical.<sup>6</sup>

Analysis separates the different elements, but life unites them: and it is well for us to affirm this unity and be aware of it! With one and the same call Christ invites us to follow him in his work of salvation and in the kind of virginal and poor life that he chose for himself;<sup>7</sup> and we, in a single response of love and the grace of the Holy Spirit, following the example of the apostles, willingly leave everything (cf. Lk 5,11; Mt 19,27) and join together in community, the better to work for him and for the Kingdom. The consecration of Salesians is therefore one and undivided: it is inseparably apostolic and religious.

The text of the Rule expresses all this by saying that the three above mentioned elements are lived "*in a single movement of love*". Don Albera explains it this way: Don Bosco wanted in his sons so ardent a charity as would unite the active and contemplative lives, the life of the Apostles with that of the Angels (cf. Const. FMA), religious perfection with the apostolate.<sup>8</sup>

The perfect model of this unity of life is Christ whom we set out to follow. He was "consecrated and sent" by the Spirit of the Father to proclaim the Gospel (Lk 4,18) and carry out his work of salvation. But at the same time, in order to be totally available for this service

<sup>6</sup> The profound unity of the fundamental elements of our life is well expressed in the formula of profession (C 24); cf. also C 44, 50, 61 which show clearly the correlation between mission, community and the practice of the evangelical counsels

<sup>7</sup> Cf. IG 46

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. ALBERA, Letter of 18 October 1920, in *Circular Letters*, pp. 365-366

of the Father, he "chose a virginal and poor style of life" and a community of apostles.

The splendour of the salesian vocation arises precisely from its radical extension: it is at the same time "evangelical", "apostolic" and "community based".

### **The element which specifies salesian life: the mission**

The mission requires in us a deep sense of God and his Kingdom: everything comes from him who sends us and animates us, and everything is directed towards him whose will it is "to unite all things in Christ" (Eph 1,10). Our radical commitment as religious to the "God we love above all things",<sup>9</sup> serves to purify and enrich our apostolic service. This religious spirit animates and gives energy to our active life as sons and priests of the Father, to whose glory our whole life becomes a liturgy.<sup>10</sup>

After establishing the fundamental unity of our consecrated life, the Constitutions deal with the special role the mission plays in our lives as apostolic religious: the mission "specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families".

Our novel character and the reason for our existence derive from the mission God has entrusted to us: to go to young people, and especially the poor, with the salesian spirit.

An original physiognomy of this kind has not merely the effect of identifying us in the eyes of others: it also affects our whole life, in its community and religious aspects, to give it a deep unity and its specific "tenor".

Obedience, chastity, poverty, prayer and ascetical practices etc. are not lived by us in an abstract fashion or in separation one from another;

<sup>9</sup> Cf. IG 44

<sup>10</sup> These expressions were contained in art. 70 of the Constitutions of 1972

they are all immediately coloured by our mission to poor and abandoned youth, they are apostolic and salesian.

In this sense one can quite correctly speak of "*salesian apostolic consecration*". "The mission is seen as the focal point of our whole vocation. From it go out initiatives and creativity for a true increase in fidelity to our calling... It is here we find the parameter of our identity, secure and well-defined".<sup>11</sup>

We may conclude by listening once again to the words of our Father Don Bosco, who reminds us of the deep sense of our consecration, emphasizing the central place of the love of God, the essential motive from which all our existence draws its inspiration: "The members (of the Society) should have recourse to their head, their true master, the one who will give them their reward, to God; it should be for love of him that each member joins the Society; for love of him that we work, obey, and leave behind all we possess in the world, so that at the end of our life we can say to the Saviour whom we have chosen as our model: 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you...' (Mt 19,27)".<sup>12</sup>

*Father,  
we give you thanks  
for having called us and consecrated us  
by the gift of your Spirit  
and for sending us to the young  
as bearers of the Gospel  
of your Son Jesus Christ.*

*With the day of our profession in mind  
we now renew the complete offering of ourselves to you,*

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SGC, pp. xv-xvi

<sup>12</sup> D. BOSCO, Circular letter 9.6.1867, *Collected Letters I*, pp. 473-475

*so that we may follow Christ  
and work with him for the coming of your Kingdom.*

*Grant that our daily life  
may be a single movement of love  
as we seek your glory  
and the salvation of our fellow men.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 4 THE FORM OF OUR SOCIETY

Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation.

We are recognized in the Church as a clerical religious institute of pontifical right, "dedicated to apostolic works".<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by the goodness and zeal of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco called us Salesians<sup>2</sup> and gave us a programme of life in the motto: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 8; CIC, can 675,1

<sup>2</sup> cf. MB V, 9; BM V, 8

<sup>3</sup> cf. MB XVII, 365, 366, 280

This article completes the two preceding ones. It continues to "define" the Society, but it does so from a more institutional point of view: that of its public "form" in the Church. It is a response to the further questions: how and by whom is our Society "formed"? on what principles and traditions is it based?

By "*form*" is meant here the sum total of the visible and concrete elements which characterize our Congregation, shape it as a Society, and indicate its manner of life and activity and the structures it has in the Church. It is a question of concrete elements and society aspects which have also juridical implications, intended especially to manifest and defend its charismatic originality, i.e. the kind of Congregation desired by the Founder.

It is desirable that the identity traits which "form" the Society should be precisely expressed, because they are elements which are neither arbitrary nor capable of change; they are the institutional expression of an original experience in the Church and ensure the linkage between charismatic qualities and the corresponding constitutive elements of the "particular law".

Between "charism" and "institution", between consecrated life and its canonical state, between the reality as lived and as codified, there

is no separation or distance, but rather a vital union with interchange of values; the charism is manifested in the juridical structure and the structure is the guarantee of the charism's permanence, and together they are a visible sign of an original kind of spirituality. The union of the spiritual and juridical elements (as we saw) is necessary to give a stable foundation to the Institute's fundamental texts.<sup>1</sup>

A discussion of these elements is precisely what is implied when we speak of the "form".

### Salesian form of the Society

The article begins with the fundamental assertion: "*Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen*". It has an original physiognomy in the Church, one which is "both religious and secular", as Pius IX put it;<sup>2</sup> it has its own manner of life and action, and a "form" suited to modern times and to the mission to be carried out.

The "form" of the Society is given its juridical classification in the next paragraph, which gives a precise and basic statement of its character as lived and transmitted in the Congregation, a hard fact of our community charism: it is made up of clerics and laymen, who (in Don Bosco's words) "form a single heart and soul, and live a common life...".<sup>3</sup>

The new text says they "*complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation*". It is not therefore a question of complementing each other in a general kind of way, but of an "organic complementarity"<sup>4</sup> which calls for a measure of fusion between the lay and priestly components, a fusion which is not static but open to a continual process of redress, revision, conversion and adaptation.

<sup>1</sup> cf. ES II, 13

<sup>2</sup> cf. BM XIII, 62; cf. ASC 300 (1981) pp. 14-15

<sup>3</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, II, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83)

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 196

It is the concrete manner in which clerics (priests and aspirants to the priesthood) and laymen lived the same vocation, united around Don Bosco in the first Oratory, in close collaboration for the salvation of the young. This "experience of the Holy Spirit" of the Founder, recognized and accepted by the Church as a gift of the Lord (i.e. "charisma")<sup>5</sup> is a basic element of the "form" of the Congregation.

The phrase of the constitutional article is pregnant with meaning and will be taken up again in more detail in later parts (cf. C 44-45); but it needs to be said here at once that the "same vocation" and the words "complement each other as brothers" demand full equality of all members in the religious life, an essential reciprocal relationship between clerical and lay members, and an adequate formation for this mutual and live correlation between priests, deacons and brothers.

Such a requirement is evident from the overall constitutional text. Nevertheless it will be well to go into greater detail about two aspects and consequences that follow from what we have said about the "form" of the Society.

— In the first place one must have a proper understanding of what is implied by a "*complementarity*" that is both real and deeply felt. It is an original trait of the salesian vocation deriving from the very mission of the Society, which Don Bosco wanted to be both 'religious and secular', "bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order" (C 31). As the Rector Major said in his closing address to the GC22, the originality of the salesian vocation does not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions (clerical and lay), each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, but requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each clerical salesian there is an intimate feeling of being linked to and co-involved with the lay dimension of the community, and in the heart of each lay salesian in turn there is the same feeling in respect of the community's priestly dimension. It is the whole salesian community,

<sup>5</sup> Cf. MR 11

in each of its members, which fosters harmony between sensitivities which are at the same time both 'priestly' and 'lay'. We must be able to bring to maturity in our communities this characteristic salesian awareness; it will exclude from the Congregation any kind of mentality that smacks of 'clericalism' or 'laicism' and which leads only to bitterness and the perverting of our specific community mode of action.<sup>6</sup>

Because of this the community takes on a role of primary importance, as an indispensable condition for the two dimensions (priestly and lay) to be able to properly interact. An obligation arises for every confrere to be sensitive to the significance of complementarity.

— A related significance, which cannot be overlooked in these considerations about "form", attaches to the "*service of authority*" which is proper to our Society.

The complementarity between clerics and laymen is certainly confirmed and strengthened by the service of authority directly linked with the kind of mission entrusted to each member.

Art. 121 explains that this is a service which in a salesian community is confided to a member who is a priest, so as to ensure the pastoral standpoint in all our works and activities. Every community is called, in fact, to be a kind of "mission station" for young people. The one who guides the community must have the discernment and sensitivity of a "shepherd", so as to give to the common mission a particular ecclesial slant.

But it is also the task of the one who guides and animates the community to ensure that there is a proper proportion between the community's two components (priestly and lay), in the light of the widely differing circumstances in which our provincial and local communities find themselves working. The distribution will be flexible, in view not only of the varying social and cultural situation, but also of the practical differences which are evident, for instance, between a community responsible for a parish and another responsible for a technical school.

<sup>6</sup> E. VIGANÒ, GC22, 80



The salesian community, therefore, takes up in a vital manner and in rich and original cohesion the two fundamental kinds of ecclesial existence: the laity and the hierarchical ministry. The Society would no longer be the one founded by Don Bosco if one of these two complementary elements were to disappear.

### **The institutional and juridical form of the Congregation in the Church**

The second paragraph adds some specific juridical details concerning the public figure of the Society in the Church.

— We are a *"religious institute"*.

The "religious institutes" are characterized, among the various forms of consecrated life, by the profession of public vows received by the Church and by a stable state of life lived together in community and in accordance with an approved Rule.

Religious institutes are distinguished from secular institutes (in which the profession of the evangelical counsels is lived not in community form but remaining in the world), and from societies of apostolic life (in which the members live in community but without the stable bond of public vows).

— We are a *"clerical" institute*.

The term is taken directly from the Code of Canon Law and means that the service of government of the communities, by reason of lawful tradition, is entrusted at every level to a member who is a priest.<sup>7</sup> In the Church various kinds of "clerical" institutes are to be found; our own Founder gave to his Congregation a physiognomy of strong communion in a "family spirit".

The specific tradition of our Society will be described more fully in art. 121, as has been said already. Here it is pointed out only that

<sup>7</sup> CIC, can. 588, 2

this characteristic of the Society in no way contradicts the specific and high value given to the lay component, which is characteristically involved in the mission, in line with the complementarity spoken of earlier.

— We are an institute of *"pontifical right"*.

The institute is not simply of diocesan right. Official recognition by the Apostolic See bears witness to the universal quality of the salesian charisma. In the terms of canon law our Society, as such, depends not on a Bishop or an Episcopal Conference but on the Apostolic See itself.

In this perspective our *"exemption"* finds its meaning (even if the text does not make express mention of it). Rather than being considered a "privilege" in the Church, exemption should be considered as availability for the Church's service. From a theological point of view indicated by Vatican II,<sup>8</sup> exemption from the jurisdiction of the local Bishop corresponds to the two ecclesial functions expressed in our article:

- for the good of the universal and particular Churches, it fosters the unity of the Institute's charism and spirit, by giving the responsibility for this to the Superiors under the authority of Peter's Successor. This enables local communities or individual religious to be inserted in the pastoral work of the particular Church in different ways;
- it emphasizes the particular availability of the Institute for the service of the universal Church, for specific Episcopal Conferences and for the needs of particular Churches.

In connection with institutes "of pontifical right", it should be noted that as a consequence of this the Society as such is of the "latin rite" (and is in fact linked with the latin universal law); but this does not rule out the possibility for individual confreres (or even whole com-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. LG 45: Religious institutes are "established all over the world for building up the Body of Christ, and should develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founders. With a view to providing better for the needs of the Lord's flock and for the sake of the general good, the Pope, as primate over the entire Church, can exempt any institute of christian perfection and its individual members from the jurisdiction of local ordinaries ..."

munities and provinces) of *different rites* becoming members of the Society: such confreres will continue to practise their own rite, for the benefit of the faithful and of the Congregation itself.

— We are an Institute "*dedicated to apostolic works*".

Our ministry is entrusted to us by the Church. The Society is numbered among the "Institutes of active life" or, as Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law put it, among "the Institutes dedicated to various works of the apostolate", in which (as already said) "apostolic activity and works of charity enter into the very nature of religious life".<sup>9</sup>

### The name and the motto

The name of "*Salesians*" was chosen by Don Bosco because he wanted his sons to draw their inspiration from "the charity and zeal of St Francis de Sales".

The Biographical Memoirs relate: "On the evening of 26 January 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco's room. Present were Don Bosco, Rocchiotti, Artiglia, Cagliari and Rua. Don Bosco suggested that with the help of the Lord and St Francis de Sales, we should first test ourselves by performing deeds of charity towards our neighbour, then bind ourselves by a promise and later, if possible and desirable, make a formal vow to God. From that evening onwards those who agreed — or would later agree — to this were called 'Salesians'".<sup>10</sup>

In this significant extract attention should be directed not only to its historical value, but also to the doctrinal content. It is really the expression of a kind of "fourth vow" which Don Rinaldi called "*bontà*" (kindness of heart) which is characteristic of our style of sanctification.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. PC 8; CIC, can. 675

<sup>10</sup> BM V, 8

Our Founder, inspired by the captivating charity of St Francis de Sales, doctor of God's love, wanted us to take the name of "Salesians" so that our whole being and activity would be marked by kindness.

Following Don Bosco's example and in accordance with his wishes, we express the unifying force of our love for God and our neighbour in the motto he chose for our Society: "*DA MIHI ANIMAS, CETERA TOLLE*". It was Don Bosco's intention that these words should serve as a "programme of life" and express the "grace of unity" of the salesian spirit.

*Lord our God,  
you ask all of us, clerics and laymen alike,  
to express in different and complementary forms  
the richness of the one salesian vocation,  
by living united with one another as your family;  
grant that in our brotherhood  
we may be able to make our charisma bear fruit  
for the service of your holy Church.*

*Help us to bear abundant witness to you  
by the zeal and kindness  
of our Patron, St Francis de Sales,  
so that the programme given to us by our Founder  
may be spread efficaciously throughout the world:  
"Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".*

## ART. 5 OUR SOCIETY IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Don Bosco inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young.

He himself founded not only the Society of St Francis de Sales but also the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators. These live in communion with each other, share the same spirit and, with specifically distinct vocations, continue the mission he began. Together with these groups and with others born later we make up the Salesian Family.<sup>1</sup>

Within this family, by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness.

Our past pupils are also members by reason of the education they have received, and the bonds are closer when they commit themselves to take an active part in the salesian mission in the world.

<sup>1</sup> cf. ASC Progetto GC1, ms DB; MB XVII, 25

After describing the essential elements of the nature and mission of the Society of St Francis de Sales, the Constitutions invite us to consider the Society in its relationship to those "various apostolic projects", which from the first article have been presented as heirs of Don Bosco's charisma.

The article speaks first of a "vast movement of persons" working in the mission to young people, which takes its inspiration from Don Bosco. Within this movement the Founder brought into being the Society of St Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators, i.e. the first basic groups of the Salesian Family, to which others will be added later.

The Salesians are invited to reflect on Don Bosco's desire concerning the unity and collaboration in dialogue of the whole Salesian Family for the common mission.

## The salesian "movement"

With the passage of time there have grown up around Don Bosco and his works individuals and groups with widely differing relationships: benefactors, priest and lay collaborators, pupils, past-pupils, friends, parents, and members of oratories, parishes, camping groups, etc.

They represent a reality extending from at one end those who take up Don Bosco's apostolic project and on it base their own life-plan, to those at the other end who merely feel a certain interest in salesian work and collaborate in it in some way. It is a reality which does not lend itself to easy classification without levelling down or confusing the different relationships.

By adopting the term "*movement*" the GC22 recognized that there are various ways of belonging to this salesian reality.

There are some, in fact, who discern in themselves a divine call to collaborate, in a group, in Don Bosco's own mission, and to carry it out in his spirit in a variety of apostolic forms and activities. And there are others who, although they feel attracted by Don Bosco and united with him in some way, do not feel like taking part in combined activities as members of one or other of the above mentioned Groups. A deep concern for the young and for educational ideals and methods can be expressed in "specifically distinct vocations".

The most explicit indication of the first paragraph, with the social overtones contained in the idea of a movement, concerns pastoral action: with their eyes on Don Bosco many people foster activity aimed at the salvation of the young: the Saint of youth inspires them to imitate him "in different ways". In this sense he has become part of the patrimony not only of the Salesians but of the entire Church.

In actual fact the "*movement*", although in itself a part of the Church's dynamics, can embrace various realities, not all of them homogeneous, with differing kinds of organization, diverse interests in human advancement and social concern, and collaboration with non-christians and even at times with non-believers. In other words it is possible to find gathered around Don Bosco and his ideal "men of

good will", even though they be not fully aware of the cardinal points in salesian education, which are reason, religion and loving kindness.

## The "Salesian Family"

Within this "movement" Don Bosco has given life to certain currents of energy which, starting from a vocational awareness, are specifically committed to his mission for the salvation of youth. He himself, as the Rule reminds us, founded the first groups of the *Salesian Family*: our own Society of St Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators. These three groups should not be thought of as parallel realities, but rather as the same reality expressed in concentric circles: none of them has ever existed apart from the others.

Around Don Bosco and his successors the Family has grown, even by the addition of new Groups, and has continued to live in unity, even though there have been some difficult moments when there was a risk of its charismatic unity becoming less evident.

After being relaunched during the SGC in the form of a new project<sup>1</sup>, the Salesian Family has given a marked impetus to pastoral activity. It has given rise to initiatives, mobilized forces, and rediscovered all the riches of its particular spiritual identity.<sup>2</sup> The Rector Major and his Council have indicated some criteria for membership: the specific vocation, participation in the mission to the young and the poor, the sharing in the salesian spirit and in the pastoral and educational plan, adherence to the preventive system, and a family style of acting together.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 151-157

<sup>2</sup> The relaunching of the Salesian Family led some groups of the salesian "movement" to call themselves members of this Family, so that the term "Salesian Family" was sometimes used to include some other aspects of the "movement" in addition to the Groups committed to it by vocation

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ASC 304 (1982), p. 61 ff.

The charismatic reality of the Salesian Family is shown in elements which *distinguish* the Groups one from another, and in elements they have in *common*. The very variety in the ecclesial circumstances of those the Spirit has called to be members (religious, consecrated seculars, priests and lay people) makes us reflect on the responsibility shared by so many people in the genuine living out of the salesian charisma: with them in fact "we make up the Salesian Family". And we in particular are reminded by the SGC: "The salesians cannot fully rethink their vocation in the Church without reference to those who share with them in carrying out their Founder's will".<sup>4</sup>

• The *distinguishing element* is the specific manner in which each Group makes its own the charism of Don Bosco.

It is important to have a sound knowledge of the different Groups and of the specific way they live the salesian mission. Here there is space only to recall a few of the Groups which make up the Salesian Family: the Salesians (SDB) and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), both of them religious institutes, and the Salesian Cooperators, an Association made up in large part of lay people. These were the Groups founded by Don Bosco himself, and to them have since been added the Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV) who are consecrated women belonging to a Secular Institute, and various other religious congregations of women;<sup>5</sup> and if it be God's will, still other different groups may appear.

<sup>4</sup> SGC, 151

<sup>5</sup> The Groups of the Salesian Family officially recognized by the Rector Major with his Council at the date of publication of this Commentary are the following:

- Institute of the "Daughters of the Sacred Heart" of Bogotá (11.01.1982)
- Institute of the "Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart" (24.12.1983)
- Institute of the "Sister Apostles of the Holy Family" (Christmas 1984)
- Institute of the "Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki" (31.01.1986)
- Institute of the "Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians", Shillong (8.07.1986)



• The *elements common* to all the Groups<sup>6</sup> are the following:

— the call to share the 'charism' given to Don Bosco and his Family, in some important aspect of the human and supernatural experience of the Saint;

— the apostolic mission to the young and the poor;

— the style of life and activity (salesian spirit);

— reference to the Founder of the Family and to his successors as the centre of unity.

The SGC declared: "In the mind and heart of Don Bosco the Salesian Family is one. The original unity of this family has its root in the existence of a common spirit and mission of total service to the young and to working class people. Thus it shows itself to be at the higher level a real community in which all the members are integrated according to their proper qualities and specific functions and in the different forms of life possible in the Church".<sup>7</sup> A deeper analysis of the reality of the Salesian Family, of its mission and unifying force, has been given by the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, in a circular which well repays meditation.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, let us not forget that a "bond of union" between the various Groups of the Salesian Family is provided by the Salesian Bulletin (cf. R 41).

### The Society of St Francis de Sales in the Salesian Family

The article's third paragraph specifies the role of the Salesians (SDB) in the Family, indicating the "particular responsibilities" they have. Already in the first "Regulations of the Cooperators" of 1876,

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ASC 304 (1982), loc.cit.

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 739

<sup>8</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian Family*, ASC 304 (1982), p. 3-48; cf. also *Costruire insieme la Famiglia Salesiana*, ed. M. MIDALI, LAS Rome, 1983

it was said: "This Salesian Congregation, being definitively approved by the Church (1874), can serve as a sure and stable bond for the Salesian Cooperators".<sup>9</sup>

The Salesian Family did not appear in the Church as though almost without the knowledge of the Founder, but by his express wish. One has only to recall how the Salesians (SDB) and the Cooperators were closely linked in the first manuscript drafts of the Constitutions of the Society; one need only think of the close bond with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The idea of unity was one that Don Bosco had always had in mind (the "union of good people", he called it).<sup>10</sup>

The preservation of this unity is one of the prime obligations of the Salesian Society, a duty devoid of all pretension; it is a service and a duty laid on us by Don Bosco.<sup>11</sup>

But it should be noted that our responsibility, rather than being merely juridical, is of the charismatic, spiritual and pastoral order.

According to the Constitutions we are obliged:

— "*to preserve unity of spirit*": it is not said that the Salesians will always be the ones who best practise the spirit of the Founder (desirable though that might be!), but those who especially by their fatherly presence and through the directives of the Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco, will be guarantors of the common fidelity to the same spirit;

— "*to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration*": a living unity cannot exist without this mutual exchange of views.

Two benefits are indicated which result from this kind of exchange: one for the groups themselves — the reciprocal enrichment of their salesian features; the other for those to whom their apostolate is directed — a greater apostolic effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, ch. II

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1877

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SGC, 173. 189; GC21, 75. 79. 588

<sup>12</sup> The Acts of the SGC develop these perspectives: cf. SGC, 174-177

Our General Regulations specify in greater detail how the salesian community is to be the "*animating nucleus*" of the Family: "The community, in agreement with those responsible for the various groups, with respect for their autonomy and in a spirit of service, offers them spiritual assistance, promotes meetings, encourages collaboration and initiatives in the educational and pastoral fields, and cultivates the common commitment for vocations" (R 36).

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians too, and to the other Institutes, "in response to their requests and as far as lies within our power ... we offer our fraternal help and our priestly ministry. We collaborate with them in deepening our understanding of Don Bosco's spirituality and pedagogy, and particularly in keeping alive the Marian dimension of the salesian charism" (R 37).

We also promote the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator and collaborate in the formation of the members (cf. R 38), remembering Don Bosco's words: "The same harvest is proposed for Salesian Cooperators as for the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, with which they want to be associated".<sup>13</sup>

## The Past Pupils

*The Past Pupils' Association* is another Group which belongs to the Salesian Family for a specific reason.

First of all we must ask: Who constitute the Group of Past Pupils? And the answer is: all those who through frequenting for some time a salesian work (community, school, hostel, oratory, youth centre, etc.) have acquired an education and formation according to Don Bosco's principles, and adhere to the corresponding Association or feel themselves represented by it.

<sup>13</sup> D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, ch. IV

The reference here to the Association is important, because according to an indication given by the Rector Major during the GC21, "one does not belong to the Salesian Family as an individual but only through some group: the Salesian Family is made up of groups, but not just any old groups; they must be properly constituted groups, for which official recognition is needed".<sup>14</sup>

The article says that Past Pupils are members of the Salesian Family by reason of "*the education they have received*", and adds that the bonds are closer "*when they commit themselves to take an active part in the salesian mission*". A comment on the two expressions will not be out of place.

— "*The education they have received*": this implies a complex of human and christian values which have an effect on the past pupil's personality and which enter (even from a purely human aspect in certain religious situations) into the objectives of salesian educational activity. The 'education received' can be later expressed in various commitments in the vast mission of Don Bosco, whether in the educational field, the many cultural areas, or in tasks specifically linked (albeit at various levels) with the values of the preventive system. It is important to notice that both educational commitments and the assimilation of the pedagogical values of the preventive system are integral parts of Don Bosco's charism.

— The further expression: "*when they commit themselves to take an active part in the salesian mission in the world*", implies that past pupils are particularly prepared, precisely because of the education they have received, to assume a responsibility in collaborating for the attainment of the objectives inherent in the salesian plan.

In the GC21 reference was made to past pupils who have made "the choice of the Gospel".<sup>15</sup> It should be emphasized that this choice is not an alternative to the title of "education received", but rather a special expression of it: it is not therefore a separate title applicable

<sup>14</sup> GC21, 516

<sup>15</sup> GC21, 69

to a kind of new group. Rightly did the Rector Major observe that past pupils of this kind do not form an officially constituted group on their own. If they want to be considered a living part of the Association of Past Pupils, the formal reason for their membership will not be their 'choice of the Gospel' but will remain that of the 'education received', which certainly does not exclude apostolic work (indeed it requires it in virtue of the education received if the latter was deeply christian and ecclesial in character).<sup>16</sup>

In this way the article of the Constitutions emphasizes that the education received should lead to the conscious choice to collaborate in the common mission to youth. Such a commitment can be carried out at various levels and with different degrees of intensity. It is easy to understand the exhortation made by the SGC (which has been incorporated in art. 39 of the General Regulations): "It is to be hoped that within the movement of the past pupils, ... those who are inclined and gifted that way should become organized as Cooperators or members of apostolic groups so as to participate in the spirit and activity of the Salesian Family".<sup>17</sup>

And here there comes spontaneously to mind a thought pregnant with implications for the future, concerning the nature and role of the "Cooperators' Association" in the Salesian Family. The Rector Major wrote: "There exists an outstanding Association, that of the Salesian Cooperators. From the point of view of the vocation of the lay person in our Family, this must be considered the centre of reference for all such possibilities, because it is not an alternative to other associations but rather aims at animating those others. The Cooperators are not an association which, as such, organizes works and specific initiatives; the Association is aware that it shares responsibility with us in preserving in all its members and in our Family the vitality of Don Bosco's plan, bringing to it the riches of its own secular condition. In doing this it retains the possibility of offering animators for the identity of

<sup>16</sup> Cf. GC21, 517

<sup>17</sup> SGC, 157

any other group or association whose specific nature needs to be known and appreciated, without prejudice to its autonomy".<sup>18</sup>

It is readily understandable therefore why our Catholic Past Pupils, naturally prepared as they are the better to take on apostolic commitments, are invited to enrol as Cooperators;<sup>19</sup> and on the other hand one can easily see what a valuable contribution such Past Pupil-Cooperators can make to their own Association.

In any case it is a specific duty of the Salesians to follow up and animate the Past Pupils; the General Regulations ask the confreres and communities to fulfil their obligations in this sector (Cf. R 39).

*God our Father,  
you have willed to entrust the salesian mission  
to different groups in a single great Family.  
Pour out upon us your Spirit  
so that in our brotherly union  
and in the sincere sharing of our gifts  
of nature and of grace,  
we may all be able to collaborate  
with true efficacy  
in the evangelization of the young and the poor.  
Through Christ our Lord*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The lay person in the Salesian Family*, AGC (1986), p. 19-20

<sup>19</sup> This was the thought of Don Bosco, who nevertheless always distinguished clearly between Cooperators and Past Pupils; cf. BM XIII, 582

## ART. 6 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CHURCH

The salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission.

Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations; we are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication; we proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it.

In this way we contribute to building up the Church as the Body of Christ, so that also through us she may appear to the world as the "universal sacrament of salvation".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LG 48; GS 45

It is quite noticeable how insistently the Constitutions speak of the Church.

The entire first part is headed "*The Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church*"; "We are recognized in the Church", says art. 4; and this present article carries the title: "Our Society in the Church" and asserts: "the salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission"; it goes on: "...we contribute to building up the Church". Later the Constitutions will speak of our "desire to work with the Church and in her name" (C 7); they will refer to our "authentic understanding of the Church" (C 13) to our sharing in the life and mission of the Church (C 24), to the fact that our community "expresses in a visible manner the mystery of the Church" (C 85) and becomes for both young and old "a living experience of Church" (C 47). All this comes down to the fact that to live as Salesians is a way of "being Church".

Our Founder and our Society are gifts of the Spirit to the whole People of God, to enrich its holiness and make it apostolically

efficacious.<sup>1</sup> Our vocation, therefore, while putting us entirely at the service of the Church's mission, asks us to take care that the characteristic "experience of the Spirit" of our charism be faithfully preserved and "constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth".<sup>2</sup>

The statements in this article are embryonic but of great importance because they summarize in connection with the Church's mission what Don Bosco called the "aims" or "purposes" of the Congregation.

### At the heart of the Church and at her service

*"The salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church".*

The reference here is not to the Church seen merely as a law-making society, but to the Church as "mystery", the People of God, the Body of Christ, the sacrament of salvation. Both the SGC and the GC22 presented the Salesian Society as being in the Church, with the Church and for the Church.

The simple image used ("*at the heart*") harks back to two statements of the Council.

— In the first place it recalls a text of "Lumen Gentium", where it is said that the state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels belongs undeniably to the Church's life and holiness.<sup>3</sup> Religious life is a particular sign of the love of the Church for Christ her Lord; for this reason the religious lives for the Church; in the words of the Council: "The bonds of consecration, by which he pledges himself to the practice of the counsels, show forth the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his bride the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. PC 1; MR 10

<sup>2</sup> MR 11

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LG 44



Church". But because "the evangelical counsels unite those who practise them to the Church and her mystery in a special way, it follows that the spiritual life of such christians should be dedicated also to the welfare of the entire Church".<sup>4</sup>

— Secondly, there is an allusion to a passage from the decree "Perfectae caritatis", in which it is stated that religious of active life receive their apostolic mission from the Church and carry it out in her name: "(In religious communities) the very nature of the religious life requires apostolic action and services, since a sacred ministry and a special work of charity have been consigned to them by the Church and must be discharged in her name".<sup>5</sup>

Our situation "at the heart of the Church" evidently excludes any idea of triumphalism and every form of parallelism. Being Salesians is our intensive way of being Church. Any kind of dualism between salesian life and the life of the particular or universal Church is unthinkable. The same Spirit who animates and unifies the Church has inspired our salesian vocation.

This is why the Rule adds: "*The salesian vocation puts us entirely at the service of her (the Church's) mission*".

Aware as we are that the salesian mission is a sharing in the mission of the Church itself, it should be impossible for us to think of carrying out our activity in a closed circle, without relationships with all the other members of the ecclesial body. The adverb "entirely", which qualifies our conduct as sons of Don Bosco, is significant!

### The four principal objectives of the salesian mission

Don Bosco has pointed out very clearly the *specific and priority areas* in which the Congregation is to carry out its apostolic service in the Church's mission.

<sup>4</sup> LG 44; cf. RD 14

<sup>5</sup> PC 8

These sectors were not just a response to spasmodic circumstances of the time calling for emergency measures, but the result of the influence of the Spirit who moved the Founder from within to make certain lasting choices. They are therefore evidently up to date and of constant interest to the Church and society.

Sensitivity, flexibility and creativity, as the Constitutions will tell us in due course, must certainly characterize our spirit in the wide panorama of a mission which is typical of a pilgrim Church. Situations change, and so do the ways and means with which we carry out our activity.

But the mission remains substantially unaltered and prescriptive. The Congregation will not limit its attention to urgent situations which arise, to the provision of "first aid" remedies for new circumstances with the risk of a generalized levelling down which would destroy or deform its identity. It will keep its eye firmly fixed, in its apostolic service, on the priority sectors assigned to it by Don Bosco and approved by the Church.

This article of the Constitutions enumerates the sectors which belong essentially to this category: for us they are of great interest, wide-ranging and always up to date. The text draws its inspiration directly from the first chapter of the Constitutions as written by the Founder, where he speaks explicitly of the scope of the Congregation.<sup>6</sup>

— *"We are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor".*

This is an ever present sector in a Church which brings to birth and forms the children of God, but in which we feel ever more urgently the need for "Missionaries of the young", as Pope John Paul II has called us.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In the Constitutions written by the Founder (1875 edtn.), the mission to the young (I,3.4), commitment to vocations (I,5) and the care of the working classes (I,6) are expressly mentioned. Don Bosco does not yet speak of "missions" (the term is found in the Constitutions only from 1904), but he nevertheless launches the Society on the missionary venture

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22: GC22, 13

The evangelizing dimension, as the Constitutions will tell us in developing the theme of the mission, is the basic criterion for our educational pastoral work.

— *"We pay special attention to apostolic vocations".*

The problem of vocations has always been of fundamental importance in the Church and is still so at the present day:<sup>8</sup> Don Bosco wanted the Salesians to be in all circumstances guides, educators, encouragers and animators of apostolic vocations (consecrated, religious, priestly or lay).

— *"We are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication".*

We are called to be "educators" of christian faith and culture, in appropriate language, among young people and the working classes, who are often defenceless against atheism and irreligion.

We are "communicators of the Word" in a simple and attractive manner in all possible ways (expression by the written and spoken word, audio-visuals etc.) and in fact by all the means of social communication offered us by the mass media. This is a task with enormous implications, and one prophetically assigned to us by Don Bosco!

We are therefore called to be up to the minute apostles of social communication among youngsters and the ordinary people, adapting ourselves to the ever new ways of developing the faith in every kind of culture.

— *"We proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it".*

For Don Bosco the missions were the heart and driving force which gave strength and tone to the Congregation. He wanted the Salesians to be proclaimers of the Kingdom among peoples not yet evangelized. His passion of "da mihi animas" allowed of no frontiers; the over-

<sup>8</sup> In his homily for the inauguration of the Second International Congress on Vocations (Rome, 10 May 1981), John Paul II said: "The problem of priestly vocations - and also of religious vocations among both men and women - is, and I say it very clearly, *the fundamental problem of the Church*"

whelming desire for the evangelization of all peoples is for the salesian a motive for personal growth, and for the Congregation an instigation to a universal outlook.

All these sectors of our mission will be further developed in later parts of the constitutional text.

**The Church appears to the world, also through us, as the "universal sacrament of salvation"**

As a conclusion to this article, emphasis is laid once again on the importance of feeling oneself involved in the mystery of the Church. For the salvation of men Christ calls them to himself making them Church, which becomes not only a "community at once human and divine", but also the "universal sacrament of salvation".

We said that our characteristic vocation "puts us entirely at the service" of the Church's needs, with particular attention to the most delicate part of the People of God, which is youth.

*As Church* we feel that we have been "saved" by the goodness of Christ, but we also feel that we share responsibility for the salvation of others, and especially of young people; we set out to renew ourselves, always in the knowledge that we are a sign of God's love for the young.

*As Salesians* we feel ourselves inserted in the mystery of the Church, we cooperate in her mission with all our strength, we pass on to others our spirit and our educational and pastoral method as gifts we have received for distribution; we become bearers of our special charisma throughout the world.

Our way of living our membership of the Church and of contributing to its construction consists in being genuine and faithful Salesians, i.e. in being ever more ourselves. The decree "Perfectae caritatis" says, in fact: "It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own proper characters and functions".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> PC 2

In this way we help to build up the Church "as the Body of Christ": in it we are a precise organism, a living member, and our apostolic activity helps it to grow (think, for instance, of our activity in the fields of education, missions, parishes, catechetics, vocations etc.).

But we contribute too, in a humble way, to showing it forth as the universal sacrament of salvation and freedom: the sacrament of the saving love of God for the young, and especially those who are poor.

*God our Father,  
help us to understand  
that our salesian vocation  
places us at the heart of the Church  
for the service of her divine mission.*

*Grant us complete generosity  
in making the contribution of our charisma,  
in accordance with the plan you inspired in Don Bosco,  
so that we may be true "missionaries of the young"  
and efficacious bearers of the Gospel of your Son.*

*Grant also that in every circumstance  
we may use all the means your Providence provides  
to collaborate in the building of the Church itself,  
the Mystical Body of Christ  
and the universal sacrament of salvation.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 7 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history.<sup>1</sup> Open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel.

The needs of the young and of working-class areas, the desire to work with the Church and in her name, inspire and shape our concrete pastoral activity so as to bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ.

<sup>1</sup> cf. GS 1

The title of this article brings to mind the great pastoral Constitution of Vatican II "The Church in the Modern World", and in this way manifests the desire of the Salesian Society to enter into the perspective of the present-day Church. At the same time it provides a first explanation of our relationship with the world: we are a living organism of the Church, we must contribute to making it present in the world to which it is sent "to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served".<sup>1</sup>

The presence of the Church in the world is justified as a service to humanity: "a Church and a Council turned towards man, not turned aside towards man",<sup>2</sup> said Paul VI; in a similar but much more humble way, the Salesian Congregation feels that it is turned towards the young, even though not turned aside in that direction.

This article affirms the relationship between evangelization and culture and the attitude to be adopted by the Salesians so as to respond to the challenges of the present day: "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GS 3

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Concluding address at the 4th session of the Council*, 7 December 1965

<sup>3</sup> EN 20

## Intimately solid with the world and its history

Our membership of the Church and our salesian vocation call us to make ourselves friends, and even "servants", of youth and of working-class areas, just as Christ became the servant of the least of his brethren.

The characteristic form of our relationship with the world is solidarity with the young in so far as they are inserted in the world and its history. The text refers explicitly to the first article of "Gaudium et Spes" which says: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time ... are (those) of the followers of Christ as well ... Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history".<sup>4</sup>

This solidarity for the salvation of the young means that we must:

- foster our sympathy for the countries in which we work, carefully study the social reality of the places where we live, and take an interest in their problems;
- be open to the local cultures, make the effort to fully understand them, and accept their values and pluriformity;
- work to incarnate in these cultures the Gospel of Christ ("inculturation" of the Gospel);
- bring up to date in them the salesian method of kindness.

Don Bosco did not want to make us monks or conventual friars but religious of a new kind, close to all men as their brothers and at their service. Many of our activities (think, for instance, of our many educational services and social communication) have a character which in themselves are profane, to the extent that of their nature they are inserted in the reality and social problems of the people.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> GS 1

<sup>5</sup> The Constitutions indicate that our mission, sharing in that of the Church, links with the commitment to evangelization that of the development of the temporal order (cf. C 31). Cf. also the document "*Religious and human promotion*" (CRIS, Rome 1980), which speaks of the promotional tasks which the Church entrusts to religious

Such a character, however, is not at variance with the demands of religious consecration, nor with the objectives of our mission, nor with the need to oppose the deviations of a world which does not accept Christ and his Gospel. We can indeed bear witness to the truth of Christ who sets man free by living the problems of our time, sharing its rhythm and its "human" enterprises, its joys and sorrows; leaving aside at the same time everything in thought, word or deed that would make us irrelevant to others or not acceptable to them. Here we find once again an aspect of the characteristic humanism of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco.

*Open to cultural values so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel.*

The Constitutions emphasize this aspect: our particular commitment to evangelization means that we must be open to cultural values, to an understanding of them and to their acceptance.

A flexible and creative attitude is indispensable at a time when all cultures are undergoing great evolution. We are - says "Gaudium et Spes"<sup>6</sup> — on the threshold of a new era in history in which is being born an intensive human interrelationship, which implies a kind of "superculture", which links human relations with exchanges and creates bonds of communion. It is a call to make ourselves more universal, to live in harmony with universal human growth, and to be attentive to the intercultural dialogue which is now taking place at world level.

The motive which induces us to embrace this encounter with cultures is the apostolic anxiety which moved the apostle Paul to travel the earth to take everywhere the Gospel message, a message which is able to "make every people fruitful, as it were from within, to strengthen, perfect and restore them in Christ":<sup>7</sup> the journeys of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GS 54 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GS 58\_\_



Pope and his teaching show very clearly the special role which Providence entrusts to the apostles at the present time with the Spirit's assistance.

Within our own modest salesian environment too the inculturation of Don Bosco's charisma makes indispensable a great attention, to both the signs of the times and the mediations of the individual cultures, to strengthen the identity and unity of the Congregation, by the acceptance of a pluriformity of means which at the same time exclude both uniformity and nationalisms.

### **Our pastoral viewpoint: from the salesian "mission" to "pastoral" action**

Don Bosco believed in the social implications of his work (cf. C 33), directed as it was to the overall advancement of the young, to the service of mankind and hence to the advent of a new society where justice and brotherhood in Christ could reign: "From the good or poor education of youngsters depends the happy or melancholy future of society's customs".<sup>8</sup>

After glancing at the vast and complex character of the salesian mission in relation to the modern world, the text concentrates attention on the indispensable "*pastoral outlook*"<sup>9</sup> needed to translate the mission into concrete pastoral interventions of many kinds.<sup>10</sup> This kind of outlook is expressed in the Rule as "the desire to work with the Church and in her name" so as to give direction to all activity and at the same time prevent our indispensable commitment to human advancement from degenerating to a merely temporal level. The salesian pastoral outlook makes us examine with a positive approach the reality in which we live and leads us to a discernment of the real "needs of the young

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Proemio alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales, 1858* (F. MOTTO, p. 58)

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22. GC22, 13

<sup>10</sup> The SGC, while affirming the unity of the salesian mission, points out the indispensable need to put it into practice through a variety of pastoral activities linked to the different social and cultural realities (cf. SGC, 30)

and of working-class areas" so as to advance towards what Paul VI called "the civilization of love".

Our Founder has insistently exhorted us to give great attention to the pastoral aspect of our commitment for humanity, with activity entrusted to us by the Church, always inspired and motivated by the intention "to preserve the faith and sound customs in that section of young people who, because they are poor, are exposed to greater dangers to their eternal salvation".<sup>11</sup>

Concern about the pastoral viewpoint ("*working with the Church and in her name*") helps us, when responding to urgent social needs, to avoid the very real dangers arising from ideological deviations and prevailing current ideas; it recalls to our minds how careful Don Bosco was to avoid adopting fixed political and partisan attitudes; it helps us to make preferential options indicated by the salesian mission, in harmony with the local Churches.

Here we are interpreting from a salesian standpoint what "Gaudium et Spes" says about the "signs of the times". "At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task... so as to be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask".<sup>12</sup> "The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith it tries to discern in the events, the needs and the longings which it shares with other men of our time, what may be genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God".<sup>13</sup>

In every country to which we may be sent we want to be intensively present in the cultural, social and political life of the people, and in particular of young people in working-class areas: this is the only way to discover their real "needs", their hunger for bread, for knowledge, for human dignity, for truth, for beauty and, at the foun-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Proemio alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales, 1858* (F. MOTTO, p. 60)

<sup>12</sup> GS 4

<sup>13</sup> GS 11

dation of it all, their hunger for Jesus Christ. Don Bosco never used any other method!

In this way we hope, through our educational and apostolic commitment, to contribute to the world's progress. But what kind of progress? What kind of world are we dreaming about? And what kind of human society do we want to promote? The text discreetly implies that we contest every dehumanizing element of the present world and in particular the prominence given to profit; we want to contribute to the building of "a more just world and one of greater brotherhood" inspired by Christ and the principles of his Gospel.

The same theme will be taken up again and at greater length in article 33.

*Lord our God,  
you have called us to serve you in our fellow men  
and to be solid with those to whom you have sent us.*

*Grant that we may share with sincerity  
the hopes and anxieties of men of our time,  
and accept with an open heart  
the values of the cultures in which you insert us,  
willingly sharing the needs of poor youth;  
so that being in the world without being of the world  
we may be instrumental in bringing to it  
a new experience of your justice and your love.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 8 THE PRESENCE OF MARY IN OUR SOCIETY

The Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work,<sup>1</sup> especially in the foundation of our Society.

We believe that Mary is present among us and continues her "mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians".<sup>2</sup>

We entrust ourselves to her, the humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things,<sup>3</sup> that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love.

<sup>1</sup> MB VII, 334; XVII, 258; XVIII, 439; BM VII, 197

<sup>2</sup> DON BOSCO, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, Turin 1858, p. 45 (OE XX, 237)

<sup>3</sup> cf. Lk 1, 48-49

In the first part of the Constitutions, which forms their foundation, this article on the "presence of Mary in our Society" presents our Lady as being strictly linked with both the foundation of the Society and the salesian vocation. The Marian dimension, in fact, is an essential part of both the history and the life of the Salesian Society.

The Mother of God, as cooperator in the work of redemption, has shared actively in the birth and development of the various religious institutes in the Church: "One may say that Mary most holy has been the foundress and mother of every Congregation, from the Cenacle down to the present day".<sup>1</sup>

In particular Don Bosco says in our own case: "Mary is the Mother and support of our Congregation".<sup>2</sup>

The article sets out to illustrate this reality which, while ensuring us of the motherly gaze that the Blessed Virgin turns on the Salesian

<sup>1</sup> MB IX, 347

<sup>2</sup> MB XVII, 258

Society, makes clear her enduring and operative presence in the life and activity of the Church. As the Council says: "Taken up to heaven ... (Mary) continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ... and cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home".<sup>3</sup>

### Mary present at the foundation of the Society

The article begins with the solemn affirmation of the presence and role of Mary in the vocation of Don Bosco and at the start of his work. Mary, the Mother of God, who is also the Mother of the young, has shown a special concern for them: in John Bosco's dream at the age of nine and repeated more than once in later years, she herself pointed to the young as his field of activity, and to kindness as the pastoral method to be used.

Don Bosco, thinking back later to the birth and development of his work, once said: "We cannot go wrong: Mary herself is leading us".<sup>4</sup>

The text of the Constitutions refers to the many ways in which the Blessed Virgin was the "constant guide and support" of Don Bosco.

— As his "*inspirer and guide*" she accompanied him with visible signs of benevolence and protection in the foundation and development of the Congregation and the whole Salesian Family. "It is all Our Lady's work", he used to say; "she is the foundress and support of our works", our unfailing guide.<sup>5</sup>

— As "*mother and teacher*" she supported Don Bosco with the thoughtful kindness<sup>6</sup> she had once shown at Cana (cf. Jn 2), and with

<sup>3</sup> IG 62

<sup>4</sup> MB XVIII, 439

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BM VII, 197; MB XVIII, 439

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BM VII, 406

a clear and universally valid educational plan for the formation of the young: the preventive system (cf. C 20).

— It can therefore be truly said that "the growth, multiplication and extension of the Salesian Society can and must be attributed to Mary most holy".<sup>7</sup> Our Founder used to say: "The Congregation is led by God and protected by Mary most holy".<sup>8</sup>

Speaking to his first followers in 1867 of the future of the young Congregation, Don Bosco narrated his dream of the pergola of roses and introduced it as follows: "I have already told you of several things I saw as in a dream. From them we can infer how much Our Lady loves and helps us. But now that we are alone together, I am going to tell you not just another dream, but something that Our Lady herself graciously showed me. I am doing this so that each of us may be convinced that it is Our Lady herself who wants our Congregation. This should spur us on to work ever harder for God's greater glory. She wants us to place all our trust in her".<sup>9</sup>

In this perspective we can understand the words of the Rector Major at the end of the GC21: "The Congregation was born and developed through the intervention of Mary, and it will be renewed only to the extent that Mary returns to occupy the place that belongs to her in our charism".<sup>10</sup>

## **Mary present in our vocation**

Our trust in Mary's active presence among us to continue her "mission" must never fail. We believe with Don Bosco that she is our mother and teacher, in a certain sense the one who instructs us in the manner of taking the Gospel to present-day youth.

<sup>7</sup> BM VI, 183

<sup>8</sup> MB XVIII, 531

<sup>9</sup> BM III, 25

<sup>10</sup> GC 21, 589

In the second paragraph is noticeable the special emphasis laid on the ecclesial and Catholic openness of Don Bosco's devotion to Our Lady. "She wants us", he said, "to honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians",<sup>11</sup> a very appropriate title, particularly in the time of great difficulty and great hopes through which we are living.<sup>12</sup>

She "has continued from heaven, and even more efficaciously, the mission of Mother of the Church and Help of Christians which she had begun on earth".<sup>13</sup>

This quotation from Don Bosco which brings together the two titles of "Mother of the Church and Help of Christians" is of particular significance at the present time, after Paul VI officially proclaimed her "Mother of the Church" at the end of the third session of the Vatican Council.<sup>14</sup>

Mary is the gift and property of the whole Church. The Constitution "Lumen Gentium" and the Apostolic Exhortation "Marialis Cultus" have described her prophetic role and her function in the Church; we can reach a better understanding of her figure by more attentive reflection on the way she serves God, her brethren and the community, by a greater sensitivity to the requirements of ecumenism, and by a closer study of Christology and ecclesiology.

Mary is not only Mother of the Church; she is also the Church's image. To renew the difficult dialogue between youth and the Church, this Mother must be found again. "If we want to get back to the truth about Jesus Christ, about the Church and about man, we must turn to Mary".<sup>15</sup> Mary wants a Church that courageously puts itself at the service of the world, of the young, of the poor and the working-class, of cultural requirements, but also a Church full of motherly kindness.

<sup>11</sup> BM VII, 197

<sup>12</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Mary renews the Salesian Family*, ASC 289 (1978)

<sup>13</sup> D. BOSCO *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin 1868, p. 45 (OE vol XX p. 237)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *Closing address of the third session of Vatican II*, 21 November 1964

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, 1979

We should always link the title of Mother of the Church with that of Mary Help of Christians. As disciples of the Lord, we are Church: its difficulties, anxieties and plans are ours too; as followers of Christ we feel ourselves to be participants in the Marian mission of "Help of Christians" and "Mother of the Church".

As educators we note in particular Mary's role in the education of christians. "The figure of Mary", we read in 'Marialis Cultus', "offers to men of our time the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim to the city which is heavenly and eternal, the disciple who works for the justice which sets free the oppressed and for the charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts".<sup>16</sup>

We believe that Mary is indeed the Helper in the formation of christians in this way; the Helper in the titanic struggle between good and evil, life and death, light and the darkness of sin; the Helper of the young in overcoming their little personal fears and the great universal fears that afflict them.

Don Bosco tells us: "Call her the Help of Christians. She greatly enjoys helping us".<sup>17</sup> She is "the Help of parents, the Help of children, the Help of friends".<sup>18</sup>

### **We entrust ourselves to Mary**

Because of their participation in the vicissitudes of the Church and their responsibility to youth, the Salesians entrust themselves to Mary in their apostolic enterprises: "Entrusted as we are to her protection, we shall be able to embark on great undertakings".<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> MC 37

<sup>17</sup> MB XVI, 269

<sup>18</sup> MB XVI, 212

<sup>19</sup> P. ALBERA, Letter of 31.3.1918, *Circulars*, p. 286



This entrustment was renewed by the Congregation in a solemn act on 14 January 1984 at the beginning of the GC22, and is repeated daily by every Salesian on his own account.

We are quite certain in fact that "the Blessed Virgin will certainly continue to protect our Congregation and our salesian works if we maintain our trust in her and promote devotion to her".<sup>20</sup>

The term "entrustment" is of recent origin but is a very significant one. It takes the place of the formerly used "consecration" which, as we have seen, is properly used to express an action of God.

Entrustment of oneself to Mary is a filial gesture which reveals sure trust, unmixed love and complete belonging. It had also been suggested by Don Bosco in 1869 when he proposed an "Act of affiliation by which we take the Virgin Mary as our mother".<sup>21</sup>

To entrust oneself to Mary is to begin an affective relationship of self-donation, of availability, of belonging, of depending on the patronage of Mary, Christ's co-worker.<sup>22</sup>

The Constitutions say that we Salesians entrust ourselves to Mary so as to be bearers of a youthful spirituality, to construct a pedagogy of living witness to youthful sanctity, i.e. to "become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love": this is the mission indicated from the beginning by our Rule (cf. C 2).

We entrust ourselves to the Mother of the Church, i.e. to a Mother who is active and ever solicitous over the outcome of the vicissitudes of every century. Mary is the Mother of young people and of vocations.

We entrust ourselves to the Helper of the Pope, the Bishops and all christian people.

We entrust ourselves to the "humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things". This reference to the Magnificat opens up vast

<sup>20</sup> D. BOSCO, *Spiritual Testament*, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 268

<sup>21</sup> D. BOSCO, *Catholic Readings* 1869, p. 57

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, 8 December 1981, commemorating the Council of Ephesus, "entrusted" to Mary the entire human family

horizons in which appear in rapid sequence the tortured history of mankind and the fatherly intervention of God who made of his humble servant the starting point for the renewal of humanity: the whole story of salvation is an invitation to trust in her.

We Salesian have the responsibility of preserving and promoting devotion to Mary among the ordinary working-class people, and of fostering among the young a deeper knowledge of her, the Mother and Helper, which will lead to love and imitation.

*Lord Jesus,  
you gave to Don Bosco  
your own most holy Mother  
to be his Mother, Teacher and Helper;  
and through her you showed him his field of work  
and inspired him to found our Society.*

*Continue to look kindly on this your Family,  
and grant that we may always be aware amongst us  
of the living and active presence of Mary,  
"Mother of the Church and Help of Christians".*

*Entrusted as we are to her and under her guidance  
may we always be for young people  
witnesses of your unbounded love.*

## ART. 9 PATRONS AND PROTECTORS OF OUR SOCIETY

As members of the pilgrim Church, we are conscious of our fellowship with our brothers in the heavenly kingdom and feel the need of their help.<sup>1</sup>

Don Bosco entrusted our Society in a special way to Mary, whom he made its principal patroness,<sup>2</sup> as well as to St Joseph and to St Francis de Sales, the zealous pastor and doctor of charity.

We hold in veneration as special protectors St Dominic Savio, a sign of the wonders that grace can achieve in adolescents, and the other glorified members of our family.

<sup>1</sup> cf. LG 49

<sup>2</sup> cf. C 1875, V, 6

Our society is a living part of the pilgrim Church, and is in communication with the Church in heaven, already basking in the vision of its Lord. "All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together".<sup>1</sup>

In this last article of the first chapter the Constitutions remind us of the special relationship we enjoy with our glorified confreres, whom we invoke as patrons and protectors: our union with them is not broken by death, but consolidated in the communication of spiritual goods.

This article of the Rule takes us into the kind of atmosphere that was conjured up in one of Don Bosco's "Good Nights" to his sons: "Let everyone think of heaven, where some of you have brothers or sisters, friends or companions, superiors or subjects, a father or mother, who are enjoying the reward of their virtuous lives. ... If they became saints, why cannot you?" ... I assure you that the Lord will help you. ... All you lack is a small dose of good will. ... Ask the Lord for it, ask insistently and he will grant it. And if your prayers prove insuffi-

cient, turn to the Saints and especially to the Blessed Virgin, who ... are ready to help you in every way. Ask them to obtain for you an ardent and constant love of God, and the Lord will grant through the prayers of so many saints what your prayers were unable to obtain".<sup>2</sup>

**We are members of the pilgrim Church, in communion with our brothers in the heavenly kingdom**

The Church in which we are working is not one which is disembodied and outside time. It is living dynamically in history: it is a "pilgrim" Church, a Church on the way.

The image emphasizes our intention to respond to the needs of the Church here on earth, with our eyes fixed on what she plans for the future.

The Constitution "Lumen Gentium" speaks of a prophetic, royal and priestly people; and the decree "Perfectae caritatis" urges religious to take part in the life of the Church in various fields: "biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social matters".<sup>3</sup> This supposes that we promote a Church which is ever more authentic and evangelical, in a world in process of secularization: a serving and poor Church, which is looking for a new kind of presence and action, which will be all things to all men, which will heed the cry of the poor, find a place in cultures and lead men to see in her the living Christ.

Such a Church bears witness to the future City and unhesitatingly points out the way to perfect union with Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem.

In this pilgrim Church *"we feel the need for the help of our brothers in the heavenly kingdom"*; with them, who collaborated in

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 407

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 2

the building of the Church, we keep alive the communion which unites us with the glorified Church of heaven: the Saints still intervene in our history to help us in building the Body of Christ: "by their brotherly concern, our weakness is greatly helped".<sup>4</sup>

## **We are members of a Society entrusted to Mary, St Joseph and to St Francis de Sales**

Among the Saints we venerate in a special way those who have been given to us as patrons and protectors, who intercede for us and intervene to sustain us in our mission.

— Of the *Virgin Mary* the Constitutions have already spoken in the preceding article; but here they tell us that Don Bosco entrusted the Congregation to her in a special way and made her its "*principal patroness*".

It is not a question here of an official act performed just once, but rather of an habitual attitude of our Founder: "I never shrink from any undertaking which I know is good and necessary, no matter what the difficulties. ... But first I recite a Hail Mary ..., then come what may, I do my best and leave the rest to the Lord". Don Bosco said this to Don Cagliero just before a difficult meeting with the Minister for the Interior, Farini.<sup>5</sup>

To his first boys and to the salesians he would often say: "A great advantage of ours that we do not sufficiently appreciate is the Virgin Mary's protection and the effectiveness of praying to her. Repeat often "Hail Mary!", and you will see how wonderfully effective this invocation is".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> LG 49; cf. LG 50

<sup>5</sup> BM VI, 384

<sup>6</sup> BM VI, 58

Don Bosco, who from his boyhood had put all his trust in her,<sup>7</sup> could say with all truth and conviction: "The Blessed Virgin is my protectress and my treasurer".<sup>8</sup>

— *St Joseph*

The article does not say explicitly why Don Bosco included St Joseph among the patrons of the Congregation. We know that he started up "St Joseph's Sodality";<sup>9</sup> in every church he built he had an altar dedicated to St Joseph; after a month's preparation his feast was celebrated on 19 March as a solemnity when all should abstain from work, even though at the time it was no longer a holy day of obligation in Piedmont;<sup>10</sup> he presented him as a model and protector for the artisans and young workers; he looked upon him as a model also of trust in God, Protector of the universal Church, and patron for a happy death. He used to tell his boys and confreres: "I want all of you to put yourselves under St Joseph's protection: if you pray earnestly to him, he will obtain any spiritual or temporal favour you need."<sup>11</sup>

— *St Francis de Sales*

Of St Francis de Sales, the patron and titular of the Society, two qualities are expressly mentioned in the Constitutions, "*zealous pastor and doctor of charity*", which have made him our model and our author of predilection for the deepening of pastoral charity.

Don Bosco chose him as his protector from the very beginnings of his priesthood; one of his resolutions at that moment was: "The charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales are to be my guide in everything".<sup>12</sup> He chose him as the titular of his first Oratory in Valdoco, and sometimes had him as a guide in his dreams.<sup>13</sup> His biographer

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BM I, 182

<sup>8</sup> BM IV, 175

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM VI, 103

<sup>10</sup> Cf. BM VI, 104

<sup>11</sup> BM VII, 382

<sup>12</sup> BM I, 385

<sup>13</sup> Cf. BM IX, 84

writes: "Don Bosco believed that the spirit of St Francis de Sales was the best suited at the time to the education and upbringing of the working classes".<sup>14</sup> When he began the Missions, he said: "With the gentleness of St Francis de Sales the Salesians will draw the peoples of America to Jesus Christ".<sup>15</sup> The great spiritual writings of St Francis de Sales guided the formation of the first Salesians.

Our patrons watch over us; we venerate them and invoke their aid in the difficulties of our mission and make them known to the young.

### **As a Society we venerate as protectors our glorified members**

Here the salesian vocation finds its fullest expression. As well as our patrons, we have as intercessors and supporters in our mission also protectors like St Dominic Savio and the other Saints of our Family. They are a confirmation that the spirit of the Lord is present among us.

This opens up the theme of the holiness of the Salesian Family in which, around Don Bosco, there is a splendid crown of his canonized and beatified sons and daughters.

*St Dominic Savio*, "a sign of the wonders that grace can achieve in adolescents" is put forward by us educators as a motive for hope, as a proof of God's interest in the young, as an example of apostolic zeal and contemplation, and as a guideline for our own educational work which starts youngsters off towards simple and joyful holiness. And with Dominic we can also recall his companions in glory, like *Zeferino Namuncurá*, *Laura Vicuna* and others.

Among the glorified members of the Family we recall brothers and sisters who imitated Don Bosco in their way of life: *St Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, prepared first by God and then guided by Don

<sup>14</sup> BM II, 197

<sup>15</sup> MB XVI, 394.

Bosco in the realization of God's plan for girls: *Blessed Michael Rua*, first successor of Don Bosco and model of salesian fidelity; our first martyrs, *Blessed Luigi Versiglia* and *Callixtus Caravario*; and then *Fr Philip Rinaldi*, *Fr Andrew Beltrami*, *Fr Augustus Czartoryski*, *Fr Vincent Cimatti*, *Simon Srugi*, *Artemides Zatti*, and so many others.<sup>16</sup>

"We venerate them": which means that we look on them as friends, we trust in their intercession, we seek their advice, we invoke them on our daily path to the goal which is Christ. Don Bosco insisted: "I shall be waiting for you all in Paradise".<sup>17</sup>

The patrimony of salesian holiness has become a spiritual current, a sign of God's love for the young. It shone forth in the Founder, but that was only the beginning of it.

Our Saints are living that covenant with God which they began when in our midst with the practice of charity which they developed through the grace of the Spirit; their activity is not limited by time, but continues through generations and centuries.

In this way our youngsters can admire concrete examples of what the Spirit has done by us making known to them Jesus Christ, the true Lord of history.

*Among your Saints, O Lord,  
you have included our brothers and sisters  
who are full of solicitude for us.*

<sup>16</sup> On the "School of sanctity" that flourished around Don Bosco, v. Letter of Rector Major in AGC 319 (1986)

<sup>17</sup> Cf. MB XVIII, 550



*Through the particular intercession  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
of St Joseph her husband,  
of St Francis de Sales from whom we take our name,  
of Don Bosco our Father and Founder,  
of Dominic Savio an outstanding sign of your grace,  
and of all the other glorified members of our Family,  
grant that we may work efficaciously at our own holiness  
in the building up of your kingdom.*

## CHAPTER II

### THE SALESIAN SPIRIT

*"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4,9).*

When Paul wrote to his christians he liked to talk about himself: it is a graceful sign of a loving interpersonal relationship (fatherhood) and at the same time a vigilant awareness of the need for concrete and credible models for christians who are a prey to confusion and misunderstanding (cf. 1 Thess 4,1; 1 Cor 4,16).

In the case of the Philippian community this happened because opposing groups were upsetting the community by spreading a Gospel and a spirit which were not those of Paul, the authentic apostle of Christ. Hence his forceful denunciation (3,15-21) made in the first person which includes a polemical note and a serious warning. With a few well chosen words and in positive and practical terms, Paul points out on the one hand the authoritative nature of his testimony and teaching, and on the other the vital and close experience of it made by the disciples; he then goes on to emphasize the indispensable need to accept the "Tradition" of which he is the mediator, so as to follow after the God of Jesus Christ. Only in this way will God's peace and the fullness of messianic blessings surround the community (cf. Rom 15,33; 1 Cor 14,33).

We recall that the letter to the Philippians is quoted in the Constitutions no less than five times,<sup>1</sup> two of them on the lips of Don Bosco himself.

It is evident that we have here a reminder, at once affectionate but deeply felt, of fidelity to Don Bosco as the primary and authentic source of the salesian spirit, in so far as he himself, like Paul, was a first genuine imitator of the Gospel of Christ and hence our authoritative and indispensable model. For this reason, in every article but one of this chapter (10-21), the figure of Don Bosco is always to the fore, as the one who passes on to us the various aspects of his spirit.

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chap. VI, chap. IX and C 17, 71, 100

In presenting the general principles of the renewal of religious life, the decree "Perfectae caritatis" asserts: "It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own proper characters and functions. Therefore the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully accepted and retained..."<sup>2</sup>

It is no easy matter to define the "spirit" of a religious institute. All those baptized in Christ have the same Gospel and are led by the same Spirit, but there are different paths for following the same Lord, and stress can be laid in different ways on the evangelical aspects of the way of perfect charity. To speak of the "spirit" of a religious institute means in fact to refer to the complexus of qualities and of gospel and ecclesial aspects to which members of the institute, following the example of their Founder and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are particularly sensitive, in both their interior attitude and their external activity.

The SGC, whose analysis gave rise to a first constitutional description of our spirit, defined it as "our own style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, in putting into operation the specific vocation and the mission which the Holy Spirit does not cease to give us".<sup>3</sup> It is well to remember that the SGC based its statement on a wealth of experience. In 16 splendid pages of the "Annals of the Society"<sup>4</sup> Fr Ceria had already condensed the main features of the spirit lived in Don Bosco's houses; the SGC was able to draw too on the ample testimony of confreres of every province: the unanimous feeling of so many Salesians of different ages, environments, nationalities and cultures is certainly a very significant indication of the Society's unity of spirit. Subsequent General Chapters, the GC21 and especially the GC22, further enriched the synthesis made by the SGC, and helped to produce a more organic presentation of what is without doubt the most characteristic element of our "salesianity": salesians, in fact, are recognized not only from what they do (there are others who concern themselves with youth), but from the way they do it!

<sup>2</sup> PC 2; cf. also MR 11

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 86

<sup>4</sup> E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana* I, pp. 720-735

When it introduced the discussion on the "salesian spirit", the SGC made it clear that the primary reference was to its foundation and source, which is the "spirit of Don Bosco" (his vocation, life, work and teaching); but it included also the spirit as shared and lived since then in his Family, i.e. the way in which the spirit of Don Bosco is realized in practice in the history and life of the Congregation and the Salesian Family (the life and sanctity of the Salesians).<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that the Constitutions speak of salesian "spirit" rather than salesian "spirituality": while the latter refers more properly to an overall consideration of the relationship between the Salesian and God, the spirit involves the complexus of his style of life and action, as a living evangelical dynamism lived and passed on as a mode of daily life. Rather than a conceptual analysis of the qualities of Don Bosco's spiritual experience, it is a question of identifying the characteristic features of his physiognomy which his sons have imitated and made their own.<sup>6</sup> The "spirit" is life, i.e. it belongs to the existential order.

Considered in its widest significance, the salesian spirit:

- is the soul of the interior and exterior life of the salesian;
- is the vital and proper "forma mentis et cordis" which characterizes the style of sanctification, common life and apostolate;
- is the foundation of our unity and renewal, and that of all the groups of the Salesian Family;<sup>7</sup>
- pervades and animates the whole life of the salesian: the virtues of the covenant with God (faith, hope and charity), apostolic con-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 87

<sup>6</sup> In the letter to the Cooperators the Rector Major wrote: "When the Regulations speak of 'salesian spirit' they are describing the characteristic features of the gospel experience tested in the school of Don Bosco as an original style of life, a synthesis of criteria of judgement and of methodology of action. It is not a conceptual analysis of relationships with God and one's neighbour, and neither is it the doctrinal presentation of the spirituality of a state or ministry, but the description of the spiritual features which identify the salesian vocation". cf. AGC 318, 1986, p. 28

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SGC, 86-87

secration, activities of the mission, life of communion, practice of the evangelical counsels, formation, animation and government; — and is, in brief, "a fundamental feature of our salesian identity".<sup>8</sup>

It should not be forgotten that the salesian spirit is a treasury of spiritual wisdom received not only for the Salesians but to be widely deployed for the benefit of youth in general. We Salesians of Don Bosco, as is said in art. 5 of the Constitutions, have particular responsibility for "preserving unity of spirit" in the Family. Don Bosco says: "We must have friends, benefactors, people who while fully practising the spirit of the Salesians live in their own families, as do the Salesian Cooperators".<sup>9</sup> The present General Regulations refer to this in connection with the service we must render to the Salesian Family (R 36-40). The purpose of the Salesian Bulletin is to "spread knowledge of salesian spirit and activity" (R 41)

Coming now to the organization of the contents of chapter II, we see that they are grouped around certain key ideas:<sup>10</sup>

## 1. Some basic attitudes which animate the Salesian

— Starting from the *most fundamental level*, it is stated that "the salesian spirit is summed up and centred in *pastoral charity* drawn from the heart of Christ, apostle of the Father, and from his Gospel: this is the source of our spirit and its justification (*art. 10, 11*).

— At the *level of personal experience* the secret of growth in pastoral charity and in fidelity to the salesian spirit is to be found in personal "*union with God*", in being able to convert work into "prayer", with the powerful support of the sacraments.

<sup>8</sup> GC21, 97

<sup>9</sup> *Progetto di "deliberato" per il Capitolo generale I, 1877*, manuscript of Don Bosco

<sup>10</sup> The guiding concepts here presented are taken from the "*Sussidi alle Costituzioni e Regolamenti*", prepared by the GC22, p. 27-28

The constant cultivation of a vision of faith facilitates a permanent commitment of hope in daily life (*art. 12*).

— At the *ecclesial level* the identity of our spirit and pastoral charity are expressed in a renewed "*sense of the Church*", of fidelity to the Pope, of communion with the Bishops and of commitment to the building of the Church wherever we are working (*art. 13*).

## 2. The salesian spirit marks our style of relationships

The style which imbues our pastoral relationships with "salesianity" is shown particularly:

— in a *love of predilection for the young*, which is the expression of a gift of God (*art. 14*);

— in *loving kindness*, an expression of "spiritual fatherhood" and the bearer of a message of purity, which is born of our chastity, as a practical and objective concern for the formation of young people for love (*art. 15*);

— in the "*homely, family atmosphere*", which helps in sharing and forgiving (*art. 16*).

— in a victorious *optimism* and contagious *joy* (*art. 17*).

## 3. The salesian spirit permeates our pastoral work of education

At the level of apostolic activity the salesian spirit is expressed:

— in *work*, i.e. in untiring industry combined with *ascetic realism* proper to educator-apostles, who collaborate in the construction of the Kingdom of God: the coupled concept characteristic of Don Bosco "*work and temperance*" is the austere and well balanced incarnation of the salesian spirit in daily practice (*art. 18*);

— in the *creative and flexible readiness* to respond to urgent local needs (*art. 19*);

The synthesis of this kind of commitment is the *preventive system*, in which coalesce the virtues which give a characteristic and original physiognomy to the salesian who works among young people for the Kingdom: it is a self-donating love inspired by the love of God (*art. 19, 20*).

#### 4. Don Bosco the model

To sum up: *Don Bosco is presented as the concrete model* of the salesian spirit and of the pastoral charity which animates us (*art. 21*).

It should be noted that other elements of the salesian spirit are scattered here and there in the text of the Constitutions, especially as regards sacramental piety, trust in Mary and some characteristic features of our pedagogy; these aspects should be kept in mind for a comprehensive knowledge of our spirit.

## ART. 10 PASTORAL CHARITY THE CENTRE OF OUR SPIRIT

Under the inspiration of God, Don Bosco lived and handed on to us an original style of life and action: the salesian spirit.

It is summed up and centred in pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone.

The whole chapter deals with the characteristics of the salesian spirit, but already in this first article we find its soul or central element, because the "spirit" is a living and organic reality which explains all the other elements of the salesian life, animates them and renders them deeply consistent. Here we are given an indication of the "organizing inspiration",<sup>1</sup> the animating nucleus, which is "pastoral charity".

The Constitutions refer to charity in many articles.<sup>2</sup> Charity is the name of the love of God (cf. 1 Jn 4,8) and the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples (Jn 13,35): it is the centre of all christian life, and therefore of all apostolic life. Art. 10 speaks in particular of salesian "pastoral charity", and helps to reveal the specifications of charity as lived in the life of the salesian.

**Don Bosco has passed on to us an original style of life and activity centred on charity**

As we have already said, to understand the "original" nature of the salesian spirit and subsequently apply it to salesian life and activity,

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 88

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C 3. 14. 15. 20. 25. 29. 41. 50. 92. 95



it is essential to refer back to Don Bosco who lived it so intensively that he has become a true model (C 21). To make this spirit properly understood, he himself taught it to the first Salesians, a handful of young men who became fired by his zeal and worked wonders amongst boys.

It is in the context of Don Bosco and the first Salesians that the Constitutions tell us that the heart of his spirit, and hence of the spirit which animates his sons, is charity. Our Father said the same thing in a conference of 11 March 1869 when, in reply to the question: "What spirit must animate this body?", he replied: "Charity, my sons; charity". He was speaking of the charity which had already attracted him when he was a boy, in the face of the reserved attitude of priests of the time; he had then said to his mother: "If I were a priest I would act differently. I would look for boys and get them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and desire their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare".<sup>3</sup> In 1877, very much later, when Don Bosco was explaining his educational system at Nizza, he spoke again of charity, referring back to the hymn of praise to it sung by the apostle Paul: "Love is patient and kind ... hopes all things, endures all things".<sup>4</sup>

In the famous letter from Rome of 10 May 1884, a real "hymn to salesian charity", Don Bosco spoke of the Oratory of the early days quoting it as an example which serves as inspiration for an educational system, and spiritual testimony in which the salesian spirit is shown forth in all its brilliance.

This internal driving force of love for youth was expressed in a ready intuition of youngsters' needs and in the characteristic experience which, in the light of his mysterious dreams, he was able to translate into wonderfully flexible pedagogical norms, into continual prayer for

<sup>3</sup> BM I, 170

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM XIII, 87-88. The quotation from St Paul is found in Don Bosco's small treatise on "*The preventive system in the education of the young*": cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 248

his boys, and into an ever creative and dynamic dedication of himself for their benefit.

In other words, to pass on his spirit to every confrere Don Bosco says: "Watch how I do things: all you have to do is imitate me".

### **Pastoral charity, the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit**

The centre of salesian spirit, says the Rule, is "pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus ...". These expressions depict a charity on the move, one which needs to be active and find realization in a practical and vehement way: a true "apostolic passion, lit up by youthful ardour", as the SGC put it.<sup>5</sup>

All religious institutes dedicated to the apostolate have apostolic charity as a basic element. With us this charity has a special tone: it is a burning ardour, a "fire", an irrepressible zeal; it is a fervent, generous, joyful and dynamic charity; a charity which has all the best characteristics of our youngsters to whom it is chiefly directed. We may recall that Don Bosco's charity led a lot of people to think him utopian, puzzling, and not a little mad!<sup>6</sup>

Pastoral charity, a sharing in the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd, finds expression in its two essential dimensions: love of the Father whose Kingdom we want to serve, and love of our fellow men to whom we want to bring the good news of salvation. Well does the collect of the Mass in honour of St John Bosco sum up charity in the definition: an apostolic impulse which makes us "*seek souls and serve God alone*".

It is important to have a proper understanding of the internal dynamism of these two poles of pastoral charity: God (Jesus Christ)

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 89

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. AUBRY, *Lo spirito salesiano*, Edizione Cooperatori salesiani 1972, p. 33

and our neighbour (the young). We have two principles which sustain the whole of our spirit. The first principle is that the love of God is always the cause and source of our love of our neighbour. The second is that from a methodological standpoint, i.e. in our daily activities, charity is practised towards our neighbour: apostolic service of our fellow men is the way that leads to God's love. This is how Jesus himself loved us!

It may be well at this point to call to mind the Congregation's *coat of arms* which carries the bust of St Francis de Sales and a heart from which flames are bursting forth: an indication of the zeal of St Francis de Sales which was recalled in art. 4. Apostolic charity, which is at the centre of our spirit, corresponds exactly to what our Patron called (in the language of the time) "devotion". In the "Introduction to the Devout Life" we read: "Devotion adds to charity only the flame which renders it ready, active and diligent, not only in the observance of the divine commandments but also in the practice of the counsels and heavenly inspirations".

To live the salesian spirit means allowing oneself to be inspired always and at every moment by the Spirit of Pentecost, and to be moved by its powerful wind and tongues of fire. Mediocrity and weakness are quite incompatible with such a spirit. It is a case of giving absolutely everything in a joyful outpouring, because "God loves a cheerful giver".

From the active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength and support to enable us to do all this (cf. C 1).

*Lord Jesus,  
you have loved us  
even to the extent of giving yourself completely for us;  
you animate our life  
with the same burning pastoral charity  
with which you filled Don Bosco and his first disciples.  
Help us to grow in apostolic fervour  
so that we may live authentically our salesian vocation  
to seek souls and serve you alone.*

## ART. 11 CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL THE SOURCE OF OUR SPIRIT

The salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father.<sup>1</sup>

Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to all men; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion.

<sup>1</sup> cf. LG 3; AG 3

The spirit of Don Bosco, *"through a special divine disposition, draws its nature and strength from the Gospel"*.<sup>1</sup>

To understand the central element of our spirit, we must go beyond the person of Don Bosco and reach the Source from which he himself drew; the very person of Christ, and especially his "Heart", i.e. Christ in his capacity as the full revelation of divine charity.

Reflection on the life of Don Bosco allows us to verify to what point our Founder drew conscious inspiration from the charity of Christ. Already in his dream at the age of nine he was told of his mission by Christ the Good Shepherd; at the end of his life he spent his last strength and efforts in building a basilica in Rome dedicated to the Heart of Christ. In the first article of the Constitutions of 1858 he had written: "The object and aim of this Society is to gather its members together ... for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Saviour, especially in works of charity for those

<sup>1</sup> PAUL VI, Motu proprio *"Magisterium vitae"*, 24 May 1973, raising the Salesian Atheneum to the rank of a University: cf. ASC 272 (1973), p. 70

who are young and poor".<sup>2</sup> The letter from Rome of 10 May 1884 makes insistent reference to Christ "master of the familiar approach ... your model".<sup>3</sup>

This article of the Rule helps us to penetrate more deeply into this fundamental truth.

### Christ, the model and source of pastoral charity

In an effort to present our spirit in its relationship with the Saviour, the Constitutions speak of Christ under two complementary aspects: as a "model" and as a "source".

As a "*model*" we seek and study him in his life on earth as we find it presented in the New Testament. But the mystery of Christ is unfathomable (Eph 3,18) and the fertile riches of his Gospel are inexhaustible. Consequently we can penetrate only some aspects of his mystery: we study his life to draw from it some indication for a particular service in the Church. Nevertheless we are not imitating just a virtue (obedience, poverty, chastity) nor an activity (education, the missions etc.); we are following a Person whom we want to imitate in all his fullness, and a Gospel that we want to live in all its implications.

To look on Christ as a model means to have in mind that the path to sanctification to which we are called (cf. C 25) means that we have to "put on Christ" (Eph 4,19 ff). As Paul expresses it: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20).

As a "*source*", we must go back to his Risen life as Head of the Church, which he animates by sending to it his Spirit of love. Christ is called the "apostle of the Father", because here he is seen as the Master who teaches "apostolic" charity (cf. Heb 3,1) in the Joannine perspective of the "One sent" by the Father.

<sup>2</sup> MB V, 933

<sup>3</sup> MB XVII, 111

The Spirit consecrates us in Christ, conforms our life to Christ's, helps us to penetrate his mystery, opens us to an experience of communion with him, leads us to immerse ourselves in him, the "Good Shepherd", who desires the salvation of the young.

In this way we are first led to a total overall experience of Christ and full adherence to his Gospel, before considering his particular features in the second paragraph.

### **Aspects of the Lord's figure to which the salesian tries to conform**

The gospel insights<sup>4</sup> relived in the salesian spirit are here listed; they represent particular aspects from which we read the mystery of Christ.

We know that the Gospel is one and the same for everyone, but it is also true that it can be "*read through salesian spectacles*", from which derives a salesian manner of living it. Don Bosco looked at Christ so as to try to copy in himself those features which corresponded more closely to his own providential mission and to the spirit which must animate it.

Art. 11 sets out what may be called the aspects or gospel insights, or better still the gospel roots or components, of the salesian spirit. The elements here presented by the Rule are certainly lived also by other religious institutes, but what we have in mind is the characteristic way in which we Salesians incarnate them in our own lives; living the salesian spirit is our way of living the Gospel, in line with the vocation we have received.

The person of Jesus is proposed to us in respect of some attitudes to which Don Bosco was very sensitive and which therefore are a particular stimulus to our imitation. There is no question of a complete list, but just of some traits of the figure of Christ the prophet, priest

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, 90-95

and shepherd, which we read in the light of the Founder's experience. The strict linkage between them and the person of Christ with regard to the "charity" of the Good Shepherd, should be noted.

Here then are the features of the Lord's figure which, according to the Rule, we find more outstanding in our spirit.

— *Gratitude*, trust and praise of the infinite goodness of the Father, who calls us to himself, looks on each youngster as a son, and gives to all men a divine calling: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little ones" (Lk 10,21).

The figure is of *Christ the "Priest"*, the model of perfect consecration and capacity for "eucaristia", i.e. of thanksgiving towards the Father; it is the source of a deep and sincere filial piety, full of trust in the merciful kindness of God.

This gives rise to the joy of the salesian in feeling himself to be a son of God, and the optimism which is able to discern the good to be found in creation and history. The salesian's zeal too and his way of approaching young people take their inspiration from this sense of the fatherly love of God.

— *Solicitude in preaching, in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom, in healing and in saving*: "He saw a great throng", says the Gospel, "and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6,34). Concern of this kind Don Bosco called "zeal".

Here we discern the figure of *Christ the "Prophet"*, which arouses so much enthusiasm among youth, of Christ the "Missionary" of the Father, who travelled the roads of Palestine preaching the good news of the Kingdom, "teaching and healing" (Mt 4,23). Don Bosco's interior life is an imitation and prolongation, especially for the benefit of the young, of the apostolic zeal displayed by Christ in his public life. In the words of his first Successor: "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young and the good of souls: 'da mihi animas'" (cf. C 21). And he

himself declared: "If I were as anxious to save my own soul as I am in trying to save the souls of others, I would be sure of my salvation".<sup>5</sup>

— "*Predilection for the little ones and the poor*", for young people in need and for the working classes: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mk 9,37); "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Mk 10,14).

Here we have the figure of *Christ the "Shepherd"*, sent for all men but who goes especially in search of the abandoned and those given least consideration, and who allows himself to be drawn by preference to the 'little ones' and to the 'poor'.

Don Bosco, like Jesus, felt himself called to the poor and little ones, towards the most needy of the young. "That you are young", he used to say, "is enough to make me love you very much". And he urged his sons to see Jesus in their youngsters: "Let us treat the boys as we would treat Jesus Christ himself, if he were a boy in our college".<sup>6</sup> It is "pure and patient charity which fights against our two most common and fearsome passions: concupiscence and irascibility":<sup>7</sup> these are the two obstacles to our life and apostolate which the preventive system helps to overcome, drawing its inspiration from the charity of Christ.

— The preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who *wins hearts by gentleness* (salesian kindness) and *self-giving* (the daily carrying of the cross): "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10,11); "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11,29).

This is a reminder of the kindness and gentleness characteristic of our spirit, even at the cost of self-denial.

From the time of his dream at the age of nine Don Bosco had learned from Christ the Good Shepherd the secret of educational success: "Not by blows but by love and gentleness must you win friends

<sup>5</sup> BM VII, 153

<sup>6</sup> MB XIV, 846-847

<sup>7</sup> D. VESPIGNANI, *Circulars*, part III, p. 124



...".<sup>8</sup> Fr Ceria recalls the beautiful testimony of one person who said, after meeting Don Bosco: "I thought to myself: Don Bosco is the living image of Jesus of Nazareth: amiable, meek, kind, humble, modest. So must Jesus have impressed others!"<sup>9</sup>

Salesian self-denial is expressed in self-giving, which implies renunciation and mortification. "The thorns on the ground (in the pergola of roses) stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his true goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and hinder his progress and heavenly harvest".<sup>10</sup>

— *The desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion* and to gather all men into the one fold: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13,34).

This is the new commandment which Jesus gave to his disciples, the fruit of his redeeming sacrifice: that men should learn to love one another, to build a single family, in the unity of the Father and the Son: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17,21).

The words of Jesus are echoed in those of Don Bosco: "Let us be charitable to one another, bearing with faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God".<sup>11</sup> Concern for communion, as we shall see later, is a trait which must distinguish the salesian superior in particular.<sup>12</sup>

For the salesian, living the Gospel means in practice living these attitudes which we have enumerated. By following Christ in this kind

<sup>8</sup> MO, p. 23

<sup>9</sup> BM XIV, 373

<sup>10</sup> BM III, 27

<sup>11</sup> BM IX, 168. The words of Don Bosco quoted here are taken from an instruction he preached in a retreat at Trofarello in 1868; v. also "*Souvenir to Missionaries*", n. 13, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 266

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C 121, 126, 161, 176

of life the confrere finds the "precious pearl" which enables him to discover in young people Christ himself, to be served, to be assisted, and to be loved.

In this way we come to understand how our vocation is a continuation of Christ's mission, in preaching, education and service. By continually drawing on this fundamental evangelical inspiration, i.e. the person of Christ, we go back to the source of pastoral charity and reach the centre of the salesian spirit.

We note in conclusion that the gospel qualities which inspire our personal, community and apostolic life, are not only a statement of our own identity, but they also distinguish us from other religious institutes; and this not in any sense of opposition between ourselves and others, but rather in living correlation so that with our different gifts we may be able to form together the one mystical Body of Christ.

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
you are the source and model  
of our pastoral charity.*

*Grant that in our own lives  
we may imitate your own unconditional dedication  
to the saving will of the Father,  
your loving concern as the Good Shepherd  
for the good of mankind,  
especially the poor and the little ones,  
and your desire to gather your disciples  
into the unity of fraternal communion.*

*Through the grace of your Spirit  
grant that these evangelical qualities  
may invigorate our spiritual life  
and our apostolic commitment.*

## ART. 12 UNION WITH GOD

As he works for the salvation of the young, the salesian experiences the fatherhood of God and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work: "Apart from me you can do nothing".

He cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand. Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love he becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action.

Jn 15,5

Don Rinaldi's definition of our spirit has become well known among us: "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God" (cf. C 95). It means that the salesian acts with a true "apostolic sense", in the awareness of "the divine dimension of his work". It is a case of living his baptismal priesthood so as to make of his whole life an oblation to God, offering him spiritual veneration, and celebrating in the trials of daily living the great "liturgy of life" (C 95).

From the article we can discern the action of the three divine Persons in the life of the salesian:

- the Father, the Creator, whose fatherhood and mercy to man the salesian experiences day by day;
- the Son, the Saviour, with whom he converses from the heart concerning the salvation of the young, and listens to his Word;
- the Spirit, the Sanctifier, always present in the Church's life and in the vicissitudes of history; from him he draws the strength to be faithful, support for his hope (cf. C 1), and grace for his sanctification (cf. C 25).

The text emphasizes three aspects of the salesian's union with God:

- our absolute need of Christ in our apostolic work;

- the simple and continuous dialogue that we maintain in Christ with the Father;
- the importance of living in the Spirit's presence, doing everything for the love of God.

The reference here is to the "contemplative dimension", which must be so deeply rooted in the salesian as to permeate and imbue his every activity.

To plumb the depths of this kind of union with God, we must hark back to that "grace of unity", of which we spoke in connection with our vocation.<sup>1</sup> It is not found primarily in activity, nor even in the "practices of piety", but in the interior of a person of whom it pervades the whole being; before finding expression in activity or in praying; it is a kind of "spiritual dynamism", in so far as it is a conscious participation in the very love of God through self-donation in practical availability for the work of salvation. It is an interior attitude of charity directed towards apostolic activity, in which it becomes concrete, is made manifest, grows and becomes perfected. In this sense apostolic industry is an expression of interior spirituality!

We must keep in mind what is said in the document on "*The contemplative dimension of religious life*": "The very nature of apostolic and charitable activity contains its own riches which nourish union with God. It is necessary to cultivate every day an awareness and deepening of it. Being conscious of this, religious will so sanctify their activities as to transform them into sources of union with God, to whose service they are dedicated by a new and special title".<sup>2</sup> The same document later emphasizes that "the religious community is itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation; of its nature it is the place where the experience of God should be able in a special way to reach its fullness and be communicated to others".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. commentary on general structure of the text (p. 67-69) and arts. 2 & 3 (p. 97 ff.); cf. also SGC, 127

<sup>2</sup> "*The contemplative dimension of religious life*", CRIS, 1980, n. 6

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* n. 15

In this way the salesian, sustained by the spirit of Don Bosco and the evangelical richness of his community, can express in every circumstance the contemplative dimension of his life and grow in it. In his 'Treatise on the love of God', St Francis de Sales has well explained the "ecstasy of life and activity" as an authentic expression of the pastoral charity of one who puts all he has into his daily commitments, even "exceeding himself and his natural inclinations".<sup>4</sup>

Art. 12 sets out to explain some aspects of this important fact.

### **The salesian, while engaged in work for the salvation of the young, feels his need of God**

The salesian is shown a way for savouring the "depths of God" (1 Cor 2,10) in every circumstance of his life, from youth to maturity, in activity and lack of it, from dawn to dusk: it is a concrete compenetration of action and contemplation in the spirit of "da mihi animas".

He is invited to discover and reinvigorate the "divine dimension" of his activity.

It should be noted that it is not simply a question of material or professional work detached from the mission confided to the community, but of the daily work done in accordance with God's will. In our educational, charitable and pastoral activity, we are sent by God and guided by his Spirit: we are his collaborators (cf. 1 Cor 3,9); it is God we serve in the poor and the little ones; it is for his glory and Kingdom that we work.

And when we become aware of this presence of God, we recognize our absolute need to remain in him. "Apart from me you can do nothing!" — a peremptory statement that comes from Jesus himself (Jn 15,5). Launched as we are into a life of pastoral activity among youth,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *"Treatise on the Love of God"*, book 7, chap.7 *Opera omnia* V, 29-32

with a keen desire to be of use to them and to the world, we cannot fail to reflect on this stark assertion, which finds frequent endorsement in other parts of Scripture: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour ... In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest, you who toil for the bread you eat: when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber" (Ps 126/127). All toil is in vain if the Lord is not present. "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. For we are God's field, God's building" (cf. 1 Cor 3,7.9).

The Rule invites us to "experience" God, i.e. not only to live an interior and spiritual life but to have a conscious awareness that we are in relationship with God in our daily life.

The salesian way of living in the intimate presence of God is the way Don Bosco lived it. His "experience" of God was extraordinarily fervent and is still an example for us even at the present day. Evidently such experience does not have to be the same for everyone: it will be felt in a different way in the life of each salesian, be he priest or brother, or member of the Salesian Family.

All this calls for a continual reminder of the "divine dimension of our activity".

### **The salesian dialogues with God continuously and with simplicity**

The manner in which the salesian dialogues with God is described in the text by two typical terms: it is *simple and continuous*.

He is not a monk but an apostle of tireless industry, as has been already said, an apostle among the poor and the little ones; his prayer is simple, without exaggerations, made up of essential elements, based on the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation; he continues it in generous and joyful dynamism in a youthful and trusting style which is pleasing alike to God and young people (cf. C 86).

The first draft of the Constitutions of 1858 carried a statement which remained in the official text until 1972. It said: "The active life,

towards which the Society more especially tends, renders its members unable to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore supply for these by giving one another good example, and by fulfilling perfectly the general duties of a good christian",<sup>5</sup> where the word "perfectly" should be noted.

Nevertheless the Rule, echoing the words of Jesus (cf. Lk 18,1), says that the salesian feels the need to pray "without ceasing". This coincides with Fr Piccollo's testimony concerning Don Bosco: "He always prayed. In him, union with God was uninterrupted".<sup>6</sup> How was it possible in a life so crammed with activity?

In the constitutional text of 1864 Don Bosco had already said that the salesian prevented from making mental prayer by some urgent call of the sacred ministry "will make up for the deficiency by more frequent ejaculations, and by directing to God with fervour and devotion those particular labours which are thus hindering him from the ordinary exercises of piety".<sup>7</sup>

On closer examination it will be found that in the life of the salesian, as was the case in that of the Founder, prayer and activity form part of a single movement of the heart; prayer leads naturally to action and becomes a "spirit of prayer", with the result that the activity becomes permeated by prayer. For the salesian, God the Father, Christ and the Spirit are the great "presences" in his life: despite appearances he feels their presence and sees and meets them always and everywhere. And so what happens is that during the work itself, spontaneous and informal prayer fills his heart and also rises to his lips, especially in the form of ejaculations specifically recommended by Don Bosco, following the teaching of St Francis de Sales.<sup>8</sup> These humble invocations springing to the lips constitute the "simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand" and with the Spirit of whose presence he is aware.

<sup>5</sup> BM V, 644

<sup>6</sup> BM XII, 266

<sup>7</sup> MB VII, 884

<sup>8</sup> Cf. SGC, 550

The apostolic activity itself, as has been already said, provokes and nourishes this dialogue: it leads the salesian to thank God for the good and fine things he sees, to call for help in time of suffering, to seek his pardon at once should he fall into sin, and to ask for his support and for success for the efforts he makes. Since charity is the soul of every apostolate, it follows that the apostolate becomes the soul of the salesian's prayer.

And so union with God keeps us united with our Source; it maintains our heart and spirit at the level of "mystery" in which we are committed, and obviates the danger of activity degenerating into mere activism.

### **Doing everything for the love of God, the salesian becomes a contemplative in action**

The expression "contemplative in action" may evoke the concept of a spirituality which is not salesian in origin; the phrase "in action" too may seem to limit the field of contemplation to those who are actually working, excluding the sick and handicapped etc.; but the addition of the words "like Don Bosco" helps us to arrive at the correct interpretation of the article from a salesian standpoint.

The dynamics of contemplation in Don Bosco, so intense that he was defined as "*union with God*", are to be found in the motto "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*" lived out in complete consistency: it is something within the possibilities of all Salesians and other members of the Salesian Family. Don Bosco was defined as "union with God" not only because he was united with God at the explicit moments of prayer, which was that of a consecrated apostle, but because he was accustomed to fill every moment and every aspect of daily life with thanksgiving to God, with filial trust in Providence, and with conversation with Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church and of youth.

The salesian also "does everything for God's love", i.e. he adopts the method of a vigorous apostolic integrity which rejects any temptation to work for himself and his own interests, or to gain esteem:



"everything for the love of God and for souls!" And so his activity becomes a real means of sanctification.

The Rule invites us to make of our existence an attitude of faith which fixes our mind and heart on God, to adore and participate in his saving love. This is the supreme expression of our vocation: to seek constantly our union with God, imitating Don Bosco who "had no interest in his heart other than souls".<sup>9</sup> We can understand why it is that the Church teaches, when addressing apostolic religious: "In these days of renewal of the apostolate — as at any time in any missionary engagement — a privileged place must be given to the contemplation of God".<sup>10</sup> Contemplation, a theological act of faith, hope and charity, becomes for us "the highest and fullest act of the spirit, an act which at the present day can still arrange the immense pyramid of human activity in hierarchical order".<sup>11</sup>

*Lord, you said to your apostles:  
"Apart from me you can do nothing".  
Render all our activity fruitful,  
by a constant and living union  
with you and with your Father,  
so that, becoming like Don Bosco  
"contemplatives in action",  
we may find in trusting and cordial dialogue  
the strength to do everything for your love,  
and to persevere until death  
in our total self-donation for your Kingdom.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. D. RUA, Letter of 24.8.1894, cf. *Circular letters* p. 130

<sup>10</sup> MR 16

<sup>11</sup> PAUL VI, Address at concluding session of Council. 7 December 1965

## ART. 13 SENSE OF THE CHURCH

Our love for Christ necessarily gives rise to our love for his Church, the People of God, the centre of unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom.

We feel ourselves a living part of her, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity.

We educate young christians to an authentic understanding of the Church and we work assiduously for its growth. Don Bosco tells us: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MB V, 577; BM V, 383

Actively present in the mystery of the Church is the mystery too of God the Father who loves all his children, of the Son the Redeemer, and of the Spirit the Sanctifier. From the heart of the Church comes forth a pastoral dynamism which makes it the sacrament of unity: "It pleased God to call men to share in his life, and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together";<sup>1</sup> he also made it "the universal sacrament of salvation, at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men".<sup>2</sup>

This is true without any doubt of the universal Church, both in respect of its sacramental nature, as a sign and efficacious means of salvation, as also of its ministry of communion between the various vocations, charismata and ministries, and as regards the mission it carries out in the world; but it is true as well of the particular Churches, i.e. the local Churches in which we find ourselves inserted in practice.

<sup>1</sup> AG 2

<sup>2</sup> GS 45; cf. LG 48

One of the characteristics of the salesian spirit is precisely its *ecclesial aspect*, which the Mother of the Church and its Helper committed to Don Bosco and his Institute for a specialist service.

The article we are now studying says that the salesian loves the Church, works for its growth, and educates youngsters to the same kind of love. Many of these attitudes are true of everyone who is baptized; but the Rule insists on a special propensity of the salesian in his love for the Church: he is particularly attentive to its unity and growth ("centre of unity", "communion of forces", "efforts to live in communion"); today more than ever the problem of unity is of great importance.

This article should be linked with art. 6 which speaks of the "Salesian Society in the Church" and described our commitments in the Church, whereas the present article is concerned with the style and spirit with which the salesian works in the Church and for the Church.

### **The salesian loves the Church because he loves Christ**

We have inherited from our Founder a particular sensitivity in respect of that aspect of the Church which is its ability to build "unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom".

The Church is seen as the People of God, the mystery of the "communion" of all its members, an active communion and dynamic centre for the service of unity among all the forces (the men of good will) which work silently in the world for the good of their fellow men. This is the vision of faith which sustains the salesian in his love for the Church, and is in fact the doctrine of Vatican II on the Church as the sacrament of salvation: "The messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, ... is however a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all. ... All those who in faith look

towards Jesus God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity".<sup>3</sup>

But the fundamental reason for which we love the Church is that it is willed and loved by Christ the Saviour: he, the Man-God, gathers all creatures to himself and reunites them to the Father (cf. Rom 8,21). To save man Christ incorporated him to Himself making him the Church, and in this way the latter becomes a "communion both human and divine" and at the same time the "sacrament of salvation" for humanity.

The whole of the first paragraph of this article is an echo of the appeal made to religious by Pope John Paul II: "Through everything that you do, and especially through everything that you are, may the truth be proclaimed and reconfirmed that 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her': the truth that is at the basis of the whole economy of the Redemption. *From Christ, the Redeemer of the world, may the inexhaustible source of your love for the Church pour forth!*"<sup>4</sup>

**The salesian expresses his love for the Church in "filial loyalty to Peter's successor" and in collaboration and communion with the "bishops, clergy, religious and laity".**

We feel ourselves a living part of the Church: we are, in fact, a concrete response to its needs; it is for the enrichment of the Church that from time to time God raises up men and women who follow Christ and imitate him more closely.<sup>5</sup>

The Church itself has discerned and recognized our charism as a response to some precise and urgent needs of the present day, as a

<sup>3</sup> LG 9

<sup>4</sup> RD 15

<sup>5</sup> Cf. PC 1

remedy to certain evils and to a void that had appeared, and this as a new gift made to the entire People of God.

This is the reason why the Constitutions, harking back to the Council, say that we need to "cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness".<sup>6</sup>

The concrete expression of this ecclesial awareness and of our love for the Church (for the universal Church as for the particular Church in Turin, or in London, or Sydney, or New York, or Delhi, or Nairobi etc.) is made clear in the article's second paragraph: it implies two things: fidelity to the Pope and collaboration with the particular Churches.

a. *"Filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching".*

This is one of our characteristics, witnessed to by Don Bosco's whole life and by our tradition. One need only think of the numerous sayings of Don Bosco in this connection:<sup>7</sup> "The Pope's wishes must be a command for us".<sup>8</sup> "I am indignant", he said on one occasion, "when I see the little attention that some writers give to the Pope and to what he says ... we must close ranks around him ...".<sup>9</sup>

In presenting his new Society he had said that "the fundamental purpose of the Congregation from its beginnings was to constantly sustain and defend the authority of the supreme Head of the Church among the poorer classes in society, and especially among young people in danger".<sup>10</sup>

The salesian is convinced that the Pope and the Bishops have received from Christ the mandate to lead his Church and maintain the cohe-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. PC 2. 5; MR 14b; RD 14

Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, AGC 315, 1985

<sup>8</sup> BM V, 380; cf. BM V, 571

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM V, 383

<sup>10</sup> *"Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 gennaio 1874"* in OE vol XXV p. 380

sion of all its forces.<sup>11</sup> Peter's successor is the visible sign and efficacious instrument of the unity of the episcopal college and of the whole Church, and therefore we nourish for him in our heart and activity a *"filial loyalty"*. For the Popes he knew, Don Bosco was a most attentive and devoted servant, and the Popes reciprocated this attitude.

The salesian loves the Pope and does not conceal such love. He is able to instil this same love in the young and make them attentive to papal teaching, knowing that in this way he is giving them a sure and certain reference point in the search for truth.

Art. 125 will express in more precise terms our attitude to Peter's successor when it says that we Salesians are filially submissive to his authority.

b. *"Communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity"*.

Solidarity with the bishops and clergy of the local Churches is dealt with at greater length in art. 48, which explains how our mission is made part of the pastoral plan of the particular Church. What is emphasized at this point is our efficacious intention to live in a spirit of real communion and collaboration with the local bishop and his group of priests.

The reference to "religious" corresponds to the attitude and teaching of Don Bosco. Here we need do no more than quote the tenth of the recommendations he gave to the first missionaries: "Love, reverence and respect other religious Orders, and always speak well of them."<sup>12</sup> Our solidarity with them stems also from our conviction that religious families are living forces in the Church, and that we must work with them in unity and charity, rejecting any jealousy or superiority complex.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. LG 18

<sup>12</sup> BM XI, 364

As far as the "laity" are concerned and our communion and collaboration with them, we note that the attention of the salesian world is broadening in line with the reflections the Church has been making concerning the values and significance of the "lay state".<sup>13</sup> Many lay people are associated with our work (cf. C 29), but in any case the salesian is immersed in a reality in which concern about the Mystical Body must increase; he is called to be an animator in the educative and pastoral community, even to the extent of rendering it "a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C 47). As specialists in communion and collaboration (which is what we should be!), our contact with the laity can have a prophetic significance if we become legible and credible signs of God, professionally competent and capable of bridging differences, but especially if we are bearers of the characteristic "salesian spirit".<sup>14</sup>

### **The salesian works for the Church's growth and educates young people to do likewise**

We are men of the Church, apostles who foster a living "sensus ecclesiae", engaged in works that have been entrusted to us by the Church and which we animate in the Church's name.<sup>15</sup>

The Congregation is not closed in on itself but creates new linkages in the Church, and is concerned about making them grow in charity. "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, jointed and knit together, ... grows and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4,16).

In particular we feel ourselves called, in the Church, to foster communion between forces working for the salvation of youth.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. E. VIGANO, *The advancement of the lay person in the Salesian Family*, AGC 317, 1986

<sup>14</sup> V. commentary on art. 47, p. 431-435

<sup>15</sup> Cf. PC 8

The Rule reminds us of an important commitment in our work as educators: *"we educate young christians to an authentic understanding of the Church"*; i.e. we educate them to see in the Church the "Body of Christ" and the "People of God", the communion of all the forces working for salvation and their centre of unity and animation. On this account we sustain the baptismal vocation of the laity and all specific vocations; hence the effort we make to bring about a living experience of Church in the pastoral and educative communities: art. 35 sets out this responsibility more clearly, and art. 125 will deal specifically with the education of youth to accept the teaching of the Pope.

This is not an easy task: any plan to intensify dialogue between youth and the Church would seem in some places to be particularly difficult; and yet the Church is suffering a great deal because of the fact that many young people are indifferent or uninterested in the problem of God, or are atheists, non-believers, or even actively opposed to the Church. Others would like the Church to adapt itself to their own ideas and spirit, broadening its outlook and becoming less demanding, without giving any heed to the fact that it is bound by the Word of God. Still others declare their adherence to Christ but not to the Church. And it is these conditions that we, through the witness of our love, have to proclaim the mystery of the Church and make it loved.

With non-christian youngsters our attitude will always be careful to show respect for cultures and for other religions, but love of Christ's Church and of truth does not admit of compromise; in non-christian countries too we must be able to testify to the fact that the Church is a Mother, full of kindness towards everyone, and possessing the greatest of all treasures and the supreme truth, Jesus the Lord.

Don Bosco's phrase, which winds up the article, is a splendid synthetic expression of the intensity of our endeavour to build the Church and put ourselves at the service of Peter's successor: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> MB V, 383



*God our Father,  
you willed to make your Church  
the People of the new Covenant,  
the centre of unity and communion  
of all the forces working for salvation in Christ.*

*Your Son, who became man, loved the Church  
and sacrificed himself for her;  
grant that we too, as living members,  
in loyal unity with the Pope and the Bishops  
and fully docile to their teaching and directives,  
may express our fidelity to their magisterium.*

*Teach us how to educate our young people  
to an authentic sense of Church,  
and how to lead towards her  
those who are still in search of the truth.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 14 PREDILECTION FOR THE YOUNG

Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much".<sup>1</sup> This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life.

For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health: "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DON BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 7 (OE II, 187)

<sup>2</sup> DON RUFFINO, *Cronaca dell'Oratorio*, ASC 110, quaderno 5, p. 10

The salesian vocation is distinguished by a special gift of God which leads to predilection for the young. This love of predilection, which permeates all of a salesian's thinking and acting, impresses on him a characteristic mark which is not only the result of natural gifts and inclinations, but also an expression of pastoral charity. Entirely taken up by zeal for the good of young people, the salesian never ceases throughout his life to foster within himself an attitude of sympathy for youth, the desire to meet and be with them, a continual concern to get to know them and help them to reach a full personal development.

The salesian derives his predilection for the young from the love shown by Christ himself for children and young people:

— "Let the children come to me" (Mt 19,14), said Jesus to the apostles, who were too quick to defend him from the disturbance they were causing him;

— and in the conversation with the young man who had asked what he must do to gain eternal life, the evangelist notes: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him and said to him ..." (Mk 10,21);

— of interest too is what happened in the case of the three he raised from dead to life: the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8,49-56), the son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7,11-17); and Lazarus (Jn 11); the emotion

shown by Jesus and his miraculous interventions are signs of his love for those concerned.

Speaking of youth, Pope John Paul II refers to it as a period of singular value experienced by man: the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will subsequently be of great personal and social importance. Youth is a delicate and important age "on which depends the end of this millennium and the beginning of the next".<sup>1</sup>

Greatly interested in youth is the Evil One and all his minions, in order to ruin their lives. But young people are dear to the heart of the Church as they were dear to Christ. They are dear to the heart of Mary, who was herself a young girl, who lived and worked among the young, and who now continues to understand from heaven their urgent needs, and to respond when they call upon her. In his dream at the age of nine, his guide (Jesus the Good Shepherd) said to John: "I will give you a Teacher...".<sup>2</sup>

To get in touch with youngsters you have to love them. We may recall once again what John said to his mother while still a boy: "If I were a priest ... I would look for boys and gather them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and want their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare".<sup>3</sup>

This "predilection" had already enlarged his heart and made him "everything for the young", as Don Bosco well expressed it in the Foreword he wrote for the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the youth of the world*, 1985, cf. n. 3. 16

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM I, 95

<sup>3</sup> BM I, 170

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *"Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales" 1858-1875*, ed. F. MOTTO, pp. 58-61

## The salesian receives from God the gift of predilection for youth

A youngster needs someone "to whom he can turn with confidence: someone to whom he can entrust his essential questions: someone from whom he can expect a true response".<sup>5</sup>

Jesus Christ, the perfect model, shows us how to be available, open, kind and accessible.

He is the root and source of the pastoral charity which for the salesian is expressed in the love of "predilection" for the young. In Don Bosco this love "can only be explained through his love of Jesus Christ ... it was God's gift. It is the first charism of the salesian, his vocation *par excellence*".<sup>6</sup>

Speaking about the same topic, Don Albera asserted: "It is not enough to feel for them a certain natural attraction, a love is needed that is more than normal. Such predilection is, in its beginnings, a gift of God" ... "*This predilection is the salesian vocation itself*".<sup>7</sup>

The Rector Major, Fr E. Vigano adds: "The Salesian Family came into being because Don Bosco loved the young. His was a love of predilection that permeated his every inclination and talent; but basically it was a special gift from God, a 'salvation strategy' for modern times".<sup>8</sup>

After fixing our gaze on Jesus, we can understand Don Bosco, in whom pastoral predilection towards boys and young people seemed like a kind of passion. He felt that he had to be a sign of love: "The Lord sent me to look after boys";<sup>9</sup> "my life is dedicated to the good of the young";<sup>10</sup> "I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare; I am here only for your benefit";<sup>11</sup> "you are the objec-

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 1985, 4

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. VIGANO, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290, 1978, pp. 18-19

<sup>7</sup> P. ALBERA, Letter of 18.10.1920, *Circular letters*, p. 372

<sup>8</sup> ASC 290, 1978, p. 16

<sup>9</sup> BM VII, 171

<sup>10</sup> MO, p. 163 (Don Bosco to the Marchesa Barolo)

<sup>11</sup> BM VII, 302

tives of my thoughts and concerns";<sup>12</sup> "I feel at home with you; this is really where I belong";<sup>13</sup> "My dear boys, you are very dear to me. It is enough for me to know that you are young to become interested in your welfare... it would be difficult to find anyone who has a greater love for you in Jesus Christ, or a greater desire for your true happiness";<sup>14</sup> "you are the masters of my heart";<sup>15</sup> "I hope you will not be offended if I tell you that you are all thieves; I say it again, you have all stolen me; your letter signed by 200 of my dear friends has stolen my whole heart, of which nothing remains to me except a lively desire to love you in the Lord, to do good to you, to save the souls of all of you";<sup>16</sup> "my dear sons in Jesus Christ, whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next";<sup>17</sup> "these words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus".<sup>18</sup>

These and many other similar expressions reveal the love which moved Don Bosco in giving himself to the young, a love which found its source in the imitation of that gesture of the Lord: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10,21).

It could be said that the whole salesian movement is centred in an "oratorian heart", or in other words a priest of the local Church of Turin possessed of an overwhelming apostolic passion for poor and abandoned youngsters. "We must find the unifying force of our Family in that kind of priestly love characterized in Don Bosco by an overwhelming apostolic passion to help the young...".<sup>19</sup>

This love of predilection, an "expression of pastoral charity", of which the Constitutions speak, is not something superficial but a reality which characterizes all the salesian is and does; it endorses it with a

<sup>12</sup> *Collected letters* II, p. 361

<sup>13</sup> BM IV, 455

<sup>14</sup> D. BOSCO, "Companion of Youth", Introduction (OE II, 187)

<sup>15</sup> *Collected letters* II, p. 361

<sup>16</sup> *Collected letters* III, p. 5

<sup>17</sup> *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian Family* ASC 304, 1982, pp. 13. 23

seal which is like a "new character", rendering him a friend "accessible" to the young.

John Paul II, writing to priests, speaks of such a quality as follows: "Accessibility to young people means not only ease of contact with them, both inside and outside church, wherever young people feel drawn in harmony with the healthy characteristics of their age (I am thinking for example of tourism, sport and in general the sphere of cultural interests). The accessibility of which Christ gives us an example consists in something more. The priest, not only through his training for the ministry but also through the skill he has gained in the educational sciences, ought to evoke in young people trust as the confidant of their problems of a fundamental nature, questions regarding their spiritual life and questions of conscience".<sup>20</sup>

This is true for every salesian.

We must intensify this love of predilection for the young, which does not mean that others are excluded, because charity has no frontiers: "This love flows from a particular concern for what being young means in human life... The future of a person depends to a great extent upon the nature of that person's youth".<sup>21</sup>

### **The salesian offers his time, talents and health for the benefit of the young**

The second paragraph of the article tells us how this predilection for youth is manifested in practice. The salesian, deeply moved by a passion for the welfare of youth, generously gives for them his time, talents and health, and maintains a permanent attitude of sympathy in their regard, a constant presence (assistance) and a continual interest in getting to know them and win their affection.

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to priests*, op. cit. 4

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 6

Here too the example comes from Don Bosco, according to those words which the Constitutions put before us in the very first article: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".<sup>22</sup>

Don Bosco had formulated this promise very much earlier, but he endorsed it at the time of his wonderful cure from a serious illness: "I am convinced that God granted me an extension of life in answer to your prayers. Therefore gratitude demands that I spend it all for your temporal and spiritual welfare. This I promise to do as long as the Lord will permit me to remain in this world".<sup>23</sup>

He used often to repeat: "Remember that, whatever my worth, I am here every moment of the day and night for you".<sup>24</sup>

In his last years he spoke of "this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys".<sup>25</sup>

Starting from this fatherly example, the article of the Rule speaks of interior and exterior attitudes which the salesian must develop.

"The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them ... Our primary goal is the care of youth, and consequently every concern which draws us away from that objective cannot be good".<sup>26</sup> As Fr Luigi Ricceri wrote: Don Bosco fulfilled his vocation for the young by "bypassing every obstacle and leaving behind all things, even good ones, that could in any way hinder its accomplishment".<sup>27</sup> And Fr Viganò adds: "Our presence among the young is in obedience to God. ... It is amongst youth in need that our mission feels truly at home".<sup>28</sup>

Finally this love of predilection leads to a permanent and deep interest in getting to know individual youngsters, and also in being

<sup>22</sup> MB XVIII, 258

<sup>23</sup> BM II, 386

<sup>24</sup> BM VII, 302

<sup>25</sup> *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

<sup>26</sup> BM XIV, 216

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ASC 284 (1976) p. 33

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ASC 295 (1980) p. 25

aware of the cultural phenomenon called nowadays the "youth condition". "We must lend a willing ear to the voice of the world of the young and keep it in mind in the educative and pastoral dialogue of evangelization".<sup>29</sup>

*We thank you, Father,  
for having filled the heart of Don Bosco  
with predilection for the young:  
"That you are young", he said to them,  
"is enough to make me love you very much".*

*Enrich the heart of every salesian  
with the same gift of loving kindness,  
and help us to discover in all young people  
the presence of Jesus,  
so that we may be ready to offer for them  
our time, talents and health,  
and even the total donation of our whole life,  
in imitation of our Founder, who said:  
"For you I am ready even to give my life".*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ASC 290 (1978) p. 24



## ART. 15 SALESIAN LOVING KINDNESS

Sent to young people by the God who is 'all charity',<sup>1</sup> the salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience.

His love is that of a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return; this is the loving-kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco.

His chastity and well-balanced attitude open his heart to spiritual fatherhood and give transparent witness to God's anticipating love.

<sup>1</sup> DON BOSCO, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin 1847, p. 81; (OE II, 151)

Art. 15 is closely linked with those immediately preceding ("Predilection for the young") and following it ("Family spirit"), and is an explanation of how we are to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people" (C 2). It presents "*salesian loving-kindness*", which is born of "spiritual fatherhood" and of the characteristic message of purity and chastity, and is aimed at the formation of young people for love.

Introducing this topic, the Acts of SGC say: "(The salesian) asks the Holy Spirit for the gift of "sympathy", modelled on the meekness of Christ".<sup>1</sup>

The article emphasizes that the initiative of sending the salesian to the young comes from God, who is "all charity".

The underlying reason is that if a youngster does not experience love at that stage of his life, if he does not live in an environment in

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 100

which love is present, his growth becomes compromised.<sup>2</sup> The transforming power of love passes through the loving kindness of the educators, and the Salesians manifest it with the purity recommended by Don Bosco, i.e. with a love that is transparent, deep, strong and well balanced.

To be signs of the love of God for the young requires in us this transparency (asceticism) and the mystical presence of God within us.

## The salesian is welcoming

After emphasizing the divine source of all kindness, the text begins by presenting some basic attitudes of the salesian who is "sent to the young".

The salesian is "*open ... and ready to welcome others*": he is not closed in on himself but able to relate to others; since it would be difficult for an apostle to live at the same time a hermit's life, he adopts attitudes which favour contacts: openness and cordiality, respect and patience, a willingness to make the first approach and show welcome; in other words he is able to create sympathy and friendship.

Don Bosco recommended to his sons: "Try to make yourselves loved".<sup>3</sup> "Try to act in such a way that all those to whom you speak will become your friends", he said to Don Bonetti.<sup>4</sup> And writing to Don Cagliero, he declared: "The salesian spirit we want to introduce in the houses of America is ... charity, patience, gentleness, with no humiliating reprimands, no punishments, doing good to all and evil

<sup>2</sup> On the need for an experience of love for growth in faith, cf. the testimony of Agostino, a boy who after many negative experiences came into contact with the Salesians at Arese (Milan), and subsequently died at the age of only 16. He wrote the following, in the form of a prayer: "They say that love is a proof of your existence; may be that is why I have never met you: I have never been loved so that I could feel your presence. *Lord, let me find a love that will bring me to you*, a love that is sincere, disinterested, faithful and generous, a love that would be a bit like your image". (From *Il Vangelo secondo Barubba*, Arese 1974. p. 79)

<sup>3</sup> BM X, 453

<sup>4</sup> *Collected letters* II, 434

to no one. This holds for the salesians among themselves, with the pupils, and with others, whether living with us or externs".<sup>5</sup>

"*Open and cordial*", the salesian is "*ready to make the first approach*" towards the shy and the timid, towards those whom an exaggerated sense of respect keeps silent and at a distance; he is ready to bridge the gap, to approach in a sympathetic manner, to "come down from the pulpit", to make himself little with the little ones. Don Bosco always recommended this kind of attitude. And when it is the other person who makes the approach, he must be welcomed without fail, the door and heart must be opened to him, he must be listened to and his interests shared: "Let the superior be everything to everyone, always ready to listen to every doubt or complaint of the youngsters ... all heart to seek the temporal and spiritual good of those whom Providence confides to him".<sup>6</sup>

And all this is to be done especially by the adoption of three basic attitudes or qualities: "*kindness*", which seeks the good of the other person; "*respect*", which avoids cornering or exploiting him and recognizes his unique personal dignity behind his defects; and "*patience*", which is nothing else than the expression of constant and persevering love: "Love is patient and kind", says St Paul.<sup>7</sup>

This complexus of exterior qualities which ensure a good salesian reception and characterize the relationship of the salesian with everyone and especially with the young, corresponds to what Don Bosco called "*familiarita*", which might be best rendered in English by "*informality*". This has not yet reached "*amorevolezza*" (loving kindness), which indicates rather an interior attitude, a movement of the heart. But it is evident that the two realities are closely linked and correspond. Don Bosco himself wrote: "You cannot have affection without this familiarity (a friendly informal relationship)".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Letter of Don Bosco to Don Cagliero, 6.8.1885, *Collected letters* IV, 328

<sup>6</sup> MB XVII, 112

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 13,4; cf. also D. BOSCO, *The preventive system in the education of the young*, chap. 2, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 248

<sup>8</sup> *Letter from Rome*, cf. MB XVII, 107. Appendix to Constitutions, pp. 254-264

## The salesian shows loving kindness as a father, brother and friend

The loving kindness of the salesian is made specific in this paragraph which draws its inspiration from the Letter from Rome of 10 May 1884. "*Amorevolezza*" is a word characteristic of Don Bosco's terminology, with which he expresses the affection full of fatherly and brotherly kindness that he nourishes towards youth. The text indicates three nuances of this kindness.

— *True and personal "affection"*, given substance by human warmth and supernatural delicacy. Like Don Bosco, every salesian is a "man of heart". It is enough to read the above mentioned Letter from Rome: "My dear sons in Jesus Christ ... not being able to see or hear you upsets me more than you can imagine ... These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus...".<sup>9</sup> The terminology used by the Saint is striking: affection, cordiality, familiarity, charity, heart, love etc. And towards the end of the letter his secretary notes: "At this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears ... because of the ineffable tenderness that was evident from his face and voice".<sup>10</sup>

A great salesian, Don Berruti, has written: "Heartfelt love is a characteristic of salesian charity. Don Bosco was not satisfied with the austere kind of charity, born of the will and of grace, which forms part and parcel of the educational systems of other Orders".<sup>11</sup> His is a charity of the style of St Francis de Sales or, better, after the heart of Christ who wept over his friend Lazarus and over the grief of his sisters Martha and Mary.

— *The affection of "fathers, brothers and friends"*: the expression comes literally from the Letter of May 1884.

Salesian affection resembles that which binds the members of a family together or a group of friends. It means that the "superior", the

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> On the splendour of salesian charity in Don Berruti, v. *Don Pietro Berruti, luminosa figura di salesiano*, Testimonianze raccolte da P. ZERBINO, SEI 1964, chap. XXVI, p. 564 ff.

"master" or even the "priest", preacher or celebrant, does not close himself off within his own particular function, and this without loss to his authority; the latter does not give rise to fear because it is exercised within a deeper relationship which unites one person to another, father to son, brother to brother, friend to friend.

— *"Able to draw out friendship in return".*

Once again this is the explicit doctrine of Don Bosco. The salesian speaks the "language of the heart", a language which includes both words and actions: he shows that he loves, and seeks explicitly to gain the love of others, to "win over and conquer" their hearts, so as to create a communion within which to establish a dialogue of the heart. "An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them", says the little treatise on the Preventive system apropos of punishments.<sup>12</sup> And again in the Letter from Rome: "The youngsters should not only be loved, but they themselves should know that they are loved ... One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young".<sup>13</sup> This John Bosco had learned already in his dream at the age of nine: "You will have to win over these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness".<sup>14</sup>

And evidently this must also be the attitude of the salesian towards his own confreres.

**Through his gift of chastity and well balanced attitude, the salesian is a sign of God's anticipating love**

It needed all the daring of a Saint to let loose an army of educators with a method like this for education and the attainment of sanctity.

<sup>12</sup> *The preventive system in the education of the young*, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 246-253

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 259

<sup>14</sup> BM I, 95

The objections of opponents are well known: does not that kind of love "from the heart" expose both educator and pupil to danger? No, replies the Rule, because Don Bosco knew that he could count on the salesian being chaste in his affections.

The Constitutions place in their proper place Don Bosco's insistent words about chastity: he puts it in immediate relationship with this loving kindness. If Don Bosco demands of the salesian a clear and strong purity, consciously assumed and lived, it is precisely because he also demands of him a deep and true affection: purity preserves the authenticity of love. The characteristic therefore of the salesian spirit is not a chastity which is simply austere, but the chastity which is a guarantee of true affection and rules out any deviation.

Don Bosco, as we have seen, exhorts us to love "in such a way that the youngsters know they are loved", but at the same time he demands from his sons a great detachment from themselves in showing affection, the rejection of any sentimental sensitivity, the avoidance of any word or gesture which could be badly interpreted or prove disturbing, of any intimacy which would narrow the heart and prevent it from being open to all.

In this way chastity makes possible the valid expressions and positive fruits of love. As we shall see when speaking of consecrated chastity, it is an evangelical way of loving: the salesian gives up physical fatherhood, but does so to make himself more capable of spiritual fatherhood: chastity disposes the heart for this great task.

The salesian therefore has a heart which is spontaneous but delicate, a heart which is tender but not weak or effeminate, a real sensitivity but one which does not weaken his self-control. "Balance" of this kind is a gift made possible by God's grace, through the Spirit of charity. Thanks to this presence the loving kindness of the salesian has the joyful unembarrassed quality which belongs to the sons of God and reveals the Father's love.

*God our Father, source of all love,  
through your Spirit you bring to birth in us*

*the living force of true friendship.  
Make us open and cordial in welcoming our fellow men  
and especially the young.*

*Make us generous and impartial  
in our love for each and all,  
with a sincere and chaste affection,  
so that it may prove to be for those we meet  
a reflection and foretaste  
of your own anticipating fatherly love.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 16 FAMILY SPIRIT

Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart.<sup>1</sup>

This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation.

<sup>1</sup> cf. MB XVII, 110

Every religious community finds at its source God himself who calls the members to live together united by the bond of charity (cf. C 50). It is called to be in the Church "a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in his presence";<sup>1</sup> we shall see later how the religious vows help in this project of communion (cf. C 61): chastity renders us more available to love each other as brothers in the Spirit, poverty makes it easy to give and receive, and obedience prompts us to seek together the will of God.

The Rule tells us that we Salesians, if we are faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, establish within our communities (which in familiar terms we call "houses") that unmistakable style of relationships which, in our living tradition, we are accustomed to call "*family spirit*". From the description given in art. 16 of the "salesian house" we can glean the extent to which the spirit of Don Bosco penetrates our communities at different levels: local, provincial, world, and the entire Salesian Family, where the very term 'Family' signifies the spirit which unites the members.

<sup>1</sup> PC 15



But it is not a question of a style which exists only within the house': the Salesians, wherever they are, in the educative and pastoral communities or in contact with other groups, in all their relationships in fact, tend spontaneously to establish a kind of "family", to give life to a "family spirit", which makes each one feel at home and at ease, which means that he also feels responsible for the common good.

In this way the article follows naturally on the two previous ones and completes the description of the style of salesian relationships, inspired by charity.

**·The family atmosphere makes us feel accepted and that we share responsibility together**

The model for the salesian "family spirit" is in the first place the life of the Oratory at Valdocco, where Don Bosco lived as a father among his boys and collaborators. The description given by the author of the Biographical Memoirs is interesting: "In those days the Oratory was truly a family".<sup>2</sup> "Don Bosco ran the Oratory as a large family, and the boys really felt as if they had never left their homes".<sup>3</sup> "Peaceful joy, unmarred by worry, ruled the Oratory, and family spirit brightened its life. The boys were given all the freedom compatible with discipline and good conduct."<sup>4</sup> It was on this family style that Don Bosco set up all his houses, and even the religious community as well.

<sup>2</sup> BM III, 250

<sup>3</sup> BM IV, 474

<sup>4</sup> BM IV, 338-339

We shall find the theme returning at various points of the constitutional text. <sup>5</sup> The purpose of the present article is to emphasize some of its characteristic aspects.

The first paragraph speaks of "mutual affection", of "feeling welcome", of "responsibility for the common good", i.e. of a deeply felt intercommunication which is at the foundation of an authentic "family spirit".

"The need and joy of sharing everything is experienced", as in a true family. Whatever goods a member possesses are made available to the others; each one enriches the others and is enriched by them in return. This giving and receiving brings about a growth in joy and unites the members by solid and unbreakable bonds. But the most important exchange is not of material goods, but rather of life itself and of good things more deeply personal, like thoughts and feelings, plans and interests, joys and sorrows, etc.: this is the "opening of the heart" that Don Bosco used to speak of.

This is true for the educative community, but the article applies it also to the religious community; it is not sufficient that the relations between members of the same house be correct, bureaucratic and formal: they must also be "personal". The Constitutions will tell us that the family spirit inspires every moment of the community's life, and that "in an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows and are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences" (cf. C 51-52).

The same is true also of relationships involving authority and obedience, of which the Rule speaks later. "In salesian tradition (these) are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust" (C 65); to a discreet and respectful exercise of authority will correspond a practice of "filial" obedience that is spon-

The family spirit invades every aspect of salesian life and mission:

- in the educative community: cf. C 37. 38. 47
- in the religious community: cf. C 49. 51. 53. 56
- is fostered by the evangelical counsels: cf. C 61
- in authority and in obedience: cf. C 65
- as regards chastity: cf. C 83
- in the formation community: cf. C 103

taneous and generous. Those who have a keen "family sense" do not need orders to do those things which will be advantageous to the community. For us who "live and work together" (C 49), for us who believe that our apostolic mandate "is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities, whose members have complementary functions" (C 44), the family spirit is the great secret for strengthening our cohesion and responsibility.

**The family atmosphere is governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart**

The text qualifies this atmosphere, saying that it is based on "mutual trust" and "daily forgiveness". The Letter from Rome is a sufficient endorsement of this. The first Oratory at Valdocco is described as follows: "The greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors ... closeness led to affection and affection brought confidence. It is this that opens hearts and the youngsters express everything without fear to their superiors". And then, when things had changed at the Oratory: "The reason for the present change is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors ..., who are now thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends... If you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again, for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence".<sup>6</sup>

Brotherly relationships and mutual trust, says the article, make recourse to laws, regulations, norms and authority less necessary; instead appeal is made to interior qualities of the individual, to faith and the "promptings of the heart".

Here too the principle extends to every kind of community in which salesians are involved, because it is a feature of the spirit which they practise always and everywhere. The source of the principle is always the Letter from Rome, in which Don Bosco comes out with a kind of cry of anguish which is very significant: "In the old days at the Oratory

*Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 254-264

... boys would do anything they were asked by one who they knew loved them. We had no secrets from you", Valfré told Don Bosco. "Why do people want to replace love with cold rules?<sup>7</sup> In salesian houses things are not done "because you have to", but rather because the underlying reason is understood, because love and willingness are present, and all this in the light of faith.<sup>8</sup>

One of the surest signs of the salesian spirit is the untroubled air of freedom and creative joy, which is common among the sons of Don Bosco. There is no constraint or fear, each one can say what he thinks, each one can make his own generous personal contribution and make suggestions... Don Bosco himself used to say: "God does not like things done by force. As a loving God, he wants things done for love's sake".<sup>9</sup> Again we become aware that the salesian spirit leads us to the very depths of the Gospel. Later we shall see some further applications of the salesian spirit to the life of the community and the practice of obedience.

### **The family atmosphere gives rise to vocations**

One of the finest fruits of the family spirit is vocations. The history of the Congregation amply demonstrates the truth of this in the case of both Don Bosco and the first salesians. Inserted as they were in the heart of a salesian community made warm by family affection, many boys learned to model their own lives on those of their educators; they became progressively aware of the germ of a salesian vocation that God had placed in their heart, and the family atmosphere led them little by little to identify with the ideals and the style of life of their teachers; slowly their sense of belonging to the Congregation matured together with the desire to take part in its pastoral activity.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> V. Don Caviglia's description of the fatherly authority of Don Bosco: A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco*, pp 168-169

<sup>9</sup> BM VI, 637

This is the dynamic growth process which is characteristic of the salesian way of life; the atmosphere is one in which vocations naturally appear and grow; they then mature in the family spirit and a gradual insertion into apostolic work follows almost automatically.

A precise task of our communities is to involve our youngsters in our family life, to enable them to experience for themselves how wonderful is the salesian mission and be attracted to follow the Lord Jesus and work for his Kingdom: "Come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39).

But it should be kept in mind that this will be possible only if the family spirit shines forth in our communities, and especially in formation communities; it is possible only if all the members "form a family founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ, united in mutual esteem and common endeavour" (C 103).

*Grant, O Lord, to our communities  
a true family spirit  
in mutual trust and reciprocal forgiveness,  
and in the joyful sharing of all we have  
in obedience to the supreme law of love.*

*Grant also that many young people  
may find themselves at ease with us,  
and so be encouraged to get to know and to follow  
the same vocation.*

## ART. 17 OPTIMISM AND JOY

The salesian does not give way to discouragement in face of difficulties, because he has complete trust in the Father. "Let nothing upset you", Don Bosco used to say.<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales, he believes in man's natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness.

He is able to make his own what is good in the world and does not bewail his own times; he accepts all that is good,<sup>2</sup> especially if it appeals to the young.

Because he is a herald of the Good News he is always cheerful.<sup>3</sup> He radiates this joy and is able to educate to a christian and festive way of life: "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MB VII, 524; BM VII, 317

<sup>2</sup> cf. 1 Thess 5,21

<sup>3</sup> cf. Phil 3,1

<sup>4</sup> D. BOSCO, *Il giovane Provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 6; (OE II, 186)

The article expresses the components of a typical christian and salesian humanism. The new style of pastoral relationships presented in the preceding articles (C 14-16), is completed by a reference to salesian joy and optimism, which draws its inspiration from the principles of "complete trust in the Father", and trust also in "man's natural and supernatural resources". This double trust opens the salesian to other elements too, so that he "makes his own what is good in the world", "does not bewail his own times", and "accepts all that is good, especially if it appeals to the young".

In this way loving kindness and the family spirit are lived in an atmosphere of undisturbed satisfaction. Optimism, joy and happiness are necessary realities in the world of youth, and must therefore be concretely experienced in salesian environments. The text speaks of "joy" and "cheerfulness". One does not exclude the other: there is no authentic cheerfulness that is not born of a deep joy, from a heart at peace with God and men; nevertheless joy is not always expressed in gaiety and cheerfulness, but among us the latter forms part of our youthful spirit.

Don Bosco knew that a boy's life rotated around freedom, games and happiness; he knew that any normal and efficacious educational efforts must respect the boy's natural state, which excludes oppression, force or violence; for this reason he wanted joy and cheerfulness to pervade the oratory environment in which the boy lived. That is why in his educational system the relationships between the youngsters and their educators, and between the educators themselves, are marked by a friendship and family spirit which helps the boy to grow in joy.<sup>1</sup>

It should be remembered that the whole article is inspired by the text of St Paul which the liturgy uses for the feast of St John Bosco, part of which is placed at the head of the present chapter: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The Lord is at hand... Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4,4-9).

### **The salesian has trust and courage**

The first paragraph of the article emphasizes the salesian's attitude of courageous trust during the trials that accompany his apostolic work, as also at times when he must remain inactive through sickness or old age.

It is an attitude inculcated by Don Bosco by word and example. His biographers describe him as remaining always calm, even in moments of difficulty; the advice he gave Don Rua who had been appointed the first Rector at Mirabello is well known: "Let nothing upset you!"; this and other valuable pieces of advice were later inserted in the "Confidential reminders for Rectors"<sup>2</sup>, but it forms part of the spirit which animates every salesian.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Turin 1955, p. 214 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM X, 447

The source of the trust and the apostolic courage of the salesian is to be found on high. If he is able to preserve his deep inner peace and not give way to discouragement in the face of trials, it is because he believes in God's fatherhood; God's work cannot fail, and the trial is a "providential" path to a better result. Here there is in fact a certain appeal to the salesian's supernatural spirit: he has the right to count on God in the measure that he remains God's servant, seeking nothing else but his glory and his Kingdom.

### **The salesian is optimistic and believes in the capabilities of every youngster**

This optimism is born of hope, of a deep sense of the Father's Providence and of the certainty that Christ is risen; but it is also supported by man's trust. The Constitutions recall that in our case it is "inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales", founded on a double conviction: the goodness of God ("I am not a God who condemns; my name is Jesus the Saviour") and the possibilities given to man ("Our human heart can give rise naturally to the beginnings of the love of God").<sup>3</sup> God is so good that he has put into man's heart "natural and supernatural resources" in which the educator or man of action can always find reasons for hope. "The practice of the preventive system", wrote Don Bosco, "is wholly based on the words of St Paul: 'Love is patient and kind; love bears all things ... but hopes all things and endures all things'"<sup>4</sup> In the Biographical Memoirs we find these words of our Father: "Just as there is no barren or sterile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man's heart. No matter how barren and restive at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit. It will begin by loving what is naturally good and ultimately advance to what is supernaturally good, provided that a zealous spiritual director will cooperate with God's grace by prayer

<sup>3</sup> Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the love of God*, book I, chap. 7

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D. BOSCO, *Treatise on preventive system*, App. Const. 1984, p. 248



and effort. Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it".<sup>5</sup>

The whole preventive system consists in the progressive development of these "living sources which every man carries deep within himself"; and because salesians do not lose sight of the frailty of youth, they lend their brotherly presence "so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil" (C 39), and help them to gradually overcome this fragility. The whole skill of the educator rests in the ability to find a resonant chord in the depths of a heart and get it to vibrate. Don Bosco was convinced that the grace of God and human effort can make of every adolescent a genuine saint.

Optimism is always therefore a salesian characteristic at every age and situation of life.

### **The salesian makes his own what is good in the world, especially if it appeals to the young**

The salesian spirit makes us reject any unilateral judgement on the world. It is true that there is a world which "is in the power of the evil one", as St John says (1 Jn 5,19); but the reference is to worldly elements opposed to God's designs. The world, in the sense understood by the conciliar Constitution "Gaudium et Spes", is the object of the Father's love, even though it be a complex reality in which sin and redemption are mixed.<sup>6</sup> The salesian is not blind to sin and evil, but insists spontaneously on the redemption aspect. He is conscious of being "deeply united with the world and its history" (C 7); he resists the natural tendency of many adults to praise the past and bewail the present, because he is able to seek, discern and accept "what is good" in today's world, and fight strenuously against evil, but without bitterness.

<sup>5</sup> BM V, 236-7

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GS 2

Like Jesus who came "not to judge but to save" (Jn 12,47), Don Bosco did not take up rigid and provocative attitudes in dealing with his adversaries: he always hoped to change them by prudence and patience.

Among the good things of the earth, the salesian makes his own especially those which "appeal to the young", and also things of which the young are themselves bearers and promoters. Anyone, on the other hand, who rejects the present and is closed to the future, shows by that very fact that he is not suitable as an educator of youth.

### **The salesian is cheerful, radiates joy, and lives in festive fashion**

The final paragraph concentrates our reflection on the joy and cheerfulness which is part of the salesian spirit.

The deep root of this joy is the Gospel of Christ, the Lord's "Good News" which the salesian proclaims: "... that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full" (Jn 15,11); "your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16,22).

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and arises from the conviction that God loves us.<sup>7</sup>

From this deep and solid root is born a serene and enthusiastic christianity tinged with the kind of cheerfulness that was seen in Dominic Savio: "Here we make holiness consist in being very cheerful" (a new kind of definition in the history of sanctity, but deeply evangelical nonetheless); the kind that Don Bosco gave to his boys as a programme of life in the slogan: "Cheerfulness, study and piety". Don Caviglia goes so far as to speak of cheerfulness as the salesian's eleventh commandment! On the other hand, everyone knows the famous saying attributed to St Francis de Sales: "If a saint were sad, he would be a sad saint!"

<sup>7</sup> On christian joy, v. Paul VI, Encyclical "*Gaudete in Domino*"

It is not a question of an alienating frame of mind leading to a life where ignorance is bliss, but a true sanctification of the joy of living. The salesian environment must be such that those in it can detect and experience a joyful atmosphere that opens hearts to optimism and trust in life, that leads to the quiet acceptance of the hard things we meet and even enlightens with holy joy the difficult moment of death.

The Rule emphasizes that not only is the salesian cheerful himself, but he is a *communicator of festive joy*: "We're a festive people, we're a joyful lot", in the words of a modern song composed by some young salesians in Italy.

Joy is self-propagating, it is contagious, it needs to expand, to explode in festive happiness; it must have space therefore, something like a playground (which Don Caviglia defined as "Don Bosco amidst the young";<sup>8</sup>) it must have music and singing, because "an oratory without music is like a body without a soul";<sup>9</sup> it needs a theatre and outings; it needs periodic celebrations which the youngsters can see and in which they can take part, to serve as highlights in the daily rhythm of their lives.

The salesian knows that genuine and authentic cheerfulness is not possible for anyone whose heart is not at peace, and at the same time it becomes an efficacious call to those who are not in that state. "The devil fears cheerful people", Don Bosco used to say.<sup>10</sup> The salesian educator is well aware that this is the way to make youngsters experience the liberating efficacy of the grace of Christ. But he knows too that there is a price to be paid: in the dream or vision of the pergola of roses<sup>11</sup> anyone seeing the salesian joyful, enthusiastic and optimistic might get the impression that he was walking on a carpet of roses; but the piercing pain caused by the thorns show that the salesian spirit may find in this attitude of cheerfulness a very real opportunity for asceticism: it is a happiness fed by sacrifice, sometimes of a severe kind, but accepted with a smile, with simplicity and without fuss, as

<sup>8</sup> *Opere e scritti di Don Bosco*, ed. A. CAVIGLIA, V, 173

<sup>9</sup> BM V, 222

<sup>10</sup> BM X, 294

<sup>11</sup> Cf. MB III, 25-27. The dream was repeated three times in Don Bosco's life: in 1847, 1848 and 1856

something quite normal without playing the martyr or the hero. In the unavoidable trials of life the salesian repeats with Don Bosco: "A piece of paradise will make up for everything".<sup>12</sup>

The reflection concludes with Don Bosco's exhortation to his boys, which enshrines a programme for holiness: "*Let us serve the Lord in holy joy!*"<sup>13</sup>

*That following the example of St Francis de Sales  
and the teaching of Don Bosco,  
we may always believe  
in the natural and supernatural resources of man,  
and while not ignoring his weakness,  
be able to discover the germs of goodness  
which you place in the heart of every youngster,  
— Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in spite of the thorns strewn on our path,  
we may never lose sight of the goal which awaits us,  
but remain optimistic,  
full of trust in our Father,  
— Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to discern the values of creation  
and be able to accept what is good,  
especially if it appeals to the young,  
— Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus,  
we may be bearers of joy,  
and be able to educate young people  
to a holiness based on christian happiness,  
— Lord, hear our prayer.*

<sup>12</sup> BM VIII, 200

<sup>13</sup> D. BOSCO, *Companion of Youth*, Turin 1847, OE II, p. 186

## ART. 18 WORK AND TEMPERANCE

"Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish",<sup>1</sup> whereas the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will instead bring about its death.<sup>2</sup>

The salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered.

He does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MB XII, 466; BM XII, 338

<sup>2</sup> cf. MB XVII, 272

<sup>3</sup> cf. C 1875, XIII, 13

In this article and the one which follows we turn our attention to some characteristics given by pastoral charity to our salesian apostolic activity. According to the Constitutions the salesian apostle is distinguished by his tireless industry which remains at the same time well balanced (the inseparable "work and temperance"), by daily self-sacrifice, by creativity and flexibility in the face of urgent requirements, and by a spirit of initiative in response to needs arising in the course of time.

The precious chapter of Don Ceria in the Annals of the Congregation cited earlier<sup>1</sup>, presents three elements which give to the religious spirit the unmistakable mark of the "salesian spirit": they are "piety",

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana*, I, p. 722 ff.

which means the ability to transform work into prayer, with the support of the sacraments; our "family life"; but above all a "prodigious activity" both individually and collectively.

The article we are now examining presents, as its title implies, the double concept of "*work and temperance*", which is the "*badge and password of the salesian*".<sup>2</sup>

### "Work and temperance", two inseparable salesian concepts

The text of the Rule first highlights the role that work and temperance have in the Congregation's life and mission. For Don Bosco they were a programme of life (a motto to be put alongside "da mihi animas, cetera tolle"), and a guarantee for the future: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish".<sup>3</sup>

"Salesian life, considered in its activity", says Don Rinaldi, "is work and temperance, enlivened by the charity of the heart".<sup>4</sup>

In our tradition the two elements are inseparably linked. In the dream of the ten diamonds, the diamonds of work and temperance, on the two shoulders, seem to support the mantle of the personage.<sup>5</sup> In the physiognomy of the salesian and in his apostolic life, work and temperance cannot be separated one from the other; they have complementary functions of incentive and support. The reality of life calls on the one hand for enthusiasm and on the other for renunciation, on this side for commitment and on that for mortification.

It should be noted that from a salesian point of view work and temperance represent a positive reality. Work gets an individual mov-

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 338

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> ACS 56, 26 April 1931, p. 934

<sup>5</sup> MB XV, 183

ing, stimulates his creativity, prompts him to a certain self-affirmation and sends him into the world; the qualities of salesian work, for example, are alacrity, spontaneity, generosity, initiative, constant updating and, naturally, union with one's fellows and with God. Temperance, as a virtue which leads to self-control, is a 'hinge' around which various moderating virtues turn: self-restraint, humility, meekness, clemency, modesty, sobriety and abstinence, economy and simplicity, and also austerity; this complexus adds up to an overall attitude of self-control. In this way temperance becomes a preparation for the acceptance of many difficult or unpleasant requirements of daily work... For us salesians, wrote the Rector Major, "temperance is not the sum total of what we have given up, but a growth in the practice of pastoral and pedagogical charity".<sup>6</sup>

It can be said that work and temperance, the "badge and password of the salesian", are for us a testimony to a charity which loves "not in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3,18).

### **The work of the salesian**

The Rule says of the salesian that he "gives himself to his mission with tireless energy"; the reference is to an assiduous and particular kind of work, which becomes a means of sanctification.

The emphasis placed on the "professional" quality of the salesian's work should be noted<sup>7</sup>: it is work which is linked to the implementing of the mission, and hence is pedagogical, educational and pastoral in character, and prepared with indispensable qualifications in the human sciences and theological disciplines; a work lived according to the typical salesian style expressed in the words "taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation", and echoed in Don Bosco's words: "He

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Un progetto evangelico di vita*, LDC 1982, p. 118 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GC22 RRM, 293

does much who, though doing little, does what he must; he does nothing who does much, but not what he should do".<sup>8</sup>

The source of the doctrine here set out is clearly Don Bosco himself, his own example as a formidable worker and his encouragement to commitment to work for souls. Considerable significance attaches to what Don Caviglia once said in an introduction to a discussion on salesian work: "It seems almost a scandal in a saint, but he said 'let us work' much more than 'let us pray'".<sup>9</sup>

Speaking to the Superior Council in the evening of 10 December 1875, Don Bosco said "As for the Congregation, I see that although we keep repeating that we must consolidate what we have, things go better when we work hardest: ... as long as we are intensely active and do plenty of work, everything goes on wonderfully. There is really a very great desire to work among the members of our Congregation".<sup>10</sup>

On another occasion in a conference he said: "If you join the Congregation you will want for nothing, but you must work ... No one should enter if he intends to sit around twiddling his thumbs...".<sup>11</sup> Our novitiates are no places for idlers. And the motto: "*bread, work and heaven*" is a slogan which does not admit of compromise!

Our Father came back constantly on the same point: "Don't remain idle; if you don't work, the devil will".<sup>12</sup> Pius XI, who had known and admired our Founder, condensed the thought of the Saint into a few words: "Anyone who doesn't know how to work is out of place in the Salesian Society".

Such a declaration is much to the point at the present day. The seventh successor of Don Bosco has written: "We are on the threshold of a new culture prompted by the civilization of work: we are living in a technical and industrial age, in which work occupies a central place.

<sup>8</sup> BM I, 298

<sup>9</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, Turin 1985, p. 99

<sup>10</sup> BM XI, 363-4

<sup>11</sup> BM XIII, 333

<sup>12</sup> BM XIII, 341



Well then, in our work we want to feel that we are 'prophets' and not just being 'ascetical.'<sup>13</sup> All work is productive and socializing; it causes cultural growth, but it requires a professional approach; it calls for competence, organization, formation, study and updating.

The Constitutions emphasize the *divine greatness* of work, which makes us "co-workers" with God for the coming of his Kingdom.

The salesian is aware that by his work he is participating in the ongoing creative action of God in the world:<sup>14</sup> creation is seen as a fundamental act in the history of salvation, directed not to the bringing into existence of galaxies, but to rendering the world human, to transforming it in history, to the growth and domination of the earth".<sup>15</sup> Here there is also the root of a fundamental and creatural lay status from which can arise a real "mystique" of human work, a sound secularity and a proper appraisal of professionalism.

By his work the salesian feels especially the joy of collaborating with Christ in the work of the "redemption"; in the activity of mankind, wounded by sin and immersed in structures which bear sin's consequences, the mystery of Christ the Saviour is inserted: his example at Nazareth is conclusive. The feeling of being a "co-redeemer" gives eloquent value to work: fatigue, patience, dedication, commitment all "take on redemptive significance which gives to the heart of the worker a touch of divine nobility".<sup>16</sup>

The salesian worker does not identify only with his "profession" (educator, instructor, engineer, communicator, agriculturist, cook, etc.) but more especially with his "vocation", which transforms his activity into witness, which makes of work a message for the present day, nourished at the sources of faith, hope and charity, which are the historical dynamic forces which change society and human existence.

<sup>13</sup> E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 107

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, 1981

<sup>15</sup> E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 112

<sup>16</sup> E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 113

One can understand from all this that "tireless activity" does not mean either agitation or activism, but the activity proper to the salesian, permeated by practical charity and an apostolic sense: what he is doing is "*working for souls*" with the Lord.

### The salesian's temperance

Temperance, one of the cardinal virtues, is presented by the Constitutions as self-control and the custody of the heart: i.e. the moderation of the inclinations and passions, a constant effort to be balanced and reasonable, and a break with earthly attractions — not by fleeing to the desert but by staying among men with the heart under control. "More than a virtue on its own, temperance is an existential basic attitude implying many other virtues which lead to self-control and mastery of the heart... It accustoms us to inconvenience by rationalizing our desires and feelings, by the domination of our passions, by composure in our common life, by a proper reserve, by a healthy shrewdness (as an expression of intelligent common sense); and all this in the light and under the guidance of reason. Yes; temperance controls everything in accordance with reason".<sup>17</sup>

"It is a like temperance that crowns the salesian smile; it is a similar temperance, joined to work, that traces the outlines of the salesian physiognomy".<sup>18</sup>

Temperance leads to a healthy balance in everything, and not only to the control of concupiscence. Don Bosco wanted temperance and common sense to be present even in work. On 3 January 1879 he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: "As for work, yes, go ahead and work, but don't overdo it. Don't shorten your life by privations or excessive toil or depression or such other nuisances".<sup>19</sup> To us sale-

<sup>17</sup> E. VIGANO op. cit., p. 119-120

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> BM XIV, 191

sians he said the same thing: "Work as much as your health will allow, but be on your guard against idleness".<sup>20</sup> And he told the departing missionaries: "Take care of your health. Work, but only as much as your strength allows".<sup>21</sup>

It is true to say that our temperance can be measured by the effort we make to love by making ourselves loved! And experience teaches that that is no easy task. To be "temperate" for us means to be controlled, balanced, with common sense, not given to exaggeration, reasonable in behaviour, self-controlled and pleasant in manner; but also sensitive to so many real needs, to what is pleasing or otherwise to the young, to the signs of the times, to all the vast sectors of the Church's renewal, not permanently ready to slam on the brakes when changes are taking place, but at the same time being watchful against excesses and deviations.

A temperance which helps to "remain even tempered" is not made up of a collection of renunciations, but springs rather from growth in faith, hope and charity, from adherence to the Constitutions, from love of the community, from cheerfulness and from the heroicity attached to the daily round.

### **The salesian's penance**

The salesian's asceticism is based on work in its stern requirements (the sacrifice of the daily duty) and on temperance, which certainly calls for renunciations to develop the necessary self-control. And here enters the theme of the cross, which links up well with the faithful and self-sacrificing discharge of his duty, and with the exertions involved.

The final paragraph reproduces almost to the letter some words which go back to Don Bosco himself: "Let each one be ready, when

<sup>20</sup> BM XIV, 511

<sup>21</sup> BM XI, 364

necessity requires it, to suffer heat and cold, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain, whenever this will redound to the greater glory of God, the spiritual good to others, and the salvation of his own soul".<sup>22</sup>

Also pointed out is the *mystery of the cross in the life of the salesian apostle*, as a characteristic trait inherited from the Founder: it is a salesian style of mortification, which anticipates or strengthens a penitential practice suited to our times and so much recommended at the present day: "a joyful well-balanced austerity".<sup>23</sup> "A great deal of present-day penance," says a document from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "is already present in the circumstances of life, and must be accepted there".<sup>24</sup>

At a time of great cultural changes, far different from the circumstances in the lifetime of the Founder, it is well to reaffirm explicitly, with the Constitutions, that self-renunciation and the taking up of one's cross are integral elements of the style of life and activity of Don Bosco, who "in order to clothe his holiness with attractive pedagogical and pastoral characteristics, made ceaseless and enormous efforts in the way of asceticism".<sup>25</sup>

Our own ascetic realism as apostles and educators is founded on St. Paul's declaration: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1,21). Anyone entering our Society does so to follow the Saviour, consciously sharing his cross by self-renunciation, in trials and difficulties, in his passion and even in his death.

This ascetical side of the salesian is well expressed by the Rule which speaks not of extraordinary penances but of the daily acceptance of the unforeseen elements of the apostolic life: "cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain...", which constitute a "martydom of love and self-sacrifice for the welfare of others".<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, XIII, 13 (cf. F. MOTTO p. 191)

<sup>23</sup> ET 30

<sup>24</sup> *Elementi essenziali della vita consacrata*, CRIS 1983, n. 31

<sup>25</sup> E. VIGANÒ, ASC 310 (1983), p. 14

<sup>26</sup> BM XIII, 236

But Don Bosco repeats to us the words of St Paul: "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8,18).

*That in imitation of Don Bosco  
who was concerned only with the salvation of youth,  
we may respond generously to your call  
and dedicate ourselves with tireless energy  
to the mission you entrust to us,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That we may understand the greatness and beauty  
of our apostolic work,  
which makes us participants in your creative activity,  
and collaborators of your Son  
in the construction of the Kingdom,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That we may be always able to unite our work  
with salesian temperance,  
and be convinced that in "work and temperance"  
lies the secret of the apostolic success  
and fruitfulness of the Congregation,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That without seeking extraordinary penances  
we may accept the daily demands  
and renunciations of apostolic life,  
and make of them an instrument  
for your greater glory  
and the salvation of the young,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

## ART. 19 INITIATIVE AND FLEXIBILITY

The salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord manifests his will also through the demands of time and place.

Hence his spirit of initiative and apostolic creativity: "In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness".<sup>1</sup>

Timely response to these needs requires him to keep abreast of new trends and meet them with the well-balanced creativity of the Founder; periodically he evaluates his work.

<sup>1</sup> MB XIV, 662; BM XIV, 536

If our generous and self-sacrificing style of work is to attain the pastoral efficacy required by the Kingdom of God, it must exhibit a number of aspects, which are also attitudes of the person of the salesian: practical responses to the needs of those to whom we are sent, a spirit of creative initiative, and a balanced flexibility in following the vicissitudes of history.

The changes of our time overwhelm us with innovations and tensions, which make it easier for us to yield to extreme ideas between conservatism and progressivism, excessive concern about efficiency and spiritualism, evangelization and human advancement, emphasis on pastoral work and attention to teaching etc.

To be alert to the signs of the times, to have a practical mentality and spirit of initiative, to make choices with level-headed creativity, all this means keeping one's feet firmly on the ground, being aware of the fact that circumstances are continually changing (but without totally ignoring tradition), acting with moderation ("temperance"), watching for deviations and "periodically evaluating his work".

<sup>2</sup> GC21, 31

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 80

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 155

<sup>5</sup> E. VALENTINI, *D. Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e spiritualita salesiana*, Turin 1965, p. 32

## The salesian makes a practical response to the signs of the times

The salesian wants to live in the present, taking cognizance of all the needs of cultural realities and historical situations, looking eagerly for what today's youth needs in a society which is pluralistic, fragmented, strongly socialized, and technically oriented; and in a Church which through the Vatican Council has renewed its pastoral physiognomy.

In a situation far different from ours, but full nevertheless of innovations and unknown quantities, Don Bosco had said: "In these days, when all monastic orders are being suppressed by the state, when nuns can no longer feel safe in their cloisters and monks have disappeared, we get together and, despite all our enemies, grow in numbers, open houses and do whatever good can still be done. ... Monks have been exiled and we respond by changing garb. We carry on dressed as priests, and should this too be forbidden we shall use civilian garb and continue to do good. We shall even grow beards if we must; these things can never keep us from doing good".<sup>1</sup>

To keep up with the progress of science and truth, to provide a valid response to the changes in culture in which both we and our youngsters are immersed, the salesian will be attentive not only to the development of ideas but also to the concrete reality of persons and events.

This reality calls for shrewd observance so as to detect in it the "signs of the times",<sup>2</sup> to discern urgent local needs and, through them, to hear the Lord's voice calling us to a commitment for the Kingdom. This was Don Bosco's attitude: his works came into being in accordance with a prearranged general plan, but they were all started to meet needs of particular times and places: "I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and circumstances required".<sup>3</sup> An adequate and generous

<sup>1</sup> BM X, 462

<sup>2</sup> "The signs of the times are facts and events which display a historical and sociological sense, and also a theological sense of the times. ... They characterize an era, explain the needs and aspirations of the people of humanity in that period ... and reveal the roads that God is providing for the Church to follow" (*Linee di rinnovamento*, LDC 1971, pp. 15-17)

<sup>3</sup> MB XVIII, 127

response to the needs of people and places is one of the criteria which the Constitutions will later lay down for checking the validity of our work and the activities of our communities (cf. C 41). This was also the attitude of the Church of Vatican II: the Church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask".<sup>4</sup>

### The salesian maintains a spirit of initiative

In a world in continual and rapid transformation, no one is more sensitive to changes than young people. Educators must therefore be particularly attentive to this fact and able to meet its consequences.

The desire to provide timely answers to individual needs leads necessarily to the two qualities of initiative and flexibility, words which provide the heading for this article.

The text makes use of typical terms to express the sense of the creativity required in the salesian:

- "*Spirit of initiative*" means that the salesian begins as soon as possible to do what seems to need doing, without waiting for ideal conditions; he gets on with the job spontaneously without waiting to be asked or told. It is an attitude which calls for courage. To Fr Achilles Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI, Don Bosco confided: "When it comes to progress, I want to be in the vanguard".<sup>5</sup> His zeal continually suggested some new project to him or some new means of doing good to youth.

- "*Apostolic creativity*" means that the salesian uses his pastoral imagination to use and exploit everything good that exists, and to create new things as well where the need is felt: innovations in the work itself

<sup>4</sup> GS 4; cf. also GS 11

<sup>5</sup> MB XVI, 323



or in ways of doing it. Those extraordinary words of Don Bosco cited in the article: "I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness" show us that in certain circumstances the salesian will have to take risks and go ahead with *apostolic boldness*, driven on by his love for the salvation of the young and the certainty that this is what God is asking of him: it is an attitude in line with St Paul's words: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power" (2 Tim 1,7).

### **The salesian is flexible and level-headed in following the events of history**

Fidelity to life and its changes, rather than to laws and structures: this is the final characteristic feature of the salesian's realistic and flexible approach to the urgent needs of youth. A realistic mentality reveals that people and environments evolve, especially nowadays and especially among young people, the group most sensitive to what the future may bring.

From this follows the need for the "periodic verification of his work", to check whether it is efficacious in the relevant circumstances of life, and to keep it so. In this regard we have a valuable statement of Don Rinaldi: "Don Bosco believed in bending to meet the needs of the times. This elasticity, which makes possible adaptation to all kinds of good that are continually arising ... is the real spirit of our Constitutions; and on the day when this spirit changes, it will be all up with our Pious Society".<sup>6</sup>

Vatican II notes that the task of the educator requires, among other human qualities, "a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt old ones".<sup>7</sup>

All this also supposes a certain flexibility in the means and structures of pastoral activity; if these are cumbersome they may hold up the necessary transformations.

<sup>6</sup> ACS 17, 6 January 1923, p. 41; cf. SGC, 135

<sup>7</sup> GE 5

For this reason it should cause no surprise if with the Salesians certain things evolve and change. It would rather be surprising if they did not: it would indicate an anti-salesian manner of having recourse to traditions, and one contrary to genuine tradition and to our spirit. Don Bosco once confided to Don Barberis: "I see that from the moment we stand still, the Congregation will begin to decay".<sup>8</sup>

*Bestow on us, O Lord,  
as you did on our Founder and Father  
"a heart great as the shores of the sea",  
able to read the signs of your presence  
and the designs of your will.*

*Help us to be courageous in initiatives,  
ready to respond to the needs of people and places,  
forgetful of ourselves and our own tastes and interests,  
and prompted only by the desire for your glory  
and the salvation of our fellow men.*

<sup>8</sup> From the *Cronaca di Don Barberis*

## ART. 20 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AND SALESIAN SPIRIT

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". For him this was a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them.

Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way of living and of handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved.

There is a strict linkage between the salesian spirit and the preventive system. One may say that *the salesian spirit is expressed and becomes incarnate in a particular way in the preventive system*; it is Don Bosco's most original creation in the pedagogical field, but it is also a characteristic general way of being and acting at both individual and community level which is so evident in the life of the salesians. The preventive system is our way of "prophesying", our practical way of living the Gospel as educators and of tending to the fullness of charity. It involves the person of the salesian in a manner of thinking and feeling, of life and activity, which inspires and characterizes his whole existence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. VIGANO, *The Salesian Educational Project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 13. It may be of interest to note that although the preventive system is not quoted explicitly in the Constitutions written by Don Bosco, the latter contain all the essential elements of the salesian educational method: we find there the charity, which is the centre of the preventive system and from which the mission of the Society of St Francis de Sales draws its inspiration ("every spiritual and corporal work of charity": chap. I, art. 1); we find "the young, and especially those who are poor" as agents in the educational activity (chap. I, art. 1-5); we find the figure of the salesian who is both religious and educator, "entirely dedicated" to God and to the youngsters (called "to do and to teach") and the community which is at the same time a family; we find the superior described as a father and friend to the young etc. For all this cf. P. BRAIDO, "Il sistema preventivo nelle Costituzioni salesiane di Don Bosco", in "Fedeltà e rinnovamento", LAS 1974, pp. 103-118

The preventive system embraces a complexus of principles, which the Constitutions present in different places:

- it is the guide to our educational and pastoral activity, and at the same time a style of sanctification which takes its rise from a heart steeped in the mystery of Christ the Saviour;
- it is the plan which characterizes the pastoral brilliance of Don Bosco, able to translate spirit into life in a correct and practical way;
- it is the measure of our authenticity and of our vocation as evangelizers and educators of youth;
- for us it is a vital synthesis of pedagogy, pastoral work and spirituality; through it "we publicly profess our love for the Father who calls us and unites us in communities to make us evangelizers of the young, in the shared responsibility for an educational plan inspired by the charisma of Don Bosco";<sup>2</sup>
- finally, for the Salesian Family the preventive system is one of the foundations of unity in the face of plurality of ideas and of decentralization; when cultural differences might lead us astray, it helps the members to preserve "the vital bond with their Founder and unity of spirit".<sup>3</sup>

In this way a salesian community can verify its life and vocational growth by daily examining its practice of the preventive system.

Reflection on this article becomes all the more important and necessary if we heed the warning of the GC21: "With young people of today, the preventive system means that a new kind of presence is needed".<sup>4</sup> Don Rinaldi declared: "The salesian is either a salesian or he is nothing; he is either of Don Bosco or of no one. If we study Don Bosco, if we follow his system, we shall truly be his sons; otherwise we shall be nothing, we shall be beating the air and getting nowhere".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> GC21, 31

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 80

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 155

<sup>5</sup> E. VALENTINI, *D. Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e spiritualità salesiana*, Turin 1965, p. 32

The preventive system, a true spiritual and educational experience, is a gratuitous love, which forestalls, accompanies and saves

This fundamental element of our spirit<sup>6</sup> matured in the life of Don Bosco as a "spiritual and educational experience", "an experience of the Spirit",<sup>7</sup> which from its beginning had seen the motherly presence of Mary as "teacher and guide". This kind of experience, lived among the "boys of the first Oratory" in simplicity, joy, family style and a concrete form of education, has been passed on to us as a precious personal and community legacy, and we receive it as a method of pastoral action and a path to sanctity.

The text of the Constitutions emphasizes that this creative synthesis of Don Bosco is catalyzed by the "pastoral charity" which is at the centre of the salesian spirit (cf. C 10): Don Rinaldi and Don Caviglia, speaking of "bontà" (our 'fourth vow', linked with the very name of 'salesian'), say that it is nothing else than the practice of the preventive system, lived among youth: it is not only a "system of kindness", but "kindness erected into a system".<sup>8</sup>

Later we shall see the preventive system as a method of educational and pastoral activity which, through educational presence and the force of persuasion and love, makes youngsters grow up as "upright citizens and good christians" (cf. Const. chap. IV, and especially C 38, 39).

Here the Rule is drawing special attention to the fact that the preventive system, as an experience of the Spirit, *is for us a way of sanctification*: it is "a love freely given, inspired by the love of God which forestalls every creature by his divine providence, accompanies him by his constant presence and saves him by giving his life for him".<sup>9</sup> It is translated therefore into the constant practice of charity which is without limits, and which makes of the salesian a sign and witness of love (cf. C 2).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GC21, 97

<sup>7</sup> Cf. MR 11

<sup>8</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, Rome 1935, p. 14-15; cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 9-10

<sup>9</sup> Cf. GC21, 17

## The preventive system is a way of living and working to offer to youth the Gospel and salvation

The Rector Major has written: "The SGC reminded us that between salesian "mission" (one and the same for everyone everywhere) and the actual "apostolate" (which varies according to different situations) there is an important difference, and they need to be harmonized. The preventive system lies between the two as a pedagogical and pastoral signpost, lighting the way and pointing out what initiatives we should develop and how we should set about them in the various situations that the times and places present".<sup>10</sup>

"The first and foremost essential of the preventive system for us today is 'not to desert the difficult field of our youth commitment'".<sup>11</sup>

The salesian, as the Constitutions put it, is invited by the preventive system to *live among the young*; this is a practice stemming from the heart rather than the pedagogical sciences, which stimulates the salesian to learn the art and sacrifice of staying with youngsters, especially the most needy ones, of loving them, of getting to know them individually together with the problems arising from the situation in which they live.<sup>12</sup>

We recall the testimony given in the Letter from Rome: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation?" Don Bosco himself used to say: "*I feel at home with you: this is really where I belong*".<sup>13</sup> On this phrase the Rector Major makes the following comment: "The salesian not only works for the young; he lives with them and is always in their midst. For him the preventive system is a matter of the heart... He must master the art of being physically present and accept the sacrifice it may entail".<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ASC 290 (1978), p. 13; cf. SGC, 30

<sup>11</sup> Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 21; cf. also GC22, 6

<sup>12</sup> Cf. GC21, 13

<sup>13</sup> BM IV, 455

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 22

Again the salesian receives from the preventive system the incentive to *work with the young and for the young*, involving them in the realization of their plan of life. The Constitutions expressly indicate the ultimate purpose of this task with and for youngsters: to hand on to them the Gospel of Christ and to bring them his salvation. The preventive system intimately links evangelization with education (cf. C 31); it does not reduce pastoral work to catechesis alone or to the liturgy alone, but covers all aspects of the youth condition by linking the Gospel with culture and life.

The article ends with a fundamental statement: the preventive system "*permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships and our manner of living in community*", impressing on all our activity, the orientation to its supreme end, which is what Don Bosco wanted: the only purpose of the Oratory is the salvation of souls". In this way it gives life to an educational process oriented to Christ, with special attention to the sacramental and Marian life; it presents youthful holiness in a bold and original fashion and in ways which appeal to the young, because it passes through a charity "which knows how to win the love of others".

With regard to the way in which the preventive system is realized in practice, more will be said in the context of the apostolic mission (cf. C 38, 39). Here it will be enough to recall a letter written by Don Bosco on 10 August 1885 to Don G. Costamagna, provincial of Argentina: "I would like to have with me all my sons and our Sisters of America... I would like to give them all a conference on the salesian spirit which must animate all we say and do. The preventive system must be our characteristic: ... in the classrooms let there be only kind words, charity and patience... Let every salesian make himself the friend of all; let him never try to get his own back on anyone; let him be always ready to forgive, and never hark back to incidents that have been forgiven... Gentleness in what we say and do, and in the advice we give, will win over everyone and enable us to attain all our objectives".<sup>15</sup> And we know that to this letter is attributed the subsequent spiritual

<sup>15</sup> *Collected letters* IV, Turin 1959, p. 332

and temporal prosperity of the Argentine province. Not only the provincial, but others too made copies of it and wrote to the Saint to thank him for it. Some there were who felt that the letter highlighted their own defects, or who found it particularly difficult to be patient and charitable; they bound themselves by vow to observe Don Bosco's advice, and renewed the pledge every month at the Exercise for a Happy Death".<sup>16</sup>

Fr Duvallet, who had collaborated for twenty years with Abbé Pierre in the apostolate for the re-education of delinquent youngsters, makes a kind of significant appeal to us: "You have works, colleges and oratories for young people, but your real treasure is one and only: the pedagogy of Don Bosco. In a world in which youngsters are betrayed, drained, ground down and exploited, the Lord has entrusted to you a pedagogy in which the paramount aspect is respect for the boy, for his greatness and frailty, for his dignity as a son of God.

"Preserve it, renew it, rejuvenate it, enrich it with all modern discoveries; adapt it to all the developments of the twentieth century and their ramifications that Don Bosco could not be aware of. But I beg you to keep it safe! Change everything, let your houses go if necessary, but keep this treasure and build up in thousands of hearts this way of loving and saving the souls of boys which you have inherited from Don Bosco".<sup>17</sup>

*Lord our God,  
in the preventive system  
Don Bosco found a sure method  
for spreading your love among youth.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 33 note

<sup>17</sup> Various Authors: "Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova", Acts of European Salesian Congress on the educational system of Don Bosco, LDC Turin 1974, p. 314



*Grant that we too may assimilate and live  
this form of total dedication  
to the education of the young  
left us by our Father as a precious heritage,  
and may be able to transmit it  
faithfully and intact  
to those who will come after us.*

## ART. 21 DON BOSCO OUR MODEL

The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher.

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living "as seeing him who is invisible".<sup>1</sup>

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb 11,27

<sup>2</sup> DON RUA, 24 Aug, 1894

This concluding article provides a vertex and synthesis for the whole chapter: it declares that the salesian spirit is found incarnate in the Founder, and that to live this spirit one must go back to his example: Don Bosco is the "father" and "teacher" the Lord has given us; he is our "model".

Every founder is a result of the life and holiness of the Church,<sup>1</sup> and is shaped by the Spirit as an example to other brothers to whom he repeats with the Apostle: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11,1). Don Bosco is our model in so far as he is for us a living image of Christ himself.

The use of models in contemporary culture, as has always been the case in ecclesial tradition, is a felt need. Ideals are communicated ever more by examples, rather than through concepts.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. IG 45, 46

Don Bosco, as a model of salesian spirit, stems from the mystery of God, and to Him refers back: he functions therefore in a living, connected and mysterious way, and has great pedagogical value. The way he lived his life expressed much better than our words something that is in fact incapable of expression. Any description we can give of salesian spirit calls for understanding, while his exemplary life calls for imitation. His example is continually present to the soul of the salesian and to the community, so that little by little its features, physiognomy and style of life can be assimilated by those who imitate him. Don Bosco continues to exercise this attraction in our regard; when developed by study and research it results in love, transformation and renewal.

In this way Don Bosco "comes back amongst us": his life is still an appeal to us. Although the historical perspective of his time has changed and cannot be identified with our own, he nevertheless remains in our regard a prophet, one who inspires us and is a sign indicating the path we should follow.

We know, finally, that through the communion of saints he is still present in the Church and the Congregation, and his sanctity and intercession remain no less efficacious with the passage of time.

## **The Lord has given us Don Bosco as a father and teacher**

Coming as it does at the end of the chapter, this statement helps us to see in Don Bosco a vital synthesis of the salesian spirit. We note, with the SGC, that it is not a question of an abstract Don Bosco, remote from reality, but of a Don Bosco "alive and at work in the midst of his boys, throughout the period of his apostolic life".<sup>2</sup> This is the Don Bosco who becomes the "permanent criterion" of the "dynamic fidelity" of the salesian the perennial source of inspiration and reflection.

<sup>2</sup> SGC, 195

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC document: *Don Bosco at the Oratory, enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*, SGC, 192 ff.

Let us consider for a moment this figure of Father and Teacher, which becomes ever greater the farther away we get from him in time.

— The image of "*Father*" derives from the mysterious divine fatherhood, which is revealed in the gift of life and of divine sonship in Baptism, but is modelled too on the simple and human qualities of a father of a family; both evoke in the salesian and in the community the idea of kindness, attention, availability and forgiveness.

All his life Don Bosco displayed a father's heart. He said to his salesians: "No matter in what remote part of the world you may be, never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord".<sup>4</sup> And we recall the heart-rending appeal in the Letter from Rome of 1884: "Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? ... that we should go back to the days of affection and christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone".<sup>5</sup>

The salesian can never forget that the particular "experience of the Spirit",<sup>6</sup> which is the gift of the salesian vocation, has been passed on to him, by disposition of divine providence, precisely through his Founder, as a new gospel communication, a particular kind of ecclesial commitment. The Founder introduced and, as it were, gave life to this new way of following Christ, and accompanied the early days of the newly born Congregation with tremendous sacrifices. Don Bosco is indeed the Father of our vocation!

— The image of "*Master*" or "*Teacher*" recalls his ability to reproduce some features of the "divine Master", who had been his guide from the first dream at the age of nine, and also some characteristics of our Blessed Lady who had been given to him as a "*Teacher*":<sup>7</sup> from

<sup>4</sup> BM XI, 362

<sup>5</sup> Cf. MB XVII, pp. 107-114; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263

<sup>6</sup> MR 11

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BM I, 95

them Don Bosco learned kindness and the art of showing youngsters the way to salvation, making them see how much God loves them.

One cannot forget Don Bosco's ability to communicate as a teacher; he was able to speak in simple terms, to make himself understood, to pass on incisively the Word of the Lord, but especially to win affection, which means his ability to speak and teach with the language of the heart.

We invoke him as "Father and Master", together with all our young people, and especially the street-boys, the apprentices and young workers, the pupils of the trade schools, the jugglers and acrobats, the youngsters called to follow him so as to save other youngsters; but as well as these, with parents, teachers, educators and pastors too.

But let us not forget that in his spiritual testament Don Bosco repeats that our real Superior is Jesus Christ: "*He will always be our Master, our guide, our model*".<sup>8</sup>

### **We study him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace**

It has been said that Don Bosco is one of the most 'complete' Saints in christian history, in the sense that in him were accumulated gifts of nature and grace to a quite remarkable extent. The text emphasizes this fact, and highlights in particular the "splendid blending of nature and grace".

In Don Bosco human qualities were not suppressed, but permeated by the divine; they kept all their force. He was "*deeply human*, rich in the qualities of his people", "open to the realities of this earth"; able to inspire esteem, confidence and affection because he was able to love; he was a formative educator, "an idealist and realist who would try anything but at the same time show prudence" (Daniel-Rops); a "giant with massive arms with which he has managed to draw the whole

<sup>8</sup> Cf. MB XVII, 257-273

universe to himself" (Card. Nina to Leo XIII); a dreamer (how many "dreams" he had during his life...) but very much down to earth in what he achieved.

On the other hand he showed himself to be "*deeply the man of God*", filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit"; he lived, in fact, "as seeing him who is invisible", i.e. he was able to read with an eye of extraordinary faith the historical events in which he was immersed.

Don Bosco gave to others the impression of being a man of this earth but also of heaven, open to his fellow men but immersed in God. This made him genial with others, and for us is an invitation to develop all our own resources the better to fulfil our vocation.<sup>9</sup>

We must make use of this interpretation of the unique spiritual figure of Don Bosco to discern the foundational and unifying aspect of salesian spirituality, which is both deeply incarnated in history and deeply immersed in God.

The Rule reminds the salesian of the importance of "studying" Don Bosco, of feeling that he is close at hand, of comparing himself with him; only a constant daily comparison with the Founder can preserve and renew his burning love and ardent zeal for the good of young people.

**We "imitate" him as a model in the service of youth**

All Don Bosco's rich gifts of nature and grace placed him at the service of a unique mission in "*a closely-knit life project*". In him the human and divine aspects were intimately united in the single mission for the salvation of youth.

This is another surprising feature of his personality both as a Founder and as an educator: he is a man with a fixed idea always in

<sup>9</sup> On the human and divine aspects of the sanctity of Don Bosco, cf. P. BROCARDO, "*Don Bosco, profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*", LAS Rome, 1985

mind, which becomes ever broader in detail but remains essentially that of the dream at the age of nine, and will do so until his dying breath: save the young, and especially the poorest of them.

This service to youth prompted him to undertake courageous enterprises. He realized them "with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue". As his first successor testified, "he took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young. Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".<sup>10</sup>

His example is an invitation to us to be resolute in our commitment, to unify all our thoughts, strength and all we are in one and the same direction, a stimulus to fidelity until death.

Finally the text specifies that Don Bosco gave himself to his work with firmness, making use of all his resources with *constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart*. Firmness and constancy to realize a vocation and work beset by so many difficulties; firmness to undertake initiatives that called for a lot of courage, sometimes flying in the face of traditional ideas and ways of doing things; firmness to accept the hard work and toil of his ministry, even to the extent of dying of bodily exhaustion.

For a man driven on by such holy zeal, he nevertheless had a great and *delicate tenderness*; it sprang from a heart deeply touched by the wretchedness of the young and the injustices suffered by the lowly; the tenderness of the heart of a father which made him attentive to each one of his children, anxious for their good, sad when he had to be away from them; the tenderness finally of the heart of a child which gave him trust and joy before the infinitely good God, and before the Virgin Mary, the Mother of his family.

In this way Don Bosco remains still the guide who can enlighten our choices at the present day, the model against whom we can measure our fidelity, the animator of our educational and pastoral plans, our intercessor before God for the graces of which we stand in need.

<sup>10</sup> D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 130, Letter of 24.8.1894

*May you be blessed, O Lord,  
for having given us Don Bosco as our father and teacher,  
and for filling him with extraordinary gifts  
of nature and of grace;  
he showed himself perfectly human  
among his contemporaries,  
and completely dedicated to you  
in docility to the Holy Spirit.*

*Grant, we pray you,  
that following his teaching and example  
we may bring him to life again in ourselves,  
in dedicating ourselves to you and to our fellow men,  
in faithful service given to the young  
with constancy, courage and perseverance  
and with the warmth and sensitivity of a generous heart.*



## CHAPTER III

### THE PROFESSION OF THE SALESIAN

*"Jesus said to them: 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mk 1,17-18).*

In the fuller account of Mk 1,16-20, two parallel scenes of a calling by Christ are recorded, and two lines of thought coalesce: there is the essential act of calling by Jesus, with the peremptory imperative ("Follow me"), together with the solemnity of the promise ("I will make you become fishers of men"); and there is the prompt reply, without any second thoughts, on the part of those called. And one can glimpse at once the catechetical use that can be made of the passage by the christian community, which sees in every vocation a prolongation of that first command, and the essential schematic features of the scene.

There is a certain similarity with other biblical scenes portraying vocation, and in particular with the calling of Elisha by Elijah (1 Kings 19,19-21). But in the words of Jesus a double element is discernible, and is in fact emphasized later in the Gospel (cf. 3,13-19): the total bond with the person of the Master as the Messiah (a following of Jesus which will mean always following his leadership in obedient fidelity), and consequently active participation in his mission, that of the Kingdom of God, for the purpose of which the vocations are given. To become "fishers of men", in the light of the parable of the good and bad fish (Mt 13,47-50), is a phrase that takes on the deep significance of preparing men for the messianic Kingdom, of helping them to the full attainment of their salvation, and of leading them to experience the joy of the new world.

A careful study of these quotations evokes the apostolic consecration which the salesian endorses, in the form of a prayer, in the profession formula (C 24), and in this way he is given the grace to be a participant in those first vocation scenes beside the lake, from which began the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1,14-15).

\* \* \*

The third chapter of the Constitutions is entitled "*the profession of the salesian*", and presents some important innovations with regard to tradition, in expressing the fundamental features of our act of religious profession.

A first innovation is the actual *placing of this theme in the first part of the Constitutions*. In the texts previous to the SGC the profession had always found a place in the description of the various steps leading to incorporation into the Society, but it is now presented in the initial part of the Constitutions together with the other fundamental elements of the salesian vocation. The intention was to give prominence in this way to the fact that profession invests and sheds light on all other aspects of the life of the salesian. The global significance of salesian profession can be clearly seen: it makes us people "consecrated" by God for the young, linking "evangelical religious life to the service of youth".<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted too that profession is presented with explicit reference to the Congregation's identity: it is in fact an apostolic and religious profession which distinguishes the salesian from others.

Another innovation in the chapter arises from the *way it is set out*: it starts from the personal vocation of the salesian and from his donation to God, involving his entire apostolic commitment, life of communion and the choice of a form of existence in line with the evangelical counsels.

In the act of profession God's love meets man's response. In the formula, the subject of the verb "consecrated" is God, because his is the initiative and the consecrating action; but it implies also the giving of himself on the part of the salesian, who responds to God's call by making his profession and thus entering the Society. God consecrates him for an apostolic mission that is rooted in the Gospel and is to be realized in community; and the salesian offers himself totally to Him to live this apostolic commitment, in union with his brothers and according to the Gospel.

<sup>1</sup> SGC. 118

Finally the chapter is new in respect of the explicit *message of salesian holiness*, linked to the profession in the spirit of the Beatitudes, which constitutes the best and most needed gift we can offer to our young people.

The parts of the Constitutions which come afterwards appear as a logical and coherent development of the commitment which the salesian assumes at the moment of his profession.

A consideration of the *structure* of the chapter reveals that it is centred around the personal act of profession, which forms a kind of nucleus for all the articles.

1. *Art. 22: Personal vocation of the salesian.*

The fundamental premise is the personal vocation, which implies special gifts on the part of God. To this every salesian responds by the offering of himself in a project of sanctification and christian realization. While Chapter I defined the identity of the Society and Chapter II described the particular spirit which animates it, Chapter III concentrates the attention on the identity of each member through his personal commitment.

2. *Art. 23: Meaning of our profession.*

*The significance of profession* is seen in reference to each member and to the entire Society. Profession is:

- a sign of a meeting of love and covenant;
- the gift of the salesian to Christ and to his fellow men;
- a reciprocal commitment between the professed and the Society;
- a deeper participation in the grace of Baptism;
- a radical act of freedom;
- the beginning of a new life;
- a specific service to the Church.

3. *Art. 24: Formula of profession.*

The central nucleus consists, as we have said, of the act of profession: *the formula* expresses in the form of a prayer the commitment to freely assume a life according to the evangelical counsels, together with a global expression of the tasks of the salesian mission as set out in the Constitutions.

4. *Art. 25: Profession a source of sanctification.*

Consequences of the meeting between God and the confrere which takes place at profession are:

- the consecrating action of the Spirit, which becomes a permanent source of grace, and sustains perseverance and growth in pastoral charity;
- the stimulus and help of salesians now in glory, and of those living at our side, for the full realization of this ideal of life;
- a witness to specifically salesian sanctity, which is the most valid gift we can give to the young.

It may be well to recall once again the fundamental significance of this brief chapter. The salesian will certainly be able to have recourse to it, both in his ordinary daily practice and in the hour of trial, to renew his act of personal commitment, which is first and foremost the promise of "an unconditional love of God".

## ART. 22 PERSONAL VOCATION OF THE SALESIAN

Each one of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society. Because of this God gives him personal gifts, and by faithful correspondence he finds his way to complete fulfilment in Christ.

The Society recognizes his vocation and helps him to develop it; and he, as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks.

Every call is an indication that the Lord loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy.

The first article of the Constitutions told us of the call God had given to the Founder; this art. 22 speaks of the call God gives to each individual member of the Society.

Don Bosco received special gifts to become the Founder of a vast spiritual movement for the salvation of the young; each of us receives personal gifts to enable us to continue the same mission among youth.

Continuity of this kind, which is based on the initiative and fidelity of God, is manifested by the incessant gift of apostolic vocations which the Congregation receives. For this reason, while emphasizing the supernatural nature of the vocation, the article also gives prominence to the richness this implies for the Church and for the Congregation.

It also makes us think of the importance of working for vocations, on which depend the future, the development and the mission of the Church. Don Bosco tells us: "We give the Church a treasure of great value when we find a good vocation".<sup>1</sup> And again: "Let us try to swell

<sup>1</sup> MB XVII, 262

our numbers. To achieve this end, each of us must take it upon himself to win over new members".<sup>2</sup>

## The salesian is called to the Congregation by God

The first paragraph well expresses the *personal and divine* aspect of the vocation. We are "called by name" (Jn 10,3; cf. C 196): the statement has the efficacious ring of faith. It is the sign of a love that comes from afar: it comes in fact from the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

The Father calls every man to sanctify his name, to attain his Kingdom, to fulfil his will. He is the Lord of the harvest and of vocations (cf. Mt 9,38), and each of us knows that his vocation comes from the Father; he is obedient to the Father and with the Father he lives in an individual relationship of love.

In the Son, the One "called" by the Father par excellence, we have all been called (cf. 2 Tim 1,9); but it is Christ himself, the Master, who gives us our call (cf. Rom 1,6; Jn 11,28) and says: "Come and see" (Jn 1,46), "Come and follow me" (cf. Mk 2,13), even though frequently he may make use of the mediation of others.

It is the Spirit who consecrates for the mission those whom the Father calls through his Son Jesus Christ. Every vocation is a gift of the Spirit, and only in the Spirit can it be perceived, mature and come to fruition.

*Personal gifts* of different orders (intellectual, practical and above all spiritual) are given so that the one called may be able to know and live the values of the salesian vocation, especially the urgent need for service to poor youngsters, and to take his place in the plan of a community, which is itself a meeting of individuals, which is in fact "Congregation" (the very word expresses the dynamic aspect of the voca-

<sup>2</sup> BM IX, 40

tional "call"). These gifts are given to enable him to realize himself fully in Christ, the perfect Man.

Here is expressed the certainty that the Lord accompanies with the riches of his grace each one who has been called: how indeed could the Spirit point out to someone a road to be followed without giving him the strength and capacity to follow it? But at the same time the importance is emphasized of the discernment that each one must make to know his own vocation, and verify his suitability for it if he chooses the salesian life:<sup>3</sup> if he is called, what must he do to respond to God's gift?

We note that the personal aspect of the gift is never disjoined from the *community commitment*. Don Bosco recommended: "We renounce our own self-interest. Therefore let us not seek our own personal good, but rather let us work with zeal for the common good of the Congregation".<sup>4</sup>

As we have already said, all this dynamism leads us to full self-realization, and at the same time becomes a witness for the young to whom we are sent.

If "self-realization" meant nothing more for us than the satisfaction of our own tastes and human ideals or the perfecting of our physical and intellectual capabilities, we should be like so many youngsters who cannot reflect on the deep sense of life and so do not find the way to their true happiness.

Our aim is to "realize ourselves in Christ": in this way we share in the greatness of God, in the plans of his Kingdom, and we fulfil a task of mediation for those who are seeking the fullness of their own humanity.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning vocational discernment cf. the document: "*Criteria and norms for salesian vocation discernment. Admissions*", Rome 1985, and in particular nn. 2-6: "The Constitutions and vocation discernment"

<sup>4</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions: Five faults to be avoided*; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 244

## The confrere gives himself; the Society recognizes and welcomes him

Here the community aspect of the salesian vocation finds further confirmation.

On the one hand the Society publicly commits itself in respect of each one of its members:

— to "*recognize him*" in his vocation: more than being just a superficial juridical act, this calls for an active and positive attitude, embracing trust, esteem and respect for the person of the confrere beyond his function or what profit he brings to the Congregation; it means rather a recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the confrere's soul;

— to "*help him*" to develop his vocation, to grow in it and exploit the gifts which are the richest expression of a spiritual and apostolic personality, and a resource for the whole community.

On the other hand the confrere is aware of how much he receives from the Society, and cannot forget that his vocation is that of a member linked with all the other members, that the Spirit distributes his gifts not for the satisfaction of individuals but for "the common good" (1 Cor 12,7). He has the right to receive because he has the duty of giving. He will realize his personal vocation to the extent that he develops in himself a disinterested love, the sense of shared responsibility, and the family and group spirit.

This "reciprocal recognition" respects the differences between one person and another, and permits the expression of a true relationship between the Society and each member: in this way it creates a proper "sense of belonging", as a result of which each one puts himself and his gifts at the service of the common life and activity.

In simpler words, Don Bosco expressed it as follows: "Let no one neglect his own duty. ... Let everyone do his duty well with zeal and humility, with confidence in God; let him not yield in defeat if he is called to some sacrifice which costs much. Let him take heart that



his endurance and fatigue benefits the Congregation, to which we are all consecrated".<sup>5</sup>

Don Bosco felt a great interior gratification at being a salesian; it was evident in his words, in his reviews of the houses that had been opened or would be opened shortly, in his description of the work undertaken outside Italy. His biographer writes: "In these instances his vibrant words were calculated to strengthen the bonds of esteem and love which bound his listeners to the Congregation, so that those who had joined it might love it and those who were thinking in their hearts about entering might be encouraged... Such talks kindled in his listeners an enthusiasm which made them love not only Don Bosco, but the Oratory, the name salesian and the good the salesians were doing in various parts of the world. Their enthusiasm, radiating far and wide outside the Oratory, created an environment so well disposed towards the Congregation as to multiply its friends and benefactors".<sup>6</sup>

### **Every vocation is a sign of God's love for the Congregation**

The vocational dynamism which the Congregation has within itself arises from its "being Church", i.e. from the fact that it is immersed in God and in his designs for salvation.

By sending it new vocations the Lord shows that he loves the Congregation, that he wants it to be vibrant and enriched with fresh energy, that he wants to keep alive this charism he had given to the Church.

In this way the Lord expresses his love of predilection for each one of those he has called, and at the same time for the Congregation he has raised up.

The response to this love must not be only personal. The Congregation, which feels God's love for it, must play a role of mediation

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> BM XIII, 623

for other vocations, it must be a sign of vitality for the good of the Church and a centre of "new apostolic energy".

"We must welcome in the Congrégation", said Don Cagliero on one occasion, "those who are ready to plunge into the midst of the world and work for the welfare of souls. Our Congregation is not made for people who wish to reform their past lives".<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, a religious community, called in baptism and religious consecration to holiness and the construction of the Kingdom, would have cause for worry if it proved unable to generate new members. It would not display the power of God who can "make the desert blossom" (Is 35,1).

*Lord our God,  
in the personal vocation of each of our confreres  
you manifest your love for the Salesian Congregation,  
which you want to see alive for the good of your Church.  
Grant to our communities  
the ability to welcome each confrere as your gift;  
increase our gratitude for your call,  
and make us generous in responding to it.*

<sup>7</sup> BM XIII, 625

## ART. 23 MEANING OF OUR PROFESSION

Religious profession is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters.

It is one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make, an act which recalls and endorses the mystery of his baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression.

By publicly binding himself in the eyes of the Church, through whose ministry he is more intimately consecrated to the service of God,<sup>1</sup> the salesian begins a new life, which is lived out in a service of permanent dedication to the young.

Profession is also the expression of a mutual commitment between the professed member who enters the Society and the Society which receives him with joy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. MR 8; IG 44

<sup>2</sup> cf. IG 44; PC 5; CIC, can. 654

The act of profession, "the pact of our alliance with God",<sup>1</sup> is the loving encounter between the Lord who calls and consecrates and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God in the following of Christ the Redeemer.<sup>2</sup>

The response of the salesian who offers himself to the Lord in full freedom, joyfully aware of the choice he is making, involves his whole person and gives apostolic direction to his life, because it animates and guides all the initiatives to which his love gives rise.

By the commitment he makes at profession the salesian ratifies publicly before the Church his intention to live as an ardent disciple

<sup>1</sup> D. RUA, letter of 1.12.1909; *Circular letters*, p. 499

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Redemptionis Donum*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, which develops the theme of the religious life and its relationship to the gift of the Redemption

of Christ, and a bearer of the riches of a new kind of holiness which proclaims the message of the Beatitudes to youth.

By offering himself to God, loved above all else, the professed member is incorporated into the Society by a solemn oath and undertakes to embrace the style of sanctification in the mission to the young and in community life, following the evangelical path traced out by Don Bosco.

This is the full significance of salesian profession which is highlighted in this article of the Rule. As we shall now see, for us the act of profession is a *sign*, a *choice*, a *beginning*, and a *commitment*.

### Profession is a "sign"

The act of profession marks the end of a long and hidden story, that of two loves in search of each other: Jesus took the initiative in giving the call and hence the initiative of love, because to seek and call is an indication of love;<sup>3</sup> and the disciple allowed himself to be attracted, responded with generosity, and now pronounces his decisive "yes".

Profession is therefore a visible sign of a meeting and covenant of love: a sign of the love of Christ, but also a sign of man's loving response.

The disciple, says the text, "responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters", thus expressing the radically evangelical nature of the profession. The adverb 'totally' signifies a generosity with no strings attached, an austere option consciously and continually made, a life recollected in God to reveal the divine liberality

<sup>3</sup> "The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ... When Christ "looked upon you and loved you", calling each one of you, dear Religious, that redeeming love of his was directed towards a particular person.. You replied to that look by choosing him who first chose each one of you..." (cf. RD 3)

through service to others, and to make known to the young the person of Christ, the Word of life, whom he has met in a special and intimate way.<sup>4</sup>

By this radical gesture of freedom, by which he commits himself without any reserve, the believer bears witness to his faith and love.

### **Profession is a "choice" which endorses the baptismal covenant**

Profession is rooted fundamentally in Baptism, the sacrament of faith, which is the beginning of the new life in Christ.

Through his immersion in the waters of Baptism — water is a sign of cleansing, of purification, of death, and is at the same time the primordial element from which comes forth life — the christian dies to sin and is purified and renewed, and so enters into the life of the risen Christ; the old man dies and the new man is born, the man who is redeemed; he has become a son of God, a citizen of the new realm of the saints, a sharer in the holiness of God himself, bearing an indelible mark and tending continuously to full maturity in Christ. On the day of his Baptism every christian is made capable of sharing in Christ's threefold ministry of prophet, priest and king (cf. 1 Pet 2, 9-10)

Don Bosco often expressed his great joy "at having been made a christian and a son of God through Baptism".<sup>5</sup>

The same Spirit who in Baptism, and subsequently in Confirmation, changed an individual's life and gave him growth, in the act of profession descends again with his power on those who, having accepted the divine call and offered themselves totally to him, publicly commit themselves to live according to the Gospel and make themselves available for the mission the Lord will entrust to them.

<sup>4</sup> SGC, 122

<sup>5</sup> BM II, 19

In this regard the Rule takes up again what was said in connection with the nature and mission of the Society (cf. C 2, 3), and emphasizes the fundamental dimension of profession, which is the consecrating action of God who reserves for himself and destines for a mission the one he has called: through the ministry of the Church the salesian is "more intimately consecrated to the service of God". Profession thus becomes "a more perfect expression of baptismal consecration",<sup>6</sup> a renewal and endorsement of that covenant which is endowed with a new gift of love on the part of the Father and is lived with a new commitment to fidelity on the part of the disciple.

The article also points out on the part of the professed the exceptional quality of his choice, which it describes as one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make; with full freedom he offers himself and all his life, his past and his future, for the service of God. Could a believer do anything greater than "give himself totally" and engage himself for life just for love?

It is clear that such an act would exceed our purely human strength, were it not done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

All this will be taken up again and further developed when we speak of the specific commitments of salesian profession (cf. C 60 in particular).

### **Profession is the "beginning" of a new life**

Profession, an act of great spiritual value and at the same time an act with an ecclesial character, opens up for the salesian a particular way of life. As was said in the preceding paragraph, it is rooted in the new life of Baptism but carries with it a specific innovation: "God gives to our baptismal adoption as sons a specific complexion".<sup>7</sup> This com-

<sup>6</sup> RD 7; cf. also IG 44 and PC 5, on which the doctrine is based; v. also ET 7; MR 8

<sup>7</sup> GC22, Closing address of Rector Major; cf. GC22, 63

plexion or physiognomy is what is described in the evangelical plan of the Constitutions and which is expressed in the formula of profession (cf. C 24); here the Rule is emphasizing the fact it is a question of a "service of God" and that this service is realized in particular in "permanent dedication to the young". The new life, inaugurated by profession, commits the salesian to be totally for God and to open his mind and heart to the hopes and needs of youth.

This innovation is also externally visible, i.e. it is reflected in specific life structures. The obligations of profession, in fact, while entirely based on the evangelical spirit, are expressed in new existential conditions in which self-expression and development are possible. What this means for us is that, if it is true that the salesian mission brings us into close and frequent contact with the world, our manner of living cannot be in any way "worldly"; it must be "religious", built on the Rule of the Gospel and lived according to the Constitutions of the Society. The Rule frees us from worldly responsibilities so that we can put our lives completely and permanently at the disposition of God; it organizes our relationships and activities in direct linkage with the Lord and those to whom he sends us; it establishes us in a community of individuals who are one and all consecrated for the Kingdom.

We are impelled along this new way by the charity which the Holy Spirit diffuses in our hearts. But because we carry this treasure in fragile vessels, we keep ourselves humble, aware of our weakness but with trust in God's fidelity.

### **Profession is a public "commitment"**

Finally, the constitutional text emphasizes the public character of profession before the Church and the Congregation. This means that it takes place in public and has an official and reciprocal significance: it is the official inauguration of a donation and a function.

Once he has entered the Salesian Society, the professed member shares in the responsibility and task of the Church; but from this point onwards he will serve the Church in the particular kind of service which is specific to the salesians, i.e. one that is directed to the benefit of

youth. The Church, in accepting the profession through the person of the Superior, recognizes this commitment. What it comes to for the salesian is that the making of his profession means declaring in a public act that he will have "a greater love" for young people, a love that extends beyond words and feelings, because he is committing himself to a permanent and effective dedication to them: "greater love has no man than this, that a man give his life for his friends" (Jn 15,13; cf. Jn 3,16).

Profession is also the act which binds the salesian to the Congregation, an act which certainly has juridical aspects and consequences but has also a "human" and spiritual value. What is happening is that a man and a believer is entering a brotherly community so as to live its spirit, enrich its communion and participate in its work. He is "received with joy" as a member with full rights; especially he has the right to find there understanding, affection and support, because the commitment is reciprocal.

The canonical aspect of profession should not be overlooked: its public character implies recognition of the fact on the part of the Church, but also a personal obligation of the professed with regard to bearing witness to the counsels, the mission and the common life: to make profession means to freely commit oneself to the stable fulfilment<sup>8</sup> of these obligations (cf. C 193)

*Lord Jesus,  
on the day of our profession  
you brought together our love  
with your own Love which is infinite  
and called us to give ourselves  
fully and generously to you.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. LG 44



*Grant that the pact of the Covenant,  
which by your grace we have made with you,  
may be the constant expression of a new life  
in the service of your Church  
and in our lasting dedication to the young.*

## ART. 24 FORMULA OF PROFESSION

The formula of profession has a deep significance in the life of the salesian: it is the visible representation and sign of that joyful "yes" that he said in reply to the invitation to follow the Lord and commit himself to a life with Don Bosco given for youngsters. The words of the formula express the attitude of a heart which wants to be totally dedicated to God and youth: a total oblation to God loved above all else,<sup>1</sup> the full and personal assumption of the covenant by means of a personal oath of fidelity.

In this perspective the profession formula must contain a synthesis of the whole project contained in the Constitutions, which represents the practical way in which the salesian lives the evangelical donation of himself, as we gather from the text revised by the SGC and GC22.<sup>2</sup> This text expresses the unity and totality of the salesian vocation, the gift of himself to God on the part of the salesian in an apostolic consecration lived in community for the salvation of youth.

The GC22, by placing the profession formula in the first part of the Constitutions, wanted to emphasize the fact that the whole life of the salesian is governed by this act which seals his response of love to the love of the Lord.

Finally it should be kept in mind that for a proper understanding of the ecclesial and overall significance of the formula, it should be considered in the context of the celebration of the profession, according to the "Rite of Religious Profession" as renewed in accordance with the decrees of Vatican II and promulgated by Paul VI.

In the formula we can distinguish five parts.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. IG 44

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the profession formula, v. F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Constitutions salesiennes de 1966, Commentaire Historique*, PAS 1969, II, pp. 395-397

## 1. The invocation of the Trinity

At the solemn moment of profession the salesian invokes the three divine Persons, because he recognizes that they, each by his proper title, are at the origin of the "encounter" that takes place in profession. Even the formula in the earliest Constitutions began in this way: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost".<sup>3</sup>

*"God my Father, you consecrated me to yourself on the day of my Baptism".*

The offering of the profession is made to God the Father, through his Son Jesus, in the Holy Spirit. It is connected with the baptismal consecration, which we must see as marking the beginning of God's love for us and the foundation of the donation of ourselves (C 23).<sup>4</sup>

*"In response to the love of the Lord Jesus your Son, who calls me to follow him more closely"*

Within the christian vocation, the profession appears as a response to a particular and free call, and as the sign of a special love; it is Jesus who has called his disciple to "follow him more closely".<sup>5</sup>

*"and led by the Holy Spirit who is light and strength"*

Human strength alone could not suffice to express the commitment of profession; as well as being completely free, the act is also "charismatic" in the sense that it is performed in the light and strength of the Holy Spirit who, far from destroying freedom, gives it added strength. The two "epicleses" or "blessings", occurring in the "Rite of Religious Profession", which the celebrant pronounces with hands outstretched over the candidates, invoke the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those making their profession so that "they may fulfil with your help that which by your gift they have promised with joy".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, Formula of the vows (F. MOTTO, p. 205)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also C 3 and C 60

<sup>5</sup> IG 42

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *"Rite of Religious Profession"*

## 2. The commitment to a consecrated apostolic and fraternal life

*"With complete freedom I, N.N., offer myself totally to you".*

In this way each one expresses his "Here I am, Lord": it is the total gift of himself, which includes the triple commitment that will be immediately specified and which represents the plan of life in the community of Don Bosco. Such a response in love would be impossible without full and responsible freedom.

*"I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me, especially to young people who are poorer"*

The response to the Lord who has called, consecrated and sent his disciple, implies the personal assumption of the apostolic mission which, as art. 3 says, "sets the whole tenor" of the life of the salesian. Significant is the reference in the profession formula to the principal ones to whom we are sent, "young people who are poorer": the salesian repeats with Don Bosco: "For you I am ready to give my life" (cf. C 14).

*"to live in the Salesian Society in communion of spirit and action with my brothers"*

The commitment to the mission is lived in a community. The salesian accepts membership of the Society he is entering, and therefore accepts that he will live in "communion" of spirit and action with his brothers.

*"and in this way to share in the life and mission of your Church".*

The evangelical life which the professed member makes his own belongs to the "unity and sanctity of the Church";<sup>7</sup> his apostolic service is a Church commitment, which he carries out for and in the name of the Church.

<sup>7</sup> LG 44

### 3. Profession of the counsels made to God by vow

*"And so, in the presence of my brothers, and before Fr. N.N. (who takes the place of the) Rector Major of the Society of St Francis de Sales, I make the vow for ever to live obedient, poor and chaste, according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions"*

(or for those making temporary profession: "... although it is my intention to offer myself to you for all my life, in accordance with the Church's dispositions, I make the vow for ... years to live ...").

The solemnity attaching to this part of the formula should be noted: we oblige ourselves by oath (= vow) before God to follow the obedient, poor and chaste life which Jesus chose for himself to fulfil the mission received from the Father. In this the Church recognizes an element common to all forms of consecrated life. The Superior, before whom we make our promise, represents the Church and the Society which ratify the commitment which has been made, and in this way we continue Don Bosco's mission in the Church.

The professed member obliges himself to live the evangelical life "according to the salesian Constitutions", i.e. the entire project of salesian life as Don Bosco lived it and as he has passed it on to us.

The formula includes a specific insertion for temporary profession. This is seen as a step desired by the Church in view of a subsequent commitment which will last for the whole of life. But right from the start the intention of the one making his profession is to commit himself without any reservations at all; this in fact is a condition for its validity. Apart from this distinction the formula is the same for both temporary and perpetual profession: "I offer myself *totally* to you ... I pledge myself to devote *all* my strength".

### 4. The invocation of help

*"Father, may your grace, the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, of St Joseph, of St Francis de Sales, and of St John Bosco, together*

*with the assistance of my brother salesians keep me faithful day by day."*

The collected obligations that have been assumed may seem overwhelming for our human weakness. Reference has already been made to the "light and strength" of the Holy Spirit as a seal of perseverance. Now we invoke our heavenly Protectors so that they will be beside us to help in the realization of a project of holiness which they too have at heart: Mary Help of Christians, the "mother and teacher" of our vocation, St Joseph, her spouse and Patron of the universal Church, St Francis de Sales, the inspirer of our pastoral charity, and our Founder Don Bosco.

Also invoked is the help of his brethren in the great family the professed is entering.

In this way fidelity to profession is given the double support of grace and of the community from whom the professed will need daily help, as is specifically stated.

## **5. The welcoming acceptance**

The Superior responds:

*"In the name of the Church and of the Society, I welcome you among the Salesians of Don Bosco as a confrere committed by perpetual (or temporary) vows."*

The offering of himself expressed in profession is a public act. It is recognized and accepted by the Church, in the person of the Superior, at the moment in which the professed member is acknowledged and accepted into the Society.

In a deeper sense the individual and his offering are accepted by God in the offering of Christ, the perfect Victim. This is why the profession takes place during a eucharistic celebration. "The Church, in virtue of her God-given authority, receives the vows of those who profess this form of life, asks aid and grace for them from God in her public

prayer, commends them to God and bestows on them a spiritual blessing, associating their self-offering with the sacrifice of the Eucharist".<sup>8</sup>

By his profession therefore, the salesian is committed with equal force to the apostolic mission, to fraternal life, and to fidelity to the religious vows.

*Let us renew the obligations we assumed at our profession:*

**God my Father,  
you consecrated me to yourself on the day of my baptism.  
In response to the love of the Lord Jesus your Son,  
who calls me to follow him more closely,  
and led by the Holy Spirit who is light and strength,  
with complete freedom I offer myself totally to you.**

**I pledge myself  
to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me,  
especially to young people who are poorer,  
to live in the Salesian Society  
in communion of spirit and action with my brothers;  
and in this way  
to share in the life and mission of your Church.**

**And so, in the presence of my brothers,  
I make the vow for ever to live obedient, poor and chaste  
according to the way of the Gospel  
set out in the salesian Constitutions.**

**Father, may your grace,  
the intercession of Mary Help of Christians,  
of St Joseph, of St Francis de Sales,  
and of St John Bosco,  
together with the assistance of my brother salesians  
keep me faithful day by day.**

<sup>8</sup> LG 45

## ART. 25 PROFESSION A SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION

The action of the Spirit is for the professed member a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts to grow towards the perfect love<sup>1</sup> of God and men.

The confreres who are living or have lived to the full the gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness.

The witness of such holiness, achieved within the salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer to the young.

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 1

In religious consecration the action of the Spirit, the author of sanctity, opens up to the professed the possibility of ample spiritual experiences.

The perpetual (or temporary) profession which the salesian makes at a particular moment but which he is called upon to renew every day, is for him a source of sanctification. The call to holiness, common to all christians,<sup>1</sup> is realized for him through the evangelical path of the Constitutions. In this way his profession comes to mean an explicit commitment to aim at sanctity in the manner lived by Don Bosco. The Constitutions can be likened to a road to be followed; the consecration is like the energy provided by the Spirit to help him to travel it.

The entire text of the Rule is a path to sanctity, because it is a "gospel way of life" (cf. C 24, 192). The original and significant signs of salesian holiness are therefore scattered throughout the whole of the text. The present article considers that holiness in its source, and emphasizes its manifestation in the witness of confreres who are living or have lived to the full the project of the Rule.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. LG, chap. V



## The action of the Spirit helps the professed to grow in holiness

From the very first article the Constitutions have emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit in the work of our Society: He it was who raised up Don Bosco and formed him for his mission; it was He who guided him in giving life to various apostolic projects, first among them our Congregation. The "active presence of the Holy Spirit" is the source of "strength for our fidelity and support for our hope". We could say that the Constitutions look at salesian reality from a pneumatological standpoint: docility to the voice of the Spirit is one of the features which characterize our community (cf. C 2).<sup>2</sup>

This article considers specifically the presence and action of the Spirit in the life of the individual salesian: for the professed the Holy Spirit is the "source of grace and support" in his efforts to grow in perfect love.

At the moment of profession the Spirit of the Lord, the source of grace, permeated the heart of the salesian with the power of his "blessing", enriching him with the special gifts of the covenant and of his unfailing assistance and protection, which will accompany him throughout his existence. In this way the act of profession marks the beginning of a spring of grace, a permanent outflow of spiritual energy, a vital force which is a help to growth and fosters sanctification.

To sustain the professed member in his growth towards perfect love, the consecration of the Spirit gives strength and incessant encouragement to his pastoral charity, in his daily self-abnegation, in the renunciations inherent in the vows, in the severe demands of work and temperance, and in the contradictions and temptations which assail his fidelity; the Spirit sustains and guides his will in overcoming the many difficulties of life, and is a constant reminder of the need for conversion.

<sup>2</sup> On the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in Don Bosco and in the Society, v. also C 12. 21. 64. 99. 146

To grow in the perfect love of God and men is the great commandment of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22,37-39). This is the objective of all consecrated life, according to the constant teaching of the Church which was confirmed by the Council.<sup>3</sup> Our own style of loving God and young people is that of the preventive system: a charity which is rooted in God, and consequently loves and is able to provoke love in return.

### **The project of the Constitution lived by the confreres is a help on the way to sanctification**

Example has an attractive force.

We see this in our Founder, a real "giant of the Spirit",<sup>4</sup> whose sanctity gave birth to a spiritual posterity. We discern it in the confreres who "have lived" the project of the salesian Rule, and have now reached their homeland, the heavenly Jerusalem, and are united with Mary and Don Bosco.

We see it in the confreres who are still "living it to the full, i.e. in all its completeness, without any half-measures or compromise, even though they are inserted in today's world.

It is from the living witness of the confreres that emerge the characteristics of salesian sanctity, as they are proposed to us by the Rule. It is:

— a sanctity that prompts us from within: "I feel a deep yearning, an earnest need to become a saint... now that I see one can be happy and holy too, I definitely want to become a saint";<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The conciliar decree on consecrated life opens precisely with the definition: "*perfectae caritatis prosecutio*": "the pursuit of perfect charity" (PC 1)

<sup>4</sup> Pius XI

<sup>5</sup> Dominic Savio: cf. BM V, 135

- a sanctity possible to everyone, and not just to "extraordinary" people; even boys can attain it: "It is God's will that we become saints, and it is quite easy to do so", said Don Bosco to his boys;<sup>6</sup>
- a sanctity to be found in the daily round; one becomes a saint in the fulfilment of one's duties, living in one's own environment, without looking for extraordinary situations elsewhere;
- simple, with nothing artificial or abnormal about it, no unusual attitudes, no rigid discipline: it is sufficient to do what one has to do anyway, but to do it well;
- apostolic: "self-sanctification by educating" and "education by sanctifying". Don Bosco is the Saint of youth, not only because he worked among the young but because he became a saint by doing such work;
- congenial, attractive and joyful, but at the same time strong and demanding: "Heaven is not for sluggards!";<sup>7</sup>
- a sanctity which is contagious! Don Bosco once said: "I recall how several boys, like Dominic Savio, Mickey Magone, Francis Besucco and others, made this novena (for the feast of All Saints) with extraordinary devotion and fervour. One could not ask more of them... Have you ever seen bunches of sticks stacked one on top of the other? If one catches fire, so do all the others in turn. You can do the same... A lighted match can set fire to a haystack and start a great bonfire. One of you with the will to become a saint could kindle the others by your good example and salutary advice. What if all of you were to make this effort? What a great blessing that would be!"<sup>8</sup>

The Rule recalls the essential role of the confreres who by their simple and wonderful life make familiar to us the heights of perfection. They are indispensable: without them the Congregation would

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BM V, 135

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BM VII, 6

<sup>8</sup> BM XII, 407

not achieve its objectives. They are a friendly presence, models and points of reference; they are the fruit and source of our spirituality; they are the Congregation on its pilgrimage towards heaven.

### The witness of salesian sanctity is a gift to youth

Meditating on the vocation of Don Bosco and his message, a group of young people called the hill of the Becchi the "*Mount of the youthful Beatitudes*". It is an intuition which gives rise to some stimulating reflections on salesian holiness, and leads to the rediscovery of the deep linkage between the preventive system and the spirit of the beatitudes.

The world cannot be transformed without the spirit of the gospel beatitudes.<sup>9</sup> They were proclaimed for everyone and represent the most practical way of living Christ's renewal plan. We Salesians are invited "to listen to them again in the company of youngsters so as to give rise in the world to renewed hope".<sup>10</sup> It is a question of living among youth and with them the charity proclaimed by the Gospel, practising it in poverty, in mildness, in purity of heart, in the search for peace and justice. The kindness, reasonableness and family spirit of the salesian environment bear valid witness to this.

All over the world at the present day salesians are committed to the planning of a "salesian youth movement", as a kind of spirituality suitable for inculcating in the many groups of our boys and girls; but to do this seriously and not just beat the air, it is essential to insert into such a movement the ferment of the beatitudes. "Youth spirituality, in fact, cannot be manufactured just by words, but is generated by living witness".<sup>11</sup>

The beatitudes, incarnate in our youth mission, make us truly "signs and bearers" of the supreme value to which Jesus gives testimony:

<sup>9</sup> Cf. IG 31

<sup>10</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Strenna 1985*, in the international youth year

<sup>11</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Commentary on the Strenna 1985*

love! We are well aware that they do not suppress the commandments, they do not rule out moral, they do not devalue ethics, nor do they prescind from the virtues; but they extend further than any law, be it ever so necessary and holy. "At the level of the spirit of the beatitudes you do not ask whether what is done is 'good' or 'bad'; you ask whether what we are doing manifests and communicates the heart of Christ, i.e. whether or not we are witnessing to his Love".<sup>12</sup>

The Constitutions tell us that the salesian who lives his vocation to the full is a *witness to the beatitudes of the Gospel*; he provides a practical revelation of its unique significance; i.e. its supreme value for humanity's renewal and salvation.

*The best gift we can offer to young people* is precisely this school of evangelical and salesian holiness.<sup>13</sup> Inaugurated by Don Bosco, enriched by a tradition of Saints, endorsed by the daily testimony of innumerable confreres, this current of holiness is revealed as the greatest force in our communities.

Forged at Valdocco, it moves the salesian to become immersed among the young and the common people, to bring them the kindness and salvation of Jesus. Based on the generous simplicity of his daily self-donation, all the demands of his intense work become invested with joy and humbly concentrate the exercise of faith, hope and love in pastoral charity.

Every salesian community, where the confreres live to the full the gift of their profession, becomes a domestic school of salesian holiness.<sup>14</sup> The evidence shows that as the testimony of our sanctity

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Replanning our holiness together*, ASC 303, 1982, p. 13; v. also Letter of R.M. in AGC 319 (1986) which explicitly links salesian sanctity with profession

<sup>14</sup> The Rector Major writes: "Don Bosco, who lived at a time in the last century when Saints were flourishing in Piedmont, had the merit of starting an authentic "School of sanctity". If the various apostolic works he began were of value in his time, the fact that he successfully promoted a particular kind of holiness would be sufficient by itself to make evident a remarkable spirituality which places him among the great ones of the Church with a fertile sanctity capable of reincarnation among other people in the course of future centuries" (AGC 319 (1986), p. 9)

progresses, the hearts of the young become transformed and hope and love flourish in them: the transformation of youthful hearts keeps pace with our own sanctification!

*Grant us, O Lord,  
through the strength of the Spirit  
who has consecrated us to you,  
the grace to persevere in fidelity  
and to progress every day in love  
after the example of our brothers  
who have travelled the same road to holiness.  
Grant that, like them, we may be witnesses  
among men and especially among the young  
to the divine value of the Beatitudes.  
Amen.*

## SECOND PART

### SENT TO THE YOUNG IN COMMUNITIES FOLLOWING CHRIST

The second part of the Constitutions carries the main body of the Rule of salesian life; in its four chapters and 70 articles the essential elements of the salesian apostolic consecration are developed in considerable detail.

The first part, as we have seen, set out in synthetic and global form the fundamental notes of the nature and mission of the Salesian Society in the Church and for the world, and described the characteristic spirit which animates it. Within the Society's apostolic project the personal vocation was considered as a gift and commitment of each member.

In this second part are taken up one by one the various elements which together form the plan of salesian life: the apostolic mission, its community context, the radically evangelical way in which it is lived through the profession of the counsels, and the indispensable contribution made to it by prayer which gives life to its every aspect. As can be easily seen, it is a question of developing what has been already expressed in the formula for profession (C 24) and, before that, in art. 3 which presented "our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels" as "the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers".

In this part of the Constitutions an innovation will be noticed from a structural point of view, both as regards earlier texts and also the text produced by the SGC: the new version collects together in the same section (even though spread over several chapters) material which was previously distributed over several parts and chapters. In this the intention of the GC22 is quite clear: with this new structure it wanted to emphasize *the unity and mutual relationship of the various fundamental commitments made in profession*. The Rector Major writes:

"One of the great merits of this part is to be found in the way it presents the mutual compenetration of these various aspects of our vocation".<sup>1</sup> In fact in each of the chapters of this part the educational and pastoral commitment, community life and the practice of the religious vows are fully dealt with, but always in constant correlation with each other.<sup>2</sup> A study of the various chapters will reveal that the mission to youth is described in a way that shows that it would not be salesian if it were not lived as a community project and in the evangelical style of the counsels, and equally that witness to the counsels would not be salesian either, were it not translated into a "practical exercise of charity towards the young" realized together by a group of Don Bosco's followers.

But after pointing out the deep unity which binds together the various aspects of our life, it must be said also that within this second part the Constitutions adopt an order between the various chapters which has a precise significance. They develop what is already indicated in the title given to the whole part: "*SENT TO THE YOUNG — IN COMMUNITIES — FOLLOWING CHRIST*". We note that in this expression the apostolic mission is placed first. This corresponds, as we shall see in greater detail in the introduction to the fourth part, to both the constant tradition in our constitutional texts (Don Bosco himself dealt in the first chapter of the Constitutions with the "scope" of the Society), and the indications of art. 3 which puts the mission at the centre of our identity as Salesians, declaring that it sets the "*tenor*" of our whole life, i.e. its original stamp and complexion.<sup>3</sup>

In the arrangement of this part too, one should note at the outset the position of the chapter dealing with salesian prayer, understood in its deep meaning of dialogue with the Lord. It is placed as a concluding synthesis of the entire description of the salesian plan, and in this way emphasizes both the intimate link between prayer and every element of our vocation, and the vital importance (as both source and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 24

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Introduction to Chap. IV: "Sent to the young", p. 276 ff.



vertex) of prayer itself as a permanent stimulus to the celebration of the "liturgy of life" (C 95) in pastoral activity, in fraternal community and in the practice of the evangelical counsels.<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of these considerations we can better understand the way the *SECOND PART* has been put together:

<i>chap. IV</i>	<i>SENT TO THE YOUNG</i>	<i>art. 26-48</i>
	— section I Those to whom our mission is directed	<i>art. 26-30</i>
	— section II Our pastoral educational service	<i>art. 31-39</i>
	— section III Criteria for salesian activity	<i>art. 40-43</i>
	— section IV Those who share responsibility for the mission	<i>art. 44-48</i>
<i>chap. V</i>	<i>IN FRATERNAL AND APOSTOLIC COMMUNITIES</i>	<i>art. 49-59</i>
<i>chap. VI</i>	<i>FOLLOWING CHRIST, OBEDIENT, POOR AND CHASTE</i>	<i>art. 60-84</i>
	— section I Our obedience	<i>art. 64-71</i>
	— section II Our poverty	<i>art. 72-79</i>
	— section III Our chastity	<i>art. 80-84</i>
<i>chap. VII</i>	<i>IN DIALOGUE WITH THE LORD</i>	<i>art. 85-95</i>

To end this brief presentation we may note once again that the contents of this second part will provide indispensable points of reference for the parts that follow. Both salesian formation and the service provided by authority are based entirely on the apostolic, community and evangelical dimensions, and hence on the values set out in this part.

<sup>4</sup> AGC 312 (1985), l.c.

## CHAPTER IV

### SENT TO THE YOUNG

The theme of the apostolic mission begins long before this chapter and continues long after it. In fact from the first article of the Constitutions the apostolic mission is presented as an objective of the Congregation. Further references to it are found in each of the parts, influencing the individual themes and in this way giving effect to what was said in art. 3: "Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life". For this reason we are identified as a religious institute dedicated to apostolic works (cf. C 4), and our life in the Spirit is expressed and nourished by activity for the Kingdom.

The mission is therefore a characterizing element of the salesian life and charism to such an extent that it shapes the physiognomy of our consecration, a consecration which is in fact "apostolic" (cf. C 3).

The meaning given by the Constitutions, following the conciliar documents, to the word "*mission*", must be emphasized from the start. Since the words most frequently occurring in association with it are: pastoral, apostolate, service, and work, there are grounds for fear that in the mind of the listener or reader the mission may come to be seen as something like a "movement", "activity" or "work initiative", or worse still as ceaseless unreflecting activity among youth or among material things (bricks, money and equipment). That kind of thing would deprive the mission of its true and deep significance.

And so it is fair to ask: When the Constitutions speak of the mission, what precisely do they mean?

In the first place the Constitutions present something which is a theological reality, i.e. an existential relationship with God, who calls us personally (C 22) and "who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us" (C 3).

It is a matter therefore of a "*gift*" coming from the Spirit which transforms and shapes history. We do not take a mission upon ourselves. We participate in the eternal designs of God for the salvation of the

world: we are involved in the mystery of salvation. The first and every subsequent move is made by God; he even prompts our response.

Anyone who lives this reality will daily renew his "choice" of the Lord, recognizing him as humanity's renewing presence and man's future. He will cultivate Don Bosco's humble and characteristic attitude of being an "instrument" in God's hands. He will have faith in the "seeds" he can sow, knowing that what he is and does bears no proportion to the maturing of the Kingdom and yet a tiny part of that Kingdom is enough to leaven the world, as Jesus said in the parables. He maintains a constant union with Him who has sent him (C 12).

The mission therefore is a *manifestation of the "following" of Christ*, of identification with him, of a preferential love for him. It means allowing ourselves to be moulded and guided by "zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom" (C 11) and "cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom" (C 18), giving "practical expression to his redeeming love" (C 41) at the present day.

This relationship with Christ, God and Man, makes us constantly rethink the mission and have trust in the strength of his Redemption.

Furthermore, the mission is always described as an *ecclesial communion*. Within it are defined those tasks which "place us at the heart of the Church and put us entirely at her service" (C 6). We feel a living part of her and in her we see "the centre of unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom" (C 13).

This consideration gives rise to a continuously renewed relationship of fraternal communion with the People of God (C 13), a solidarity with their intentions, an active insertion into their lives for the world's salvation, and an acceptance too of the need for practical coordination.

The mission mobilizes "faith and charity" in every direction and immerses us in the existence of the Body of Christ, as can well be seen in today's world.

Finally the mission is *our contribution to the history of human development*, to the overcoming of the forces of evil, to the struggle to find horizons of sense and quality of life. In fact, "our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history..." For this reason

we "shape our concrete pastoral activity so as to bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ" (C 7).

The urgent needs of the mission lead us to keep abreast of the movement of history and try to meet them, periodically evaluating our work (C 19). The development of the temporal order is something we have at heart: "We cooperate in building a society more just and worthy of man's dignity" (C 33); but we are certain that in the mystery of Christ, the revelation of God and man, and in his Gospel we have been given the supreme sense of existence and the moving force of history.

Our temporal choice is the Gospel and the education of youth, just as others may choose politics or the arts. We rely on the Gospel and charity as compelling and transforming forces, and thus equipped we take part in man's pilgrimage.

By reason of this fourfold reference, to *God*, to *Christ*, to the *Church* and to *history*, the dedication of himself to the mission becomes for the salesian a "mystical" experience, and not merely a matter of external bustling activity. "As he works for the salvation of the young, the salesian experiences the fatherhood of God" (C 12). The experience that others encounter in secret contemplative prayer he finds as he spends himself in the work God has entrusted to him. His contemplation is found in his activity (cf. C 12), because there in events and individuals he perceives the Spirit's initiative; he meets God "through those to whom he is sent" (C 95). Drawing in this way on God's charity, he works out his educational and pastoral system (C 20) and, like Don Bosco, builds his life into unity by bringing together every trait and tendency into a plan for the service of the young (C 21).

In this way he comes to realize that *in carrying out his mission he finds his own way to holiness* (cf. C 2).

We have said that the mission does not consist only in activity. We must add that neither is it activity juxtaposed with a general kind of interior religious feeling but disjoined from its initiatives and purpose. It means a life linked to two pillars: the Lord who sends us, and the young to whom we must give ourselves so as to be signs and witnesses of God's saving love for them (cf. C 2). This ensemble of ideas and

concepts can lead to the development of a spirituality of active life which is characteristically salesian.

Consequently the salesian finds his "*ascesis*" in the carrying out of his mission: his path of purification and perfection, and the practice of virtue.

It is to this that Don Bosco's recommendation refers: no extraordinary penances of one's own choice, but work, work, work. In fact the mission calls for constant availability, careful preparation, resistance to discouragement and frustration, mortification of inordinate tendencies, and the renouncement of an easy life. As art. 18 expresses it: The salesian "does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it" (C 18).

The apostolic mission referred to in many articles of the Constitutions is not something generic. It is not a general intention of doing good nor a vague purpose to save souls. It has a concrete apostolic physiognomy which is part of the Congregation's identity. In this chapter therefore we find spelled out the mission's characterizing elements, which then become points of reference for a unified pastoral practice which will not become dissipated in a vague multiplicity of methods, despite the different contexts in which it develops.

What then are the elements that characterize the apostolic mission and pastoral activity of the salesians? The text lists four of them, and each has a corresponding "section":

- *THOSE TO WHOM OUR MISSION IS DIRECTED*, i.e. the field, to use the expression of Don Bosco's first dream, in which the Salesians will work.
- The PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE which the Salesians intend to provide. Among the same group of people it would be possible, absolutely speaking, to provide a variety of services (clinical, remedial, educational, catechetical, etc.) which have an influence not only on the abilities but also on the form of the community and on its spiritual life. The project defines the mission and therefore pertains to the identity of a religious institute.

- *The ACTIVITIES AND WORKS* through which the Salesians prefer to realize their mission, i.e. the instruments and working structures in which the practice of the Congregation is carried out.
- *The SUBJECT* of pastoral activity, i.e. those to whom it is entrusted and who in consequence share responsibility for its implementation.

There is a harmonious relationship between the four elements. To particular recipients there corresponds a particular plan, with certain relevant activities and works which in turn require a subject who will put them into effect. In this way the four elements are seen to be not isolated choices but to present an overall pastoral complexion. They are equivalent to the preventive system translated into practical terms.

Let us look carefully at the structure of the complete chapter to see how it is built up.

*1st section: THOSE TO WHOM OUR MISSION IS DIRECTED*

- Young people: *art. 26-28*
- Environments: *art. 29*
- People not yet evangelized: *art. 30*

*2nd section: OUR PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE*

- Ultimate overall objective of our project: *art. 31*
- Various dimensions of the single project: *art. 32-37*
  - Education and development: *art. 32, 33*
  - Evangelization and catechesis: *art. 34, 36*
  - Community and group experience: *art. 35*
  - Vocational guidance: *art. 37*
- The pedagogical and pastoral method: *art. 38, 39*
  - Underlying principles: *art. 38*
  - In practice: assistance: *art. 39*

*3rd section: CRITERIA FOR SALESIAN ACTIVITY*

- The ideal model: the Oratory of Valdocco: *art. 40*
- Discernment criteria for activities and works: *art. 41*
- Main lines of our activity: *art. 42, 43*
  - Education and evangelization: *art. 42*
  - Social communication: *art. 43*

*4th section: THOSE WHO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR THE MISSION*

- The Salesian community: *art. 44-46*
- The educative and pastoral community: *art. 47, 48*

The spirituality of the salesian has its model and source of energy in Christ the apostle, and is developed and externalized in his pastoral commitment. This takes up his entire day. It is impossible therefore to conceive his religious authenticity without concrete reference to the features which characterize his apostolic work.

## THOSE TO WHOM OUR MISSION IS DIRECTED

*"He saw a great throng, and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6,34).*

The biblical quotation is taken from the great account of the first multiplication of loaves (Mk 6,30-44), great because it reveals the messianic power of Jesus and his style of practical intervention in the lives of people: an exact perception of their state, a deep and even emotive sharing with them, and a concrete action to bring about change in them.

But for a deeper analysis of the extraordinary significance of Jesus' sign, we must go back to the biblical tradition associated with the three evangelical elements of the "sheep without a shepherd", the "lonely place" (v. 31), and the "bread". To Mark and the christian community, the crowd surrounding Jesus in the "lonely place" seemed to be the people of old, tormented by the traps and perils of life's journey, whom God intended to shepherd through historic guides, Moses in the first place (Num 27,17), providing them with abundant food (Ex 16).

Jesus, in line with the great messianic announcement that the scattered people would be reunited (Ex 34), is God's Shepherd par excellence, who intervenes fully and in person ("I know my sheep", says Jesus, "individually" (cf. Jn 10,3.14). When he says he "will teach them many things" he does not mean that he will say a lot of fine words, but rather that he will communicate to them the "Word of God", which is at the same time God's truth, his plan of the Kingdom and the powerful living energy which follows from it. By his teaching Jesus multiplies bread for everyone (v. 43) to an extraordinary extent. His pastoral care in fact will emerge in an unheard of form when in the Eucharist, to which this account is a prelude (cf. Mk 6,41), he will give himself completely as bread and truth.

The quotation highlights very forcefully the pastoral charity which Don Bosco realized in concrete experiences, and which the salesian must feel in the first and fundamental moment of his encounter with those to whom the mission is directed, "sheep without a shepherd", or in other words to "the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger" (C 26).



## ART. 26 THE YOUNG TO WHOM WE ARE SENT

The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer.

We are called to the same mission and are aware of its supreme importance: young people are at the age when they must make basic life-choices which affect the future of society and of the Church.

With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are "poor, abandoned and in danger",<sup>1</sup> those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty.

<sup>1</sup> cf. MB XIV, 662; BM XIV, 536

Art. 26 introduces a block of five articles which define clearly and coherently the fields in which the Salesians intend to commit their resources. The section as a whole has two particular merits: it provides a complete list of those to whom our activity is directed, and through the very structure of the section and the inner components of the articles makes quite clear what the priorities and preferences are.

In particular the article establishes two elements:

- the choice of the field which characterizes the salesian mission: the young;
- the preference: those who are poorer.

### Young people

First among those to whom we are sent are the young. By themselves they give to the salesian mission its original complexion, even though it be incomplete. Without them all the other aspects would not be sufficient. Don Bosco is chiefly the "father and teacher of the young". The most widespread and truest pictures of him are those which

depict him surrounded by boys; without them he would be unrecognizable. With this priority for youth are linked many of the articles of the Constitutions which refer to our spirit, consecration and community.<sup>1</sup> If there were ever a day when youth no longer constituted the pastoral "portion" and "inheritance" of the Salesians, the Constitutions would have to be rewritten.

The text gives prominence to this unqualified priority by means of three elements.

In the first place we may note the solemn quality of the phrase: *"The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission ... to the young..."*. The expression takes us back to specific historic facts, like the dream at the age of nine and its repetitions in the life of our Father.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, there occurs the explicit expression "first and foremost"; the work we do for any others is related in some way to the work for youth. In fact the young are mentioned too when other fields of work are spoken of: in presenting our pastoral involvement with poor people in general, art. 29 says that it fits in well with "our priority commitment to young people"; art. 30 describes the "missions" as mobilizing "all the educational and pastoral means proper to our charism"; and art. 43, speaking of "communication" recalls the great possibilities it offers for the education of the young.

Thirdly, particularly striking is the absolute nature of Don Bosco's declaration: *"That you are young is enough to make me love you very much"* (C 14). There is no need to seek further reasons for our commitment to youth.

These and other similar compelling indications have their origin and foundation in the conviction expressed in art. 14, where it is said that "our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young", and that "this love is an expression of pastoral charity and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C 1. 2. 3. 14. 15. 19. 20. 21. 24. 61. 81

<sup>2</sup> Cf. commentary on C 14 with its many quotations from Don Bosco concerning his conviction about the priority of his mission for youth (p. 188-194)

gives meaning to our whole life. Without the young therefore there can be no specifically salesian presences, and every new decision made in respect of activities or works should be directed to making us ever more effectively "youth specialists".

Since this article is fundamental for our identity, the editorial nuances should not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

It speaks of "*the young*", i.e. those who are at an age when they are maturing biologically and psychologically, and who by the assimilation of culture and the gaining of professional qualifications are preparing to take their full place in society.

The age limits for this period have been extended, especially (but not only) in developed societies. Salesian works and institutes were formerly found predominantly among adolescents and pre-adolescents. This is certainly a category that needs attention in terms of human formation, evangelization and decisions about their future calling; but at the present day, given the greater time needed for professional preparation, young adults are still in a period of "education and preparation for life". This period too is one of religious and cultural phenomena which affect the formation of young people, and often manifest various forms of deviation which need to be forestalled.

It will be up to each Province to decide, in the light of the social and cultural conditions of its own context, to which age-group the Salesians should give more attention: the adolescent group (11-17 years) or that of young adults (18-25 years).

We speak of "young people" or the "*young*". The term in its collective meaning (= "*youth*")<sup>3</sup> implies that we are attentive not only to individual youngsters, but to their condition as a group. Youth as a group is at the present day an object of concern and action by governments, the mass media, and international institutions. Action in favour of individuals is of little avail if the youth condition itself in a social,

<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco himself uses the term "*giovani*" in a collective sense, e.g. in art. 1 of the Constitutions he wrote (1875). Several times in his writings is found also the term "*gioventù*"

cultural and educational sense is not given attention. The GC21, in fact, recommended insistently that salesians should become "specialists" in youth conditions.<sup>4</sup>

But together with the term "young people", a choice is also emphasized: "Our pastoral service is directed to *boys and young men*" (R 3). This means that our initiatives are intended to meet the specific needs that appear among this particular group; and this implies in turn that if for pastoral reasons we work in environments where both boys and girls are encountered, our preferential attention and our initiatives which go beyond a general service, will be thought out and programmed in terms of the boys, leaving to others a more detailed care of the girls.

This means also that we feel able to manage big establishments and large numbers of boys, but when it comes to girls and pastoral reasons make their presence convenient or necessary, we establish certain limits: group participation, for formational, cultural, religious or social purposes, in numbers proportionate to the need.

This option is connected with our origins, with the pedagogy of shared life that we apply, and with the kinds of educational themes in which we specialize: vocation, work, games etc.

Finally, an element that must not be overlooked is found in *the motivations* of our commitment in favour of the young, as proposed in the text of the Rule.

The first concerns their own life: they are at an age when fundamental options are being made, as a result of which life will take a turn towards fulfilment or towards frustration; our love for the young prompts us to help them in this difficult time of growth.

The second concerns society and the Church. "Young people are preparing the future of society and of the Church". This motivation opens up a topic which will be developed in the course of the whole section — the social perspective of our pastoral and educational work.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. GC21, "*Salesians evangelizers of the young*"; especially Part 1: "Youth and its condition" (GC21, 20-30)

In the formulation of this article echoes can be detected not only of our own tradition but also of the words of the Council: "The sacred Ecumenical Council has given careful consideration to the paramount *importance of education* in the life of men and its ever-growing influence on the social progress of the age".<sup>5</sup>

### Young people who are poor

But among the young there are preferences. The first is for those *who are poorer*: "With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the '*young who are poor, abandoned and in danger*', those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty".

Poverty has no limits. In our own neighbourhood there is always someone poorer than the last one we heard about. And on a larger scale there is always a situation more wretched than the worst we imagined in our smaller area. The "poverty" evident in certain cities does not seem so bad when compared with the conditions in some of the world's slum areas, and these in turn are far exceeded by the tragedies of drought and famine suffered by whole peoples who have become refugees.

Furthermore, when Don Bosco formulated his preference no one had any idea of what we now call "structural poverty", i.e. a poverty born of a particular social and economic situation which produces it, and from which it is possible to free individuals only at a rate far below that at which they are being produced. In fact what is being said and written at the present day reveals the hope that education may prove to be the only remedy for such poverty.

These fleeting reflections may help us to understand the sense of our option, which is not to solve the problem of poverty but to reveal, through a "human" sign, the fatherly countenance of God.

<sup>5</sup> GE, Introduction

The threefold reference to young people who are "poor", "abandoned", and "in danger", indicates three kinds of poverty which are frequently interconnected.

— "*Poor*": means lacking material resources and the means for self-development.

— "*Abandoned*": implies the absence of supportive relationships: parents, family, educational institutions. This lack is often found in association with the preceding one, but can exist independently of it.

— "*In danger*": describes the situation of those youngsters exposed to hazards which make it impossible for them to attain a happy maturity as human beings. They are "at risk", in the sense that they display weaknesses which make them an easy prey to the evils that assail them, such as drugs, inducement to crime, vagrancy and unemployment.

To which of these three kinds of poverty should we give preference? The decision must be made against the background of the social context in which we are working, and in the light of other criteria which the Constitutions speak of later (cf. C 40, 41); but the first article of the General Regulations puts them in the following order:

— youngsters who because of economic, social and cultural poverty, sometimes of an extreme nature, have no possibility of success in life: the typical aspect of this condition is that it often renders impossible a normal human existence;

— youngsters who are poor at an affective, moral and spiritual level: this is a kind of poverty which has repercussions on the deepest dimensions of an individual, because of the lack of fundamental affection, true values, and openness to God;

— youngsters who live on the fringe of society and of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SGC, 39-44; 47-48; 181-182

These options are not mutually exclusive. There are in fact pastoral initiatives which tackle all three at once.

We emphasize the motivation expressed in the article: we prefer the young who are poor because they have "*greater need of love and evangelization*". More than just the specific aspect of the teaching of catechism, evangelization means the announcement and proclamation of the possibility for the young of salvation in Jesus Christ, and the experience of love that can open them to the presence of God in their lives.

From preference for the poor two practical consequences follow: care for them individually, and the geographical and social installation of our works and activities "in areas of greatest poverty".

All this is far from easy. But there are two forces, one internal and the other external, which give us encouragement and support: first the love of Christ the Saviour ("*caritas Christi urget nos*", in the words of St Paul), and secondly fidelity to Don Bosco, who so often declared that the Salesian Society is meant primarily for the young who are poorest.<sup>7</sup>

*Lord our God,  
you showed our Father by unmistakable signs  
that our mission is first and foremost to the young;  
grant that we too  
who are called to the same work of salvation  
may reaffirm the same predilection by heart and deed,  
and so become ready and attentive educators of youth,  
helping them to discover in their own existence  
your saving presence.*

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 48

*May young people  
who are "poor, abandoned and in danger"  
hear in our voice your own proclamation of salvation,  
and by accepting it and adhering to it with faith,  
cooperate in realizing the hopes and expectations,  
which the Church and humanity  
repose in the new generations.*



## ART. 27 YOUNG WORKERS

Young people from poor areas who are looking for work, and young workers in general, often encounter difficulties and easily become victims of injustice.

Making the concern of Don Bosco our own, we go to them to prepare them to take their place with dignity in society and in the Church and to alert them to the role they must play in the christian transformation of social life.

### Don Bosco's solicitude

The historical antecedents of this article go back as far as the first Rule written by Don Bosco, and there are uninterrupted references to the matter in every constitutional text down to the present day. Young apprentices and works for their benefit have always been listed in second place, immediately after the young in need of catechetical instruction who were provided for through festive oratories.

In the historical preamble to the very first text of the Constitutions Don Bosco wrote: "Many of them were poor and abandoned, and were received into a house so as to remove them from danger, instruct them in their religion, and *prepare them for employment*".<sup>1</sup>

The Constitutional expression stems from some facts in the life of our Father which are recorded in the Memoirs of the Oratory: "In general", wrote Don Bosco, "the Oratory was made up of stonecutters, bricklayers, plasterers, road makers, and others doing similar kinds of work, the majority coming from long distances away".<sup>2</sup> So characteristic were these occupations at the Oratory that in 1842 one of the feasts celebrated was that of the bricklayers.<sup>3</sup> "The young lad who constituted

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales, 1858-1875*, ed. F. MOTTO, p. 66

<sup>2</sup> Cf. MO, 129

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 130

the first step in the building up of the moral and religious work of the Oratory would have had this identity card: Bartholomew Garelli, orphan, illiterate, migrant labourer".<sup>4</sup>

This was the seed or beginning from which sprang an enterprise that underwent significant stages of development in Don Bosco's own lifetime: individual work contracts, hostels for young workers who had to learn a trade outside the house, internal workshops, schools of arts and trades with a complete and organized programme.

Don Bosco's solicitude for young workers, far-sighted in its intuitions and tenacious in application, was responsible for a series of initiatives which made one of the original features of the Congregation its natural linkage with the world of work.

In the first place we remember the *trade schools*, educational institutions which, like the festive oratories, seem like a characteristic work of the Salesian Congregation. Long practice in these schools led eventually to the drawing up of a "*pedagogy of work*" which the Salesians pioneered in more than a few regions. With this kind of work and pedagogy the Congregation became decisively inserted in working class neighbourhoods and entered into the dynamics of society for the advancement of the individual and the environment. For this reason it took on a strong "secular" complexion, which enabled it to intervene from a cultural and technical standpoint in social themes of concern in poor areas. From this there developed in the Congregation the figure of a member strongly characterized by his professional preparation in the work sector, even though not limited to it: the salesian coadjutor brother.

Work too was an essential characteristic of the Congregation's ascetics ("work and temperance"). And if it is true that by work Don Bosco meant every apostolic occupation, it is also true that because of the large proportion of craftsmen in the Congregation the term "work" took on a 'practical' and 'manual' meaning which together

<sup>4</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian mission and the workers' world*, ASC 307 (1983), p. 11

with its ascetical aspect led naturally to a close linkage with the world of work and the style of life associated with it.

The expression "making the concern of Don Bosco our own" is therefore very significant: the choice of a field of pastoral work involves spiritual aspects of our identity.

### Our concern at the present day

The words which follow: "we go to them to prepare them to take their place with dignity in society and in the Church and to alert them to the role they must play in the christian transformation of social life", bring us to the modern phenomenon of work and to its collective implications, to the complexus of norms and circumstances, models and life relationships, which are included in the phrase "the 'world' or 'culture' of work".<sup>5</sup>

It is not primarily a case of providing the youngsters with a means of earning a living, or of providing skilled workers for industry, but to save the individual by helping him to play "with dignity", i.e. with human and cultural maturity and in the light of faith, his role in the "transformation of social life". The Salesians have a propensity for choosing the workers' world as a field for evangelization,<sup>6</sup> and in it they give effect to their preference for the young.

In the second paragraph of the article our preference is motivated and defined in terms that fully express its collective and cultural overtones.

The first paragraph had already expressed the form in which the Congregation takes up at the present day the same commitment as Don Bosco's. The young apprentices of the last century have become "young people looking for work, and young workers in general". The

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ASC 307 (1983), pp. 8-9; v. also John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, 1981

<sup>6</sup> ASC 307 (1983), pp. 14-20

range has been extended. Many youthful phenomena of the present day belong, in fact, to the period that follows school, and a cultural and christian mentality is formed in the conflicts that are part and parcel of the organization of work, rather than in the earlier years of preparation.

The phrase "to enable them to earn an honest livelihood" of earlier texts has given place today to another reason: young people "often encounter difficulties and easily become victims of injustice". Behind this expression lie the phenomena of gross exploitation found in the third world (illegal and concealed child labour, job allocation in accordance with "ideologies", dismissal of superfluous workers and the exploitation of others taken on, etc.) and the typical phenomena of the industrial society. One thing is certain: the Salesians do not consider work only in terms of the individual and what he can do: the article is permeated by a pastoral charity which is aware of the collective and cultural dimension which envelops the educational and promotional theme of "work", and of the effect it has on the overall salvation of youth.

*Lord Jesus,  
in the years of your hidden life at Nazareth  
you willed to be known as a carpenter,  
and experience in your own person  
the hardships of a workman's life.*

*Teach us to understand and to love  
young people of the world of work,  
so as to guide them in their preparation for life,  
that they may become among their companions  
faithful witnesses of your Gospel.*

## ART. 28 YOUNG PEOPLE CALLED TO SERVE THE CHURCH

To meet the needs of his people the Lord continually calls some to follow him, and enriches them with a variety of gifts in the service of the Kingdom.

We are convinced that many young people are rich in spiritual potential and give indications of an apostolic vocation.

We help them to discover, accept and develop the gift of a lay, consecrated or priestly vocation, for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family.

With equal zeal we nurture adult vocations.

This is not the only article of the Constitutions which speaks of vocations. One may compare and contrast it with articles 37 and 109. What is specific to this article, placed in the chapter dealing with those for whom we work, is that it indicates those who show signs of a vocation as being a special field of work for the Congregation. It recalls what was said in art. 6 which gave a synthesis of our principal commitments in the Church: "We pay special attention to apostolic vocations".

The expression in the text has its roots in the beginnings of our charism. It appears, in fact, for the first time in the edition of 1860, at n. 5 of chapter I, under the heading: "Purpose of this Society": "In view of the great dangers faced by young people who wish to embrace the ecclesiastical state, this Congregation will take care to cultivate the piety and vocation of those who show a special aptitude for study and are eminently disposed towards piety".<sup>1</sup> The text of 1875 said that "when considering the admission of those who wish to study, preference shall be given to those who are poorer ... provided they give some hope of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni* 1860, I,5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 76)

<sup>2</sup> *Costituzioni* 1875, I,5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 76)

From that time there has always been some reference to this group in every subsequent edition of the Constitutions. The article expresses one of Don Bosco's most constant preoccupations, a manifestation of the depth of his priesthood and of his practical Church sense: to make possible the realization of their vocation to those who show signs of having one and the will to follow it. Well known are the sayings of our Father: "Every care and concern of the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians must be directed to the fostering of ecclesiastical and religious vocations".<sup>3</sup> "Let us remember that we give the Church a great treasure when we cultivate a good vocation".<sup>4</sup>

### The Lord calls

The article opens with a declaration of faith: "The Lord continually calls some to follow him. Before its ministerial significance, attention is directed to the radical sense of vocation as it appears from the Gospel: "He called them and appointed them to be his companions" (Mk 3,14).

To the many different needs of his people the Lord responds with an outpouring of grace and a multiplicity of gifts which he lavishes on the faithful, all of them converging on the same objective — the Kingdom.

The statement reflects and almost repeats the words of St Paul: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good; ... there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12,7.4).

This phenomenon is abundantly clear in the youth sector. Young people are making "basic life-choices" (C 26). We are convinced that many of them are rich in availability and spiritual resources. Our conviction stems from experience and from the recollection of a judgement often expressed by our Father: a high percentage of the youngsters sent to us by the Lord are favourably disposed to take up a vocation

<sup>3</sup> MB XVII, 305

<sup>4</sup> MB XVII, 262

to some particular commitment, if suitably motivated and followed up.<sup>5</sup> Don Bosco's conviction was recalled by John Paul II when he visited the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in 1980.<sup>6</sup>

## We collaborate with the Lord

This portion of youth, endowed with signs and dispositions of a vocation, is for us a field in which to intervene with well thought out initiatives aimed at helping those concerned to recognize, accept and develop the Lord's call. The GC21 reminded us that this is one of our characteristic areas of activity, and proposed that we "revitalize concretely (in our attitudes and apostolic initiatives) one of the components of our salesian vocation: to offer our active service to the Church in cultivating the vocation of those young people whom the Lord calls to a priestly or religious vocation, to the various ecclesial ministries and to a commitment as lay leaders".<sup>7</sup>

Practical expressions made by Don Bosco of this commitment were his offer to the Bishops to look after seminaries, and the taking on of the specific care of vocations in several places, especially in poor dioceses. He was able to write to the Archbishop of Turin: "I rather think that from 1848 to the present day this Congregation has been responsible for at least two thirds of the diocesan clergy".<sup>8</sup>

We may note that the text speaks of different forms of vocation in the Church, which correspond to the variety of gifts poured out by the Lord (lay, consecrated, and priestly). In all these different forms the emphasis is on "*apostolic vocation*"; this implies a particular need for discernment and formation. It is not a question of an initial offer to teach catechism, but of more committed forms of witness and apostolate.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BM XI, 248

<sup>6</sup> Cf. "*Torino vivi in pace*", LDC Turin 1980, p. 113

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 110

<sup>8</sup> MB XVI, 91

The article concludes with a reference to the care of adult vocations. This draws attention to the fact that the fundamental reason for the choice of this field is neither poverty nor youth but the vocational call itself. It is true that through our method of integral education, because of the presence of the greater number of confreres among young people, we have a special regard for the youth sector also in the matter of vocations, but the vocational question as such leads us to a wider outlook and greater concern. In this connection it is well to remember Don Bosco's concern for "late vocations", as they were once called, and the contribution these have made to the Congregation, especially in the missions.

Finally, the expression "*for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family*" indicates a scale of motivations.

The first and principal reason why, with Don Bosco, we choose this field is love for the Church and the sense of the need of her mission in history. The three vocations — lay, priestly, and religious — form the woof and warp of her fabric and enable her to undertake all good works. They represent her possibility of presence and witness in secular realities, of service to the christian community and of evangelical testimony. We turn our eyes first to the Church, and to her we direct our principal concern.

But the Church is made up of different charisms. The salesian vocation can be discovered and cultivated especially by us who have already received this grace of the Spirit, and we can therefore discern its signs and have an idea of its development. But everything comes under the sign of the personal response. Our activity is not a recruiting drive aimed at increasing our own "strength", but a help to those who have received from God the grace of the salesian spirit so that they may be followed up and encouraged in corresponding with it.

The significance of this choice of field for salesian pedagogy and pastoral work should not be forgotten. The ability to guide and bring to realization a vocation of commitment in its spiritual and practical aspects is the apex of religious pedagogy. If the theme of work embraced the contents and horizons of the purely human aspect of education (the formation of an upright citizen), the discovery of the christian vocation and its cultivation to the point of its full realization



represents the synthesis and summit of education to the faith: the formation of the good christian (cf. C 37).

*Lord our God,  
you sow the seed of your Word in men's hearts  
and lavishly distribute the gifts of your Spirit.  
Make us sensitive, in the same Spirit,  
to the presence of these gifts  
in the young you entrust to our care,  
so that we may be able to discern in them  
the germ of your call,  
and collaborate with you in forming  
for your Church and our Salesian Family  
new apostles,  
who will help their brothers to grow  
as members of your Mystical Body.*

## ART. 29 IN WORKING-CLASS AREAS

Our priority commitment to young people who are poor fits in well with pastoral involvement among poor people in general.

We recognize the gospel values which they stand for, and the need they have of support in their efforts at human advancement and growth in the faith. Hence we support them by "all the means that christian charity suggests".<sup>1</sup>

We also give our attention to the lay people responsible for evangelization of their local area, and to the family where different generations come together<sup>2</sup> and build the future of mankind.

<sup>1</sup> C 1875, I, 7

<sup>2</sup> cf. GS 52

Evident in the text of the Rule as it came from the pen of Don Bosco is his concern for "adults of the lower classes and especially in rural areas" (text of 1858).<sup>1</sup> Don Bosco addressed himself to them through the channels then available and with a precise aim in view: "and so the members will dedicate themselves to the preaching of spiritual exercises, the spreading of good books, and in general will use all the means suggested by zealous charity as a barrier to irreligion and heresy".<sup>2</sup>

### The working classes

It is of interest, first of all, to understand the social, cultural and religious implications of this sector of the salesian mission. The work-

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni 1858*, I, 5 (cf. F MOTTO, p. 78)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

ing classes are the ensemble of people who live a very ordinary life and who, because of their financial, social and political state, without privileges and without reaching the public eye, represent the common people. Don Bosco turned his attention to the "rural" areas in what was predominantly an agricultural era, but he was concerned too about the problems emerging in the new urban society. The 'working class' therefore meant those who were not well off and who enjoyed no privileges; they had fewer opportunities for education and advancement.

Light is thrown on the meaning of the term by General Chapter texts which speak of the location of our works. Referring to parishes the GC21 says: "The salesian parish is for the common people and this because of its location (preferably in populous urban areas) ..., because of its openness to its neighbourhood, ... sharing the ordinary people's concerns, their joys and sorrows, their disappointments and hopes".<sup>3</sup> The same GC21 declares that the salesian school "caters to the common people, as regards locality, the way it deals with people, its tone and style, its special concerns, and especially for its loving care for the most backward".<sup>4</sup>

Activity for the benefit of the working classes is not something that is carried out alongside our priority work for the young, and still less is it detached from it; indeed it harmonizes with it very well. In what does this harmony consist? It means that in our encounter with the working class, our characteristic and specialized area of interest is still the youth sector. The working class neighbourhood is the environment in which we give expression to our priority for youth, the social circumstances in which we prefer to meet them. We are at the side of the common people in the development of one of their most characteristic qualities: the family, the sense of life, children.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 141

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 131

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 54, which refers to the *internal unity* between our mission to the young and to the common people

## The attitude of the salesian

After thus setting out the field of work and the need to harmonize it with the first and principal category to which our mission is directed, the article turns to the attitude of the pastor.

Working-class people have cultural values linked with their condition: work, the family, solidarity, hope for a better future, constancy in suffering.

These are already gospel values. To them must be added the typical regard for popular devotions in an environment where the presence of the Lord in history is felt and expressed in a culture pervaded by a sense of the transcendent. "The piety of the people", said the Bishops of Latin America at Puebla, "is a heritage of values which provide a wise christian response to the great questions concerning existence. Popular Catholic wisdom is able to make a vital synthesis: it brings together divine and human elements, body and spirit, communion and institution, individual and community, faith and fatherland, intelligence and sentiment; it is a christian humanism which asserts in radical form the dignity of the individual person as a child of God, it sanctions the fundamental brotherhood of men ... and assigns due reasons for joy and love even in the context of a very hard life".<sup>6</sup>

This double aspect of the common people, with their human and christian values, determines the basic attitude of the salesian, who comes himself from the same group: he recognizes the human and evangelical riches of the people, he reads in the light of salvation history their situation and the better things they are capable of, he supports their common efforts "by all the means that charity suggests". The salesian therefore does not work for the common people as though coming to them from outside, bringing them ways of life and benefits from other sectors, but rather finds first of all what those people already possess as their patrimony which he has to make his own, and then tries to purify and develop it.

<sup>6</sup> *Puebla: concluding document*, n. 448

## Other forms of intervention

After emphasizing the fundamental attitude of the salesian engaged in activities for working-class people, the Constitutions mention some very significant forms of intervention. Don Bosco's phrase already quoted, "*all the means that christian charity suggests*", emphasizes both the breadth of possible interventions (which like charity is boundless), and the animating spirit which moves him, and which is always the pastoral zeal characteristic of our spirit.

But the text suggests certain specific fields of activity, to which salesians are particularly sensitive, since the common people form a collective reality and their formation is influenced by the environment and by family, social and political structures.

Two forms of intervention are pointed out which have a major influence on the religious and cultural formation of the working class, and which respond in fact to the concerns shown by Don Bosco:

— *the care of those who are responsible for education and evangelization in their local area*: if it is true that the environment is of great importance for the formation of the individual, one can easily understand the importance of joining forces and taking an interest in those who have local educational responsibility: parents, teachers, social workers etc.; such people are linked with our own mission and expect the support of the animation we can give them;

— *attention to the family*, "where different generations come together and build the future of mankind". The importance of the family for the growth of the new generations has been affirmed both by the Council and by the 1980 Synod of Bishops.<sup>7</sup> For us Salesians the family is an essential part of the educative community (cf. C 47), and in this light we have to think out and plan our pastoral work.<sup>8</sup>

We must add also our commitment in the field of *social communication* (cf. C 6): we cannot forget Don Bosco's attention to the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GS, Part II, chap. 1; cf. also Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (John Paul II, 1981)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The challenge of Synod-80*, ASC 299 (1981), p. 8

press and the circulating of good books for the education and evangelization of the common people; at the present day we also have more efficacious means available, as will be said later in connection with art. 43.

*Jesus, meek and humble of heart,  
make us compassionate as you were  
in the face of your people's needs.*

*That we may be able to detect in your poor ones  
the gospel values of which you make them bearers,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may sustain the poor and disadvantaged  
in their attempts at human advancement  
and in their efforts to grow in the faith,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may give special attention to the family  
and to the different generations  
who meet and grow in it,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may always provide our generous support  
to all who are involved  
in the evangelization and advancement of your people  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 30 PEOPLE NOT YET EVANGELIZED

People still awaiting the gospel message were the special object of Don Bosco's concern and apostolic effort. They continue to stimulate our zeal and keep it alive. We look upon missionary work as an essential feature of our Congregation.

Through our missionary activity we carry out a patient work of evangelization by founding the Church within a group of people.<sup>1</sup> This work mobilizes all the educational and pastoral means proper to our charism.

Following the example of the Son of God, who made himself in all things like his fellow men, the salesian missionary makes his own the values of these people and shares their hopes and anxieties.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. AG 6

<sup>2</sup> cf. AG 3, 12, 26

### The solicitude of Don Bosco

The article begins from Don Bosco, as did articles 26 and 27. Missionary sensitivity has its roots in our origins.

Many elements and facts in the life of our Founder link the missionary field to others in which the Congregation deploys its forces, and this without any break in continuity. We shall dwell on just three of these facts.

The first was Don Bosco's constant desire to leave for the missions, a desire which his confessor did not approve.<sup>1</sup>

The second was the completely missionary character of his style of pastoral activity, even where the "christian society" was thought to hold sway. This missionary style was evident especially in his desire to go to those who as yet found no place in ecclesial structures: he wanted

<sup>1</sup> Cf. BM II, 160-161; cf. also SGC, 470

to be the "parish priest of boys who had no parish".<sup>2</sup> His purpose was evident also in his efforts to bring the light of faith into secular themes; the desire to link evangelization with every form of human advancement took him to institutions and environments outside the limits usually observed by religious. Even if he did not move away from Turin he was a missionary in mind and style. He felt himself to be 'sent' by God.

The missionary element can be rightly joined to our preference for the poor, because those who have not yet had the Gospel proclaimed to them are in a more grievous state of want than those who lack bread.

The third fact was Don Bosco's immediate response to the opening of missionary possibilities for his Congregation. With the first expedition (1875), which was lived at the Oratory by both Salesians and boys alike as an epoch-making event, began a story which was quite extraordinarily fruitful. There were the missionary dreams, the looks he cast on other continents,<sup>3</sup> his friendships with great missionaries (Lavigerie, Comboni, Allamano), the uninterrupted further missionary departures of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; and finally there was the fact that at Don Bosco's death, 20% of the confreres were "missionaries".<sup>4</sup>

The concern of our Father for peoples not yet evangelized is abundantly documented by letters, projects, enterprises, trials and dreams which would take too long to enumerate.

### **An essential feature of the Congregation**

The missionary trait belongs not only to Don Bosco as an individual, but to his charism as Founder. From him it has passed to the Congregation as a feature of its spiritual and pastoral physiognomy.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM III, 135

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ASC 297 (1980), pp. 19-23

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, 471



From a negative point of view we can say that without missionary work the Congregation would not merely be impoverished, but would be distorted and alienated from its true nature. In it one could no longer recognize the Salesian Society as its Founder had visualized and wanted it.

This statement, the result of long reflection, has been repeated by General Chapters. The GC19, for instance, expressed it as follows: "The Salesian Congregation ... revives the ideal of Don Bosco who wanted the work of the missions to be a permanent preoccupation of the Congregation to the extent of being part of its nature and purpose. ... It therefore reaffirms the *missionary vocation of the Salesian Society* ... and intends that it be known as such in the Church as well as to its own members and cooperators".<sup>5</sup>

The practical consequences of this characteristic are many and varied. It means that a significant proportion of personnel, means and initiatives must be dedicated to the spreading of the Gospel among peoples it has not yet reached. It means too that the Congregation accepts and fosters the development of the vocation of those who feel called to this eminent service. But it also means that the salesian vocation as such has missionary horizons. In this sense every member of the Salesian Society is a missionary in his own way. All foster in their heart a thirst for the expansion of the Kingdom to the very ends of the earth. All are "missionaries" in the specific sense of this article,<sup>6</sup> in Don Bosco's style, in the place where they happen to be working; and even those who are not engaged directly in missionary work offer their collaboration according to the possibilities of each one, by prayer, interest, words and deeds.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Acts GC19, pp. 178-179

<sup>6</sup> "Missionary" is used here in the specific sense of an apostle dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel in the missions "ad gentes", and not in the wider sense used when it is said that salesians are "missionaries of the young"

<sup>7</sup> In the text of the *Constitutions, 1972* we read: "All salesians, even those not specifically involved in missionary work, collaborate according to their possibilities in the coming of the universal Kingdom of Christ" (art. 15)

## The salesian missions

The second part of the article (second and third paragraphs) correlates the reality of the Missions, as presented in the Council documents, with the salesian pastoral identity. Do the salesian Missions have some particular and valuable element arising from our charism?

"The special purpose of this missionary activity", says the decree 'Ad Gentes',<sup>8</sup> "is evangelization and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups in which it has not yet taken root. Thus from the seed which is the Word of God, particular native Churches can be adequately established and flourish the world over". This is typical of all the Missions.

In the case of the Salesians this objective activates and reveals the educational capacity and youth characteristics of their charisma. The charismatic originality is not lost in the overall purpose but gives to the latter its own particular complexion. In other words a "salesian" Mission, in the course of its efforts to form the first nucleus of the people of God will leave in the newly born Church the stamp of the sensitivity of Don Bosco's charism, especially as regards the education of the new generations and concern for problems in the youth sector. It will enable the growing Church to become a place of meeting and of dialogue on the faith and vital concerns between different generations. In this way the Missions are for us not just one work among many others, but the spearhead of Don Bosco's whole charism which, together with the gospel message, presents the spirit, mission, educational method and preferred options of the Congregation.

But a salesian Mission has also two other characteristics: the effort at inculturation and the determination to lay down roots among the local people. The salesian missionary does not give the impression of being one who has brought a religious "message" from elsewhere, but of one who bears witness to Christ's Gospel by making his own

<sup>8</sup> Cf. AG 6

the values of the people and sharing their hopes and anxieties.<sup>9</sup> The Mission is not finished once the Church has been planted. The salesian mission means also the inserting of a particular charisma in a Church for its enrichment. When the original work of foundation is concluded, the charism remains to offer its original contribution within the community now formed.

The example kept always in mind is once again the Son of God, who through the Incarnation makes himself like man in everything. He is the criterion and ascetical model for every missionary who is called "to make himself like his brothers whom he evangelizes". And this is an indication too for the Congregation whose missionary complexion requires that it become truly European, Asian, African, American or Polynesian according to the place where the Lord has called it to work and flourish.

*That salesian missionaries,  
inserted with love and humility  
among the people to whom they are sent,  
may work with faith and courage  
for the patient evangelization of these people,  
we pray to the Lord.*

*That they may display  
a delicate salesian charity,  
by taking care of the poor and suffering,  
of the young and of vocations,  
we pray to the Lord.*

*That following the example of the Son of God  
who made himself in everything like his brothers,  
salesian missionaries may make their own  
the values of the people they evangelize  
and share their hopes and anxieties,  
we pray to the Lord.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. AG 11-12; cf. also SGC, 468

*Grant, O Lord,  
that our Congregation may never lose  
the missionary trend of our beginnings,  
and bestow on all Salesians,  
and especially those who are missionaries  
the ability to make themselves all things to all men,  
so that all may hear the Good News of your Kingdom.*

## OUR PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the accepted year of the Lord" (Lk 4,18,19).*

The context of the gospel quotation is well known. In the liturgy on a feast-day, when the Word of God (in this case Is 61,1-2) with its message of messianic liberation, was ringing in the ears of his hearers, Jesus peremptorily declared, not without giving rise to some scandal (Lk 4,23), that this promise was realized in his mission (4,21). Every service offered by a christian to man follows in the wake of a service performed by Christ, and will inevitably meet with the same kind of obstacles.

What Jesus said in this passage has been called his 'manifesto'; it brought together the cause and deep force of his being and activity (the Spirit of the Lord), the authenticity and fertility of his mission (consecrated by anointing), and the contents of that same mission which are the innovations introduced in life by the Kingdom of God. As in the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5,2-12; Lk 6,20-26), to which these words are equivalent, the central point is the Gospel to the poor which implies liberation from every humanly impossible situation. Briefly, with Jesus the year of grace dawns, the jubilee of the redemption, the restoration of freedom to man, the son of God (cf. Lev 25,8-55).

We know that Christ's 'manifesto' became his constant mode of action, which he continues at the present day through the incomparable example of his life (cf. Acts 10,38). Everything that is for man's good from the standpoint of Christ, under the aspect of total development as it would be called nowadays, is willed by God and therefore by Christ's disciples, with the purity of his aims, the tender nature of his interventions, and his practical actions. There is an analogy with what Don Bosco said and did, and with what the Constitutions reformulate (in the section of chapter IV which begins with art. 31) as an educational and pastoral manifestation for us.

\* \* \*

## ART. 31 TOTAL DEVELOPMENT

Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of his Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order.<sup>1</sup>

We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man.<sup>2</sup> Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form "upright citizens and good christians".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. EN 31

<sup>2</sup> cf. GS 41

<sup>3</sup> *Plan of Regulations of the Oratory*, 1854 (MB II, 46; BM II, 36)

As well as being simple, the structure of this article is very clear. There are two 'nuclei' to be given further analysis: our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, and it carries with it the pastoral originality of our charismatic contribution.

### Participation in the Church's mission

'Mission' is a term which is inexhaustible from a theological point of view. It is used to indicate the redemptive work of the Son of God carried out in loving and obedient union with the Father. Thus in the conciliar decree "Ad gentes" we read: "In order to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and himself, as well as to fashion them into a fraternal community, God determined to intervene in human history in a way both new and definitive. He sent his Son ... For Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real Mediator between God and men".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AG 3

The Holy Spirit too is said to be 'sent', and this serves to emphasize both his union with the Father and the Son and also his nature of a gift from God to men. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin".<sup>2</sup>

These references highlight the divine origin of the Church's mission. It is presented as being clearly directed to the salvation of mankind, which involves many different aspects and activities. Among the principal ones, which in a certain sense also include the others, we may list: the stirring up of faith in individuals and helping them to mature in it, so that "by believing in Jesus Christ they may attain salvation"; the formation of the Church, the community of believers, which is the sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God, already begun in this world; and the transformation by the power of the Gospel of the temporal order, because of the historical and all-embracing nature of salvation: it begins in this world and takes in the whole of man, nature and history: "The Church, at once 'a visible organization and a spiritual community', travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world; it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God".<sup>3</sup>

To this engrossing and complex objective is directed the threefold ministry of the Church, which is a participation in the redeeming power of Christ: proclamation of the Word (prophecy), sanctification, and service of government.

All members of the Church share in this mission in different ways, according to the charismata with which the Spirit constantly enriches the faithful.

Religious share in it by the quite exceptional nature of their life: between religious life and the Church, the mystery of communion of men with God and with each other, there is an eminent relationship

<sup>2</sup> AG 2; cf. LG 3-4

<sup>3</sup> GS 40

of sign and witness. As the Constitution "Lumen gentium" expresses it: "By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the Church and her mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these followers should be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. Thence arises their duty of working to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every land".<sup>4</sup>

It should be noticed that the sharing of religious in the mission of the Church takes on various forms according to the different individual charismata.

The Church is not an ensemble of perfectly equal cells with identical functions, but an organic communion with a diversity of components and a variety of ministries. It is not possible to assign limits to the variety of such components. Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all ages and all men, has limitless possibilities for manifesting himself, and the Spirit is infinite in his capacity for creativity and saving initiatives.

The Church needs many forms and channels for dialogue with all of man and men, and to reveal the overall plan of salvation. The decree "Perfectae caritatis" points out the origin and purpose of this variety: "In keeping with the divine purpose, a wonderful variety of religious communities came into existence. This has contributed considerably towards enabling the Church not merely to be equipped for every good work and to be prepared for the work of the ministry unto

<sup>4</sup> LG 44. This general principle is confirmed in other conciliar documents which deal with specific pastoral areas and which make some particular reference to religious. In the decree "Ad gentes" the intervention and participation of religious is asked for in the first evangelization process and the formation of young Churches (cf. AG 40). In the decree "Inter mirifica" their collaboration is asked for in the apostolate by means of social communication. In the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" prominence is given to their work for the education of youth. Reference could also be made to points in "Evangelii nuntiandi" and "Catechesi tradendae", in which the participation of religious in the Church's action is invoked. "Who does not see the immense contribution that these religious have brought and continue to bring to evangelization? Thanks to their consecration they are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising ... They are often found at the outposts of the mission and they take the greatest of risks for their health and their very lives. Truly the Church owes them much" (EN 69)



the building up of the Body of Christ, but also to appear adorned with the manifold gifts of her children like a bride adorned for her husband, and to manifest in herself the multiform wisdom of God".<sup>5</sup>

All this enables us to understand more deeply the significance of the first paragraph of the article, which makes more explicit what has already been referred to in art. 6 and in the formula of profession itself (cf. C 24).

### **Our charismatic contribution**

In expressing the mission of the Church, in which we share, it is interesting to note that after an all-embracing statement that it "brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom", the article specifies "by bringing to men the message of the Gospel which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order". The force of the statement lies not in the two classical and undeniable pillars of the declaration but rather in the expression "*closely tied in*", which serves as the link with the pastoral option of the Salesians.

The text is evidently inspired by several passages from the documents of Vatican II, of which we quote just one: "The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel".<sup>6</sup> Although the spiritual and temporal orders are distinct, "they are nevertheless so closely linked that God's plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> PC 1

<sup>6</sup> AA 5

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*; cf. also GS 40, 42

It is precisely from this statement that the description of the contribution made by the Salesians to the Church's mission stems, a contribution expressed by three parallel sets of ideas: *we educate and evangelize*, according to a plan for the *total well-being of man directed to Christ*; i.e. our purpose is to form *upright citizens and good christians*.

It is a question of a single objective with two aspects to it, constantly emphasized by Don Bosco and found throughout salesian history: one directed to human advancement and the other to education of the faith. These are part and parcel of the Church's whole missionary tradition, and belong moreover to the spiritual current of religious humanism of St Francis de Sales, translated into pedagogical terms. Don Bosco's words in which he expressed the purpose of his mission are well known: "To win souls for Jesus the Saviour, to do good to young people in danger, to prepare good christians for the Church and upright citizens for civil society, so that in this way all may one day succeed in reaching their home in heaven".<sup>8</sup>

But it should be noted that between these two aspects there is a real *distinction*. There are in fact people dedicated to education and human advancement, but without having in view the proclamation of Jesus Christ; and vice versa.

For the Salesians, however, the two aspects effectively compenetrates, which means that we cannot see how one can proclaim the Gospel without the latter throwing light on the problems of man's existence and providing encouragement and hope for their effective solution; nor how one can conceive of real "human advancement or development" without opening man to God and without proclaiming Christ.

Between the two aspects there is nevertheless an *order of priority*, even though both are christian. The first and most important aspect, which throws light on everything, is the Gospel. Ours is a religious mission. Don Bosco used to say of his Oratory that the playground

<sup>8</sup> This formula, excellent in its simplicity, occurs at the end of the first *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, 12 July 1876 (To the Reader). Leo XIII in a memorable audience of 9 May 1884 said to Don Bosco: "It is your mission to make the world see that one can be a good Catholic and at the same time a good and upright citizen..." (MB XVII, 100)

and games were like "the acrobat's drum" which served to attract the boys, but the heart of the Oratory was catechism.

It is interesting to compare the binary expression of the single objective with other dual expressions of a similar kind scattered here and there in the Rule: we may recall, for instance, the double insertion which the communities try to promote, in the Church and in the world (environments, institutes, areas, etc. : cf. C 6-7); the double qualification for which Salesians are prepared: pastors and educators; the double figure of the member in the community: priest and layman (cf. C 45); the double basic kind of work: that in which the "educational" character predominates, and that which is formally and institutionally "pastoral" (cf. C 42).

The articles which follow will develop this assertion. The fundamental point here is to give prominence to the figure which dominates the whole of the christian humanistic project: Christ, the perfect Man. This is the fundamental thesis of "Gaudium et spes": Christ is the revelation of God, but also the revelation of man, who discovers in Him the true sense of his own existence and his own history. Of the wealth of conciliar texts which refer to this point, it is worth quoting at least one: "*Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man*".<sup>9</sup>

The process of education and temporal development we propose draws its inspiration already from the event of Christ, understood in all its anthropological force: the Incarnation shows us the paths and content of our pastoral work. But the vertex is the proclamation of Christ which brings with it all the consequences of dignity and development which we do not think should be allowed to remain merely "implicit" or a secondary element, but intimately linked with man's growth.

<sup>9</sup> GS 41. Worth recalling is the passage from *Gravissimum educationis* which sums up the task of education as follows: "(Christian education) not only develops the maturity of the human person ..., but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized ... should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth. Thus they should come to true manhood, which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ" (GE 2)

This is true of every religious institute which shows an original quality in its interventions in the pastoral field. But organically planned pastoral work calls on religious not to do anything and everything of which there is need, but to be and to do precisely what they were raised up for by the Holy Spirit.

This is a criterion for efficacious results, a norm for participation, and a requirement for fidelity to the Institute or Congregation, which is called to contribute to the building of the Church according to its own charisma.

It is true for our own Society, which shares the mission of the Church with a specific task, in fidelity to Don Bosco. This is something which shapes the whole life of the salesian and his path to holiness. Here is applicable what was said in article 3 of the Rule and at n. 8 of the decree "Perfectae caritatis".

*Let us pray to God our Father,  
who in the Risen Christ  
gave the Church its foundation  
to build it as the sign and instrument of salvation,  
and who in the Holy Spirit  
enriches it with ever new charismata.*

*You have made us depositaries of a specific mission,  
which in communion of spirit and action with your people  
reaches and gives life to the very roots  
of people and cultures.*

*Make us docile to the indications of time and place  
in detachment from ourselves  
and unqualified adherence to the Gospel.*

*In Christ you have revealed to us your countenance,  
and the image of the perfect man,  
corresponding to your loving designs.  
Make us able to cooperate with you  
through our work of education and evangelization,  
in human advancement according to your plan.*

*Through the example of Don Bosco  
you have taught us to seek the overall good  
of the young entrusted to our care.  
Keep us faithful to his teachings  
in forming them as good christians  
and upright citizens.*

## ART. 32 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As educators we work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity.

According to circumstances we share our food with them and further their trade skills and cultural advancement.

Always and in every case we help them to be open to truth and to develop in themselves a responsible freedom. To this end we commit ourselves to inculcating in them a convinced appreciation of true values which will lead them to a life of dialogue and service.

### Educators

The first thing to note in this article is the opening expression: "*As educators*". Education, educators, educative, educational: these are terms which constantly occur and they indicate a real service option that we make, and one that is characteristic of the Congregation. They define an area of work, that of individual personal development; but also, and more especially, they indicate a style of guiding presence, a method which shapes the whole of our pastoral activity, including the proclamation of the Gospel.

"Don Bosco stands before the world and the Church as an '*Educator-Saint*', a man who achieved holiness through educating".<sup>1</sup> His pastoral concern "was characterized by the choice of education as his special field of action and mode of apostolic activity".<sup>2</sup>

It must be said of today's salesian too that he is not only an apostle and shepherd of young people, but an educator as well — an educator who is at the same time an apostle, prophet and witness to

<sup>1</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 30

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* p. 29

the Gospel. His distinguishing characteristic is that he offers his educating message in learning conditions known by experience to be suited to the recipients, he accompanies the individual in his laborious process of assimilating the values of what he is taught, and helps him to grow by enabling him to take advantage of all his potentialities.

The Rector Major writes: "Don Bosco's pastoral activity was never limited to mere catechesis or liturgy; it ranged over all the educational and cultural areas according to the needs of the youth situation. The setting he chose for his apostolate was the field of human development ... convinced that this was the soil for the gospel seed that would help the young take their proper place in the world".<sup>3</sup> None of the interior qualities which contribute to the make-up of an individual is a matter of indifference to the educator. If education is to be a help to the development of personal resources so that they may all flourish and the individual may reach maturity, the educator must not select in the subject only those features which interest him personally, either to develop them or leave them aside. Education does not consist in getting the individual used to certain circumstances, nor is it only a matter of socialization or inculturation. The central point of interest in the educational process is the individual person.

The article adopts a personalized definition of education: "*We work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity*". It is a definition inspired by the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" which says: "True education is directed towards the formation of the human person... Children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They should be trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty".<sup>4</sup> It is clear that a concept of education like this, which has as its principal subject the young person himself, with the educator as a help and his personal resources as the driving force, is far from the idea of

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 30

<sup>4</sup> GE 1

education as recruitment for some ideology, and even from the intention by the educator to mould the person according to his own personal view of life.

## An educational process

For this development of the individual to maturity the Salesians follow a certain process. The first step is to help the youngsters to shake off negative conditioning elements like compelling needs for food, lodging and family. One speaks delicately of the "wretched state" of others and defines help as a "*sharing*" of bread rather than just giving it. The expression brings us back to those we work for by preference, the young who are poor, and to the threefold aspect of Don Bosco's work: relief, educational and pastoral activity all joined together in the supremely charitable intention and desire of the individual's salvation.<sup>5</sup>

To this first step is added a second constructive stage of *training in some kind of work*, by which the youngsters must be able to enter society, earn an honest living, and develop their own capabilities.

But the aim of education is not only to provide the young person with a means of livelihood or to prepare working man-power for society's needs. There is a third and important step to be taken, that of *cultural formation*, which enables the individual to develop all his own possibilities, to make contact with various communities and the whole of humanity, and to freely assess the significance, merits and manner of realization which constitute their true wealth and real riches. Culture means savoir faire, relationships with others, convictions, implicit and explicit norms of conduct, personal awareness, a sense of belonging, a commitment under various forms to the dignity of man. Rightly does the document of the Latin-American Bishops at Puebla declare: "The

<sup>5</sup> In the text of the Constitutions Don Bosco expressed the triple aspect of activity carried out for the benefit of needy youth as follows: "They will be given clothing, food and lodging; and while they are being instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they will also be learning some art or trade" (cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 4; F. MOTTO, p. 75)



word 'culture' indicates the particular way in which in a given people the members conceive and develop their relationships with nature, with each other, and with God".<sup>6</sup> "Culture embraces everything in the life of a people".<sup>7</sup>

The educational process which begins in the liberation from conditioning elements, is extended in the preparation for some profession, is deepened in the acquisition of a cultural outlook, and leads eventually to an *"openness to truth and the building of a responsible freedom"*. These are not strictly successive steps, though they have a certain hierarchical order between them. In "cultural formation", in fact, we have the vertex of the development of the individual.

It is clear that education does not consist in simply acquiring ideas, assimilating norms, or conforming to accepted forms of behaviour: it is directed at the main nucleus of the person. The words have been carefully chosen. Truth is something to which one can only "open" oneself; it is not something ready-made and handed out, but is offered to a youngster who can attentively seek it and accept it. Freedom is something that has to be built: it is a conquest which becomes consolidated little by little, despite numerous setbacks, by control of one's life and actions and through a generous response to the calls of truth and love. Full maturity is reached when the subject adopts and sets in harmonious order a frame of values which enlarge his life. The GC21 expressed this ensemble of values as follows: "In terms of personal growth we want to help the boy to build a sound and balanced humanity, by fostering and promoting:

- a gradual maturing in freedom, in the assuming of his own personal and social responsibilities, in the clear perception of values;
- a carefree and positive relationship with persons and things that will nurture and stimulate his creativity and reduce conflict and tension;

<sup>6</sup> Puebla, final document; n. 386

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* n. 387

- the capacity to maintain a dynamic and critical attitude in the face of events, to be faithful to the values of tradition and be open to the needs of history, so as to become capable of making consistent personal decisions;
- a prudently given education in sex and in love that will help him to understand the dynamics of growth, of giving and of encounter, within a plan of life;
- the quest and planning of his future in order to liberate and direct towards a precise vocational choice the immense potential hidden in the destiny of every boy, even in one less endowed as a human being".<sup>8</sup>

This lengthy quotation will serve to show how much analytical reflection lies beneath the selection of the few words of the constitutional text.

## The educational method

The manner of putting all this process into practice belongs to the educational theme, as also do others that will be described in later articles. Education is not characterized by the enunciation of values that a young person or adult must assimilate (this is a fundamental contribution of faith and also of philosophy and theology which underlie it), but by their translation into structures of learning, proportioned to the learning ability of the subjects concerned. The art of education implies also a pedagogy.

The article emphasizes some aspects of great importance.

— *The young person is himself the chief agent* in his own development and in the processes which concern him. The educator "collaborates" or "helps". This attitude is dictated not only by educational expediency, but is rooted in faith in the face of a mystery which

<sup>8</sup> GC21, 90

every individual carries within him, and in the conviction that between the individual and God there takes place a mysterious dialogue of salvation which cannot be interfered with from outside, a dialogue which covers not only "religious" themes but all life's decisions.

— Hence *the action of the educator*: it develops through motivations, the responsible growth of freedom, the attractive presentation of values and principles. This last expression recalls Don Bosco's maxim: "Let the beauty, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic religion be dwelt on".<sup>9</sup> No conviction or principle takes root in a man unless it is seen in the perspective of a response to profound needs. To inculcate a taste for these things means raising questions, helping to formulate them, accompanying the search for a response, and starting valid experiences.

— But for education it is not enough to just say or repeat things. There is a current utopian idea in circulation that seems convinced that a good proposition repeated often enough with captivating phrases will automatically produce stable attitudes leading to deep-rooted convictions. But education knows very well that values and principles which are expounded or presented have got to be translated into *learning processes*. And so to the interior mobilization caused by the presentation must be added the patient work of building "convictions", and directing towards practical action. Education therefore is not only a case of accompaniment or following up, but is also the putting forward, on the basis of the adult experience of the educator, of the authoritative framework of values which he himself lives and which gives quality to the guidance he offers.

What sort of configuration must we give to this *educative ministry*? Are we merely concerned onlookers, or do we share with the youngsters a growth experience? Just professional educators or signs of the proximity of God? The educator is a communicator: he shares his own experience of humanity, which develops in the search for and adherence to values which he proposes to others: he is like a father who communicates life-giving energy.

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249-250

*Let us ask God's help  
that we may be able to correspond fully  
with our mission as educators.*

*That in the awareness of our educational task  
we may be able to offer to young people  
with competence and generosity  
the bread of body and spirit,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help young people  
to open themselves to all truth  
and build within themselves true freedom,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That by cultivating in ourselves a deep taste  
for authentic human and christian values,  
we may be able to pass them on to others,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with our help  
young people may come to understand  
that freedom is realized  
in the love and service of others,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 33 SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Don Bosco saw clearly the social implications of his work.

We labour in economically distressed areas and for poor youth. We collaborate with them, educating them to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility. In this way we contribute to the development of both people and environment.

We share in a way appropriate to religious in the witness and commitment of the Church to justice and peace. While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity.

The advancement to which we dedicate ourselves in the spirit of the Gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which makes men free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us.

An immediate consideration of the social significance of our service is inevitable. This is not only because every pastoral intervention, even of a purely religious nature, has reference to the human community in which it takes place, necessarily taking on a social aspect, but also for quite special reasons related to our charism. In fact one cannot speak of a "sign and presence in the area of poverty" without considering its social and collective implications. We cannot work effectively for the young who are poor and for people of the working classes without coming to realize that their individual development is inevitably linked to their collective development. What has changed with regard to certain situations of the last century is the fact that at the present day we are faced not only with poor people, but with a poverty which has become a structural phenomenon of worldwide proportions.

Furthermore our place in the field of education means that we cannot fail to take into account the function of education as regards the social system and its preservation or transformation.

The article gives us four points to think about.

— The reference to Don Bosco (first paragraph).

- The principal aspects of our participation in the transformation of society (second and third paragraphs).
- The fundamental sources from which our interventions take their inspiration (second and third paragraphs).
- The sense of the interventions in the unity of the mission.

## Don Bosco

The reference to Don Bosco is both rich and opportune. About his social sense a great deal has been written.<sup>1</sup> On the ability to place his own intervention in the wider vision of the transformation of society we read: "The society Don Bosco had in mind and of which his boys would be active citizens was to be an ideal christian society, built on the new ideals of relative equality, of peace and justice, ensured by sound morality and religion. Just as the individual should be a good christian and upright citizen, so the society constructed by his efforts should be an environment of peace and well-being, and at the same time a stimulus to faith and salvation".<sup>2</sup>

An indication of Don Bosco's determination to intervene in the "public" area were the numerous visits he made to government ministers in support of the education of youth, and his appraisal of the prevailing social phenomena in conformity with the mentality of the time. He wanted all his work to be a process of social reformation through the education of the young, whom he considered to be the real "secret" and key for the improvement of the whole of society.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. SPALLA, *Don Bosco e il suo ambiente socio-politico*, LDC Turin 1975; F. DESRAMAUT, *L'azione sociale dei cattolici nel sec. XIX e quella di Don Bosco* in *"L'impegno della Famiglia salesiana per la giustizia"*. Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1976, p. 21-87; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, LAS Rome 1980

<sup>2</sup> *"Progetto educativo pastorale"*, ed. J. VECCHI and J.M. PRELLEZO, LAS Rome 1974, p. 81; cf. also *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, ed. P. BRAIDO, LAS Rome 1981, p. 344-350; P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, LAS Rome 1982, p. 10. 21. 22-24

On the other hand he always let it be known that he kept out of politics, in the sense that being fully occupied in working for the good of poor people, he took sides neither with those in power nor against them. The "politics of the Our Father", which he advocated, meant giving people through the Word of God, education and places where they could come together, as well as reasons, means and motives for living and for pursuing their aspirations by peaceful means.

## Aspects of our social commitment

The second and third paragraphs of the article highlight two aspects of the part we play in the transformation of society.

The first is linked with our task as educators: in an unequal society we have care of environments in need of development, overcoming the concept of education as a personal advantage and favouring movements of change: *"we educate to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility"*.

This statement contains an implicit reference to Don Bosco, who was always so concerned to make "upright citizens" of his boys. But the expression in the article does not immediately reveal all its content; it could be interpreted in an individualistic sense, particularly as regards its reference to moral and professional aspects. One has to ask what meaning attaches at the present day to "upright citizens", in societies where they are often subjected to injustice, or in others beset by moral problems, or still others where human rights are publicly set at nought with impunity. It means taking sides in a peaceful and courageous struggle for justice, for the creation of a real spirit of brotherhood, to draw attention to those in greatest need, and to raise the level of public morality. The need becomes evident to look into the general perspective of the education we provide (which is never individualistic), and to revise the particular section of social formation, so much recommended by the Church's magisterium.

The second aspect is connected with our status as religious: we are called to *bear radical witness to justice and peace*. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "Our educative work for justice in the world becomes

credible to the extent that the individual salesian and the community at all levels are authentic witnesses to justice".<sup>3</sup> We must emphasize the particular perspective of this task of ours: our witness is a sharing in the mission of the Church herself in favour of justice and peace. In this connection we may recall the extent to which Papal Encyclicals and documents of the Magisterium have repeatedly urged christians to play an active and convinced part in the social sector.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly on our part we must avoid all equivocation and accept the hard demands of this task: we must offer the world concrete proofs. We shall find some indications in this regard in the articles concerning our works, their collocation, and the services they provide.

To our pastoral educational task and the witness we have to give is added the action expressed in two verbs: we "*reject*" everything that encourages deprivation, and we "*cooperate*" with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity. The second is more direct. In art. 7 it was said that by our pastoral activity we want to "bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ". With this the SGC links the first aspect — education: "One educates more through what one is than through what one says. Our mission for young people, and above all for the poorest of them, requires from our communities a type of presence and global attitude towards the poor themselves and towards the movement (more or less organized) with which they attempt to achieve their rights to a more human life".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 70

<sup>4</sup> V. in detail the doctrine of the Church on social questions in the teaching of recent Popes: JOHN XXIII, Encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (15.05.1961) and *Pacem in terris* (AAS 55, 1963, 257-304); PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum progressio* (AAS 59, 1967, 257-299) and Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* (AAS 63, 1971, 401-404); JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens* (AAS 73, 1981, 577-647). Cf. also the Synod of Bishops (1977) on commitment for justice and peace, and the two Instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instructions on certain aspects of the 'Theology of liberation'* (AAS 76, 1984, 876-877) and *Instruction on christian freedom and liberation* (1986)

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 70



## Principles underlying these interventions

Whence arises our social commitment and how is it regulated?

In the first place, as has been said already, it arises from *our status as religious and apostles*.<sup>6</sup> By working for justice in the world we do not distance ourselves from our religious mission. From the latter come the spirit and intentions which go into our efforts, and also the practical attitudes studied by the SGC. It is required therefore that our words and interventions shall have as their living *source* and soul the love of Christ the Saviour, and as their *motivation* the demands of the Gospel and the will to come to the aid of Christ himself in those who suffer injustice; as their *purpose* there must be our cooperation in affirming the Kingdom by animating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel, and as their *style* that of Don Bosco, an easy approachability through kindly dialogue based on love.<sup>7</sup> Our text speaks of the "spirit of the Gospel": this is an indication which must make us very demanding in our love for justice and for the poor, and at the same time rules out any attitude not inspired by Christ's teaching. We need to keep in mind the strong words of St Paul: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13,3).

Secondly, our commitment is based on *ecclesial communion*. In this field, as indeed in others, we cannot act only in accordance with our own ideas nor only when the spirit of generosity spontaneously moves us; we are inserted in the local Church, and we take part in its activity in a timely and consistent manner. From this derive certain practical indications which we can do no more than enumerate: move with the local Church without lagging behind or sniping at it; compare our own criteria for intervention with those put forward by the Church; agree on our interventions with those who guide the Church, especially in extraordinary circumstances or in a society where there

<sup>6</sup> On the social obligations of religious, cf. in particular *Religious profession and human development*, CRIS 1980

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SGC, 77

is a high level of conflict. This is important because social and political situations vary considerably with time and place; it is up to the local Church, and especially its Pastors, to decide on the most opportune mode of action.<sup>8</sup>

From these principles a third criterion derives: *our independence from party politics and current ideologies*. The Church's experience has enabled her to distinguish between the possibilities open to a layman, a religious or a pastor as regards interventions in the political sector.

This experience has in fact been expressed in canon law: Clerics and religious "are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions..."<sup>9</sup> A clear distinction between what is pre-political, political in a wide sense, and political in its specific sense can be of great use in defining the particular field of intervention of each one.

The indication of art. 33 goes beyond the minimum laid down by the Code, and calls on us Salesians to be aware that the values of the Kingdom contain and express in universal and efficacious form the energy and strength required for the building of a society much more than does any political structure, and therefore to be faithful to our profession as witnesses to the love and power of Christ.

We can sum up all this by saying that it corresponds to a *salesian overall criterion*, an expression of the particular character of our charism. Don Bosco would have liked to formulate this in an article which he tried three times to insert in the Constitutions, as he tells us himself: "Convinced as I was of the importance (of this argument), I once more

<sup>8</sup> On the importance of ecclesial communion in the commitment for justice and peace, cf. the Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*: "The Church's social teaching is born of the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society... As an 'expert in humanity', the Church offers by her social doctrine a set of principles for reflection and criteria for judgement and also directives for action so that the profound changes demanded by situations of poverty and injustice may be brought about, and this in a way which serves the true good of humanity" (n. 72)

<sup>9</sup> CIC, can 287 §2

inserted it in 1874 when the Constitutions had to be approved article by article by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. They struck it out a third time".<sup>10</sup> But times have changed; the present day consultors of the Apostolic See gave particular praise to art. 33 of our text!

The salesian overall criterion comprises the three aspects already indicated ("religious" mission, ecclesial "communion", political and ideological independence), and brings them harmoniously together in an *approach so deeply pastoral in tone* as to avoid everything that could distance us from young people and their integral education, and at the same time lead to constructive dialogue with all those responsible for the common good, without regard to their religious faith.

The Rector Major, Fr Luigi Ricceri, in the letter he wrote on "The Salesians and political responsibility", recalls that "our activity must always start out from the perspective of the salesian vocation... We cannot lose our identity, we cannot take on a type of activity that, even though it be christian, is characteristic of other vocations... There may even be among the confreres a distinct mentality, a different way of looking at events; but the criterion that guides our pastoral decisions and our particular attitudes, community ones above all, will be the pastoral perspectives of Don Bosco's apostolic plan: 'to be in a salesian way the signs and bearers of God's love for young people, especially the poorest of them'".<sup>11</sup>

## The sense of our interventions

The last paragraph of the article takes up once again the theme of the unity of our mission and shows how all this task, which might seem profane in nature, is in fact closely linked with the work of education of the faith. Unity is ensured by the conscience of the salesian,

<sup>10</sup> BM XIII, 195

<sup>11</sup> L. RICCERI, *Salesians and political responsibility*, ASC 284 (1976), p. 53

guided and enlightened by fundamental reference to the liberating love of Christ, effected through a variety of activities. In whatever the salesian does therefore, even through human elements, he intends to be a "sign and bearer of the love of God for the young". There are two further elucidations which are interesting: the first declares in discreet fashion that for those in situations of unjust dependence or want, the work of "development" necessarily takes on the form of liberation willed by Christ the Saviour; the second says that such work, from a human point of view, is "tangible", i.e. a sign through which the Kingdom can be shown and expressed. The service of development is a "preparation for the faith" for those who do not yet have it, and a stimulus and support of the faith for those who already possess it: both are able to recognize in the dedication of which they are the beneficiaries, a sign of Christ's truth, made known to them through good works.

*Let us pray to the Lord  
that he may broaden our intelligence  
and remove all limits from our love and charity.*

*That we may work with complete dedication  
for the good of those entrusted to our care,  
inculcate in them a sense of the common good,  
and form them for their personal and social responsibilities,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in our mission as religious  
we may commit ourselves with constant fidelity  
to collaborate with the Church  
in working for justice and peace,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That at the basis of every plan and effort  
we may always place our faith in Christ's resurrection,  
the source of life and energy  
for its full development,  
and may not give way to the lure*

*of ideologies or party divisions,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in the spirit of the Gospel,  
and in the strength of the liberating love of Christ,  
we may reject all injustice and violence  
and be able to collaborate  
with all who work for justice and peace,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 34 EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

"This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson".<sup>1</sup> For us too evangelization and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.<sup>2</sup>

We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed,<sup>3</sup> who helps and who infuses hope.

<sup>1</sup> MB IX, 61; BM IX, 35

<sup>2</sup> cf. Eph 3,8-19

<sup>3</sup> cf. Lk 1,45

### The fundamental dimension of the salesian mission

In the salesian educational project there is a central aspect which sheds light on and gives colour to the whole plan; existentially we have it much at heart: it is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the introduction to his mystery. As the various aspects presented in this chapter follow one another, we find that there is a hierarchy among them, and the dimension we call "fundamental" is that of evangelization and catechesis.

Evangelization is understood as the announcement or proclamation of Jesus and comprises every method from a simple silent witness which gives rise to questions, to insertion in the christian community and active involvement in its mission.<sup>1</sup> In it, as the word itself in-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. EN 41-47

dicates, is included the intention to arouse faith and the way in which Christ is made known as offering salvation.

Catechesis on the other hand means an organic presentation of the christian mystery to those who have given a positive response to the proclamation and have reached the stage of making a first choice of faith. Catechesis provides a complete and systematic introduction to the christian community. It represents an aspect or particular phase of the overall process of evangelization.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the term "evangelization" has come to be used at the present day not only for the first proclamation but for the whole process of the vital acceptance of the message of Christ and the conversion of mind and heart, reveals a certain spirit: that of the apostle, aware that he is proclaiming something new. It also indicates a method and style for all the other phases: the proclamation of Christ is to be made and renewed in christian initiation and at every moment in life.

The expressions used in this article to stress the evangelizing and catechetical dimension indicate our role both of "*missionaries*" to those who have never known Christ, those to whom he has not been sufficiently presented or who have forgotten him, and of "*catechists*" among those who are growing in the faith.

By calling this dimension "*fundamental*" the text is not emphasizing only the quantitative aspect of the commitment, but rather the inspiration underlying the whole process of education: a process positively directed to Christ, in whose Gospel it finds its motivation and inspiration.<sup>3</sup> The same human formation described in the previous article is inspired by motives stemming from faith, on account of which the sense of duty is "religious" and social relationships have their roots in the charity that comes from God; morality is based on the natural order which is a manifestation of the divine law, but to a much greater extent on the teachings of faith. The educational synthesis of Don Bosco is characterized by religious and christian animation. In the whole

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CT 18

<sup>3</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 35

ensemble therefore, there is something which comes "first" in importance, a fundamental dimension: the religious heart of the youngster that awaits the good news of Jesus, which the educator should not delay in providing.

This is confirmed in the article by a phrase of Don Bosco culled from a brief history of the Society sent by our Founder to the Bishop of Casale, from whom he was seeking commendatory letters in favour of his Congregation. In connection with the purpose which had led to the foundation Don Bosco wrote: "*This Society's origins* are found in the simple catechetical instructions conducted by Fr John Bosco in a hall adjacent to the Church of St Francis of Assisi".<sup>4</sup> The statement is amply borne out in the Constitutions themselves and in other writings and declarations of our Father.<sup>5</sup>

### Educators to the faith

What does it imply for us that we make evangelization and catechesis the fundamental dimension of our mission? The expression which defines us, "*educators to the faith*", gives the right slant to what is said in the first paragraph.

Negatively it means that we are not only "preachers", nor are we only "catechists" in the strict sense. Positively it emphasizes the ability to open up youngsters to the faith by various ways and means. Educa-

<sup>4</sup> BM IX, 35

<sup>5</sup> In art. 3 of the Constitutions of 1875 we read: "The first exercise of charity shall be to gather together poor and neglected boys, in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, and this more especially on Festivals" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 75). The following expression of Don Bosco's biographer is significant: "*With Don Bosco the study of religion always ranked first*" (BM III, 146; cf. BM XIV, 362). Don Bosco's concern about catechism is also clearly evident from the books he wrote for the catechesis of the young and the masses: they number more than thirty (cf. G.C. ISOARDI, *L'azione catechetica di san Giovanni Bosco nella pastorale giovanile*, LDC Turin 1974; P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo per fanciulli ad uso della Diocesi di Torino" di Don Bosco*, LAS Rome 1979; N. CERRATO, *La catechesi di Don Bosco nella sua Storia Sacra*, LAS Rome 1979)



tion means using objective means to make the subject's latent possibilities flourish, to open him to a world of values and salvation events from which he can make his own choice because motives and the desire of the faith have been made active in him.

While the direct teaching of catechism is given its proper value in the article, it is also said that this is a task in which we are all involved without exception, whatever kind of activity we may be assigned to.

*"We are all called ... at every opportunity"* is a very expressive phrase. There is no difference of purpose between the task of those who are directly teaching catechism, and those who teach other subjects of a non-religious nature, or who are engaged in other work. Our life is not divided up between profane occupations without directly christian links, and pastoral work. By means of every relationship, every activity, be it cultural, recreational or specifically religious, we try to centre life on faith.

Education to faith implies a *vital communication process*. We look first, therefore, not to content or methodology but to the Person of Jesus Christ, the Communicator par excellence; the text expresses this in a manner which clearly recalls St Paul's words: *"our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal the unfathomable riches of his mystery"* (cf. Eph 3,8-19).

What precisely is this knowledge of Christ? It means the features of a deep personal daily relationship with Christ; frequent attention to his word and mystery; seeing problems of personal and social life through his eyes; the careful study of all that is needed to be able to communicate him to "little ones". It is a combination of personal experience with pastoral concern! Knowledge and science! Evangelization and catechesis means revealing his "unsearchable riches"; educating to the faith means introducing others to the mystery of Christ, man's salvation. Rather than a simple task to be performed, it is a joy; rather than an obligation imposed by the Constitutions, it is an attraction we cannot resist.

The text reflects a wonderful page from the Apostolic Exhortation *"Evangelii nuntiandi"*: "Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us — as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul,

for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history — an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be *the great joy of our consecrated lives*. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world".<sup>6</sup>

### **Walking side by side with the young towards the Lord, accompanied by Mary**

After looking at the person of the educator to the faith, the article goes on to describe his ministry in educative terms.

*Walking side by side with the young* does not mean inculcating a belief. It implies at least two things. In the first place it requires that the educator himself must advance in his faith, urged on by the challenges and stimulus he receives from the youth situation in the face of the Good News: by communicating the faith, he develops his own.

On the other hand the phrase means accepting the youngsters' point of departure, their rate of progress, and being open to the fact that not everyone's path will be the same. It is not at all the same thing as following a previously defined programme. St Paul likens the communication of faith to the process of generation.<sup>7</sup> Anyone who does not accept this can go on repeating formulas, but it is doubtful whether he will kindle faith in the midst of life's dynamism.

<sup>6</sup> EN 80

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gal 4,19

The objective of evangelization is the *personal encounter with the Lord*. At the centre of faith there is the relationship with the Person of Jesus. Through this encounter the youngster should discover the unifying sense of his existence, establish a constant coalescence between faith and life, and build a new personality modelled on Christ.

There are three expressions that call for meditation: "to lead them to the risen Lord", "to discover the meaning of their own existence", "to grow as new men". The declaration "Gravissimum educationis" expresses the purpose of Catholic education in a similar way: "It enables young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in baptism".<sup>8</sup>

In our presentation of the faith, at the side of Jesus and forming part of his mystery there is always *his Mother*. The youthful holiness which flourished in the first Oratory has provided us with a formula which illustrates the union of these two figures: "My friends will be Jesus and Mary".<sup>9</sup> From the many aspects of Mary that could have been referred to, the article chooses three which have a particular relationship with the young: *motherly presence, model of faith, source of hope*.

The motherhood of Mary is recalled in the general sense of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth; ... in the birth and development of the brethren of her Son she cooperates with a Mother's love".<sup>10</sup> For young people this reference to Mary as Mother has a unique touch about it. In the first place it suggests that she is alongside them in their far from easy growth in grace; secondly it gives the sense of a feeling presence in a phase of life prone to loneliness, discouragement and trials; and finally it offers a model of life open to God on which they can model their own existence.

In this way Mary is seen to be the Helper of the young in their pilgrimage towards the Lord: *She "who believed, who helps and who infuses hope"*.

<sup>8</sup> GE 8

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (cf. OE XI, p. 170)

<sup>10</sup> IG 62-63

*God the Father sent his Son  
to evangelize the poor.  
Let us ask him to keep us faithful  
in continuing Christ's work.*

*That we may always consider  
evangelization and catechesis  
as the central aspect of our mission,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our members, always and in every circumstance,  
may be able  
to open the minds of young people to the faith  
and lead them to the person of the Risen Lord,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our highest knowledge  
may be to know Jesus Christ,  
and our deepest joy to communicate to all  
the unsearchable riches of his mystery,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help the young  
to discover in Christ and in the Gospel  
the true sense of their existence  
and to grow as new men,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may point out to our young people  
the Mother of God  
as the first believer and support of the Church,  
the model of all faith and service,  
and that we may be able to lead them  
to know and love her,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 35 INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIAL LIFE

We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it.

To this end we promote and animate groups and movements for formation and apostolic and social action. In these the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world and to the life of the Church, and so become themselves the "first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AA 12

### Introduction to ecclesial experience: groups and movements

The life of the Church is a life of deep communion in faith, hope and charity. It is also the life of a visible community, in love and brotherly communication, in celebrations and in activity, under the direction of those who have been called to preside over it. It is primarily a spiritual (communion with God in Christ), personal and community fact: a sharing in the building of the Kingdom. But it is also an *experience* which one gets and learns from by personally living it while knowledge and awareness of it is developed through communication and deeper analysis.

This is why the text of the Rule emphasizes that among the objectives the Salesians have in mind is that of *introducing the young to an experience of Church*. This means that they must be gradually introduced into the christian community so that eventually they become involved in it and share its life in what belongs to it more specifically, i.e. witnessing to the gospel spirit of love. It has already been said (cf. C 6, 13, 31), and will be explained later at greater length (cf. C 44, 48), that our mission, and therefore the educational and pastoral plan which sustains it, is an ecclesial mission and tends to the building of an authentic christian community.

The proposal offered by the Salesians to the young as an educational process for gaining a personal experience of Church consists in *groups and movements*. These are one of the characterizing elements of salesian education and evangelization, and are indispensable to the salesian plan.<sup>1</sup> Their history goes all the way back to Don Bosco and his Oratory. In a circular on "Youth Groups, Movements and Communities" the Rector Major wrote: "The tendency to live and work in groups and the desire for community life was almost a spontaneous experience in the life of our Founder Don Bosco. He had a natural inclination to be sociable and to make friends... He was industrious and creative in his dealings with the boys from the hamlet of the Becchi and the nearby villages; the *Società dell'Allegria* which he organized at the school in Chieri, the experience of community life and friendship at the seminary, indicate already in embryo his high opinion and concern for group activity which would later find concrete expression in the salesian sodalities".<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco the educator clearly expressed his ideas in a circular letter to the confreres on 12 January 1876: "In each house let everyone take a great interest in fostering youth associations ... Do not be afraid to talk about them, to encourage them, and to explain their purpose... *It is my firm belief that these groups can be called the key to prayer life, the safeguard of morality, and the support of religious and priestly vocations*".<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco's intuitive idea has been followed up in the Congregation's practice, which has kept pace with the evolution of the same theme in the Church and which has been referred to in every one of the recent General Chapters.<sup>4</sup>

At the level of ecclesial communion it is not difficult to understand the significance of these groups, given that the universal Church is made concrete and rendered visible in the particular Churches, and that these in turn are visible in smaller communities. In this way the

<sup>1</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Youth groups, movements and communities*, ASC 294 (1979), p. 10-11

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 7

<sup>3</sup> *Collected letters*, III, p. 7-8

<sup>4</sup> For a deeper analysis of this theme cf. "The salesian plan for group activity", Department for Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1985

communion of life and love which has its source in Christ flows in a double sense under the guidance of the Spirit: from the universal Church to the particular Churches, and from these to the smaller communities; and in the other direction from the minor communities to the particular Churches and from these to the universal Church. Communion too at the present day is not expressed only in local structures, but overcomes territorial boundaries and becomes concrete in associations united by christian ideals which are shared and celebrated together.

For young people entry into the larger ecclesial communities would give rise to the risk of losing one's individual personality, of ritualism, of a clash between external aspects and constitutive elements. The experience of group life provides an important intermediate stage between the individual (with his risk of loneliness and self-interest) and the large mass (with its risk of anonymity), and little by little helps to develop the sense of belonging.

For this reason recent General Chapters have opted for groups, "so that communities may become truly apostolic and each individual can be integrated into the christian community".<sup>5</sup> A glance through Chapter documents and the subsequent indications of Superiors reveals some significant observations on the role of the group in educational environments:

- For a youngster the group is the best environment for efficacious self-development: the place where he can grow at a personal, affective and relational level and find solutions to his problems.
- The group provides the most immediate space for responding to questions on the sense and meaning of life, which among youth are the things most sought after.
- The group offers room for creativity, and makes possible an opening to the neighbourhood and society and the first opportunity for a commitment to service, sharing and participation.
- The group is fundamentally the best environment for providing the young person with an experience of Church and community

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 321

where the gospel values of "come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39) can be tried out.

— On this account the group becomes the best place for seeking and developing vocations (cf. C 37).

Part of our general plan therefore is the intention to animate and foster youth groups and movements, and offer this experience to the greatest possible number of youngsters. The Rector Major spoke of this in the circular already quoted:<sup>6</sup> the reactivation of the preventive system today is linked in practice with the fostering of group initiatives among the young. Today this can be one of the best expressions of our "new presence" in harmony with the "Oratory" concept, which is at the very foundation of our charisma (cf. C 40).

It is encouraging to recall what Pope John Paul II said on 5 May 1979 to a big crowd of young people who had come to Rome to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the canonization of St Dominic Savio, founder of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception: "You are expecting from the Pope a word of guidance and encouragement... My suggestion for you and for all those in charge of your human and christian education concerns the urgent need felt nearly everywhere of the revival of sound models of Catholic youth associations.

"It is not a question of creating militant expressions deprived of the impetus of ideals and based on the force of numbers, but of animating real communities, instilled with the spirit of kindness, mutual respect and service, and above all made compact by the same faith and the one unique hope.

"In belonging to a group, in the spontaneity of a homogeneous circle of friends, in constructive comparison of ideas and initiatives, in mutual support, the vitality of that social renewal to which you all aspire can be established and preserved...

*"This is a pressing invitation that I address to all those responsible for the christian education of youth".<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 10 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 4-5



## What kind of youth groups and movements?

In the constitutional text there are two implications which must not be overlooked: the educational character of our groups, and in consequence the multiplicity of expressions to which they give rise, with objectives ranging from those of a general educational nature to those specifically ecclesial.

Because of their educational character and the fact that they are composed for the most part of youngsters in the maturing period of their lives, the groups which we animate take advantage of their wide-ranging interests. Starting from an interest in a particular sector, they try to reach the overall objective which is characteristic of our plan, aiming especially at personal formation. The SGC gave the following indication: "Our service should be offered to the young in the context of their natural groupings in life and work. We should seek to develop all their potentialities from the inside, starting from their own interests".<sup>8</sup>

In every case salesian groups are logically organized from an educational point of view: they give first place to the person of the youngster; everything else (organization, structures, instruments and programmes, causes or aims of interest to the educator for a personal choice of life) are proportioned and directed to his personal growth. Groups make the youngster responsible for his own development, flanking him in his efforts and his search. Our own activity is fully expressed in the phrase "*we animate*", which means that we follow closely the progress of the youngsters, making suggestions, providing motivations, helping them to grow and picking up from them incentives for a common process.

From the whole context it is clear that the central hub of all the experience is the group, in which it is possible to live its life, pick up questions, and suggest programmes and plans adapted to the situation of the members. But the article of the Constitutions speaks also

of "movements". These represent a mobilization of members on a bigger scale, the union of several groups with common interests as regards values or persons, certain assemblages or combinations for mutual support and unity. It is certainly easier to gain an experience of Church in the warmer atmosphere of a smaller group, but the result would be too restricted and inward looking were it not capable of comparison with something on a much wider scale. In our environments in recent years we have come to see more clearly the need for a "*salesian youth movement*", which can bring together the many groups inspired by the same "youth spirituality".<sup>9</sup>

Finally, as a continuation of the preceding topic, the text of the Constitutions hints at the *multiplicity of groups* present in the salesian environments with gradually increasing objectives. Among them can be distinguished three main categories: formation groups, groups for social activity, and groups for apostolic action.

For us every group is important in which interests can be developed and entry to social life learned. Greater commitment is shown in those in which the members grow in the awareness of their personal responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world. At the vertex are the apostolic movements where the members become "the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them": in these we are once again directly linked with the living insertion of each youngster into the christian community and the development of his own individual vocation.

*Let us ask of God our Father  
to grant us in the Holy Spirit  
a profound esteem for Christ's Church,  
the column and foundation of truth,  
and to pour out in us the same love  
that Christ himself had for his Church,  
sacrificing himself for her.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. "*The salesian plan for group activity*", p. 32, 33, 42 ff.

*That we may be able to lead young people  
to a knowledge and love of holy Church,  
and to offer them the exhilarating experience  
of participating in her life,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That following the example of Don Bosco,  
we may be able to lead our young people  
through groups, associations and movements,  
to give to the Church their irreplaceable contribution  
for the transformation of the world and history,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That freely accepting Christ's invitation  
our young people may become  
the first and direct apostles  
among other youngsters,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 36 INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL LIFE

We introduce the young to a conscious and active participation in the Church's liturgy, the summit and source of all christian life.<sup>1</sup>

With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ in word, prayer and sacraments.

The Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, celebrated with care, are means of exceptional value for education to christian liberty, to conversion of heart and to a spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community.

<sup>1</sup> cf. SC 10

Another aspect of education to the faith is the introduction of the young to liturgical life. Ordinary doctrinal and pastoral logic would have led us to expect the usual order of the three ecclesial tasks: to teach, to sanctify, to govern; catechesis, celebration, common life. The reasons for the change are not explicitly stated in the text, but it is not difficult to discern them in a particular sensitivity to the process of maturing in faith which is much emphasized at the present day. Liturgical action is considered the vertex of the Church's activity and demands that access to the sacraments, as a sign of faith, be prepared by a process of conversion and understanding to avoid the danger of formalism: "Before reaching the sacraments it is essential to have first undergone conversion and accepted the faith", said the SGC.<sup>1</sup>

The article displays a gradual development which passes from liturgical life in general to its heart, which is the Eucharist.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 308

## Introduction to liturgical life

Liturgical life is considered here in all its amplitude: listening to the Word, celebrations, prayer and sacraments. Its importance in an authentic christian experience is explained at length in the Constitution "Sacrosanctum Concilium". The liturgy makes active the mystery of Christ, priest and mediator; "it involves the presentation of man's sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, i.e. by the Head and his members".<sup>2</sup> Consequently the liturgy continues the work of salvation: "It is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper".<sup>3</sup>

The liturgy is a pedagogical world of spiritual reality expressed in sacred 'signs'; one must therefore go into the structure of a sign to understand its language; especially is it necessary to go into what the sign signifies and brings about so as to approach it with "faith", according to the words of "Sacrosanctum Concilium": "In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain".<sup>4</sup>

The Rule calls upon us to "*introduce*" young people to participation in the Church's liturgy. It is not therefore a matter of an institutionalized ritualistic practice which calls for the fulfilment of certain obligations, nor of simply creating an habitual response to "psychological needs", but rather a conscious introduction to the world of the signs

<sup>2</sup> SC 7

<sup>3</sup> SC 10

<sup>4</sup> SC 11

and realities which the celebrations offer. To "introduce" or initiate means to show and explain to young people, to bring them in as active subjects, to teach them to celebrate, to take an active part in a celebrating community, to live the reality of which the signs are a reminder. "Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, and are actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it".<sup>5</sup>

For this reason n. 19 of the same conciliar Constitution gives pastors precise indications as to how to ensure a proper initiation, "their active participation, both internal and external, taking into account their age, condition, way of life and standard of religious culture".<sup>6</sup> It would indeed be harmful if those who are both pastors and educators should trivialize the delicate part played by the signs (and among the latter one should not forget the liturgical garments themselves), thus depriving the signs of their dignity and replacing them with a banality incapable of recalling anything transcendent.

The GC21 indicated a practical way by which salesians could provide for this initiation of young people: "An aspect which it is important to recall is the educational value of the liturgical year. The full and conscious sharing in the work of redemption is organized, in Don Bosco's thought, around the celebration of the liturgical year; this sets the pace for the life of the youthful community, showing the road to spiritual growth and the gradual commitment which one assumes in answering God's call. It is a concrete way of structuring an educational plan on the mystery of Christ".<sup>7</sup> The initiation for Don Bosco involved, in addition to catechetical aspects, the complex experience of a "feast" lived in the spontaneous expression of a youthful community against a devotional background.

<sup>5</sup> SC 11

<sup>6</sup> SC 19

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 93

## The Eucharist and Reconciliation

The sacraments are the heart of liturgical life, and the Eucharist is the heart of sacramental life. The Constitutions bring well together not only the mind of the Church but also the spirit of all our tradition, in which the Eucharist and Penance have a "special" place in the education to the faith of both young people and adults: "Frequent confession and communion ... are the *pillars which must support the edifice of education*".<sup>8</sup> In the sacraments is realized in an altogether exceptional way the encounter with Christ which art. 34 presented as being "fundamental" to the educational process.

It is of interest in the first place to draw attention to the phrase "*celebrated with care*". We know that proper dispositions and growth in awareness are required, and that Don Bosco never favoured mere ritualism or formalism but attached more value to the personal effects of the reception of the sacraments on daily life, but nevertheless this phrase is an invitation to be generous in approaching the sacraments, and always with proper motivations.

Secondly, it should be noticed that the expressions used in the article reflect salesian tradition which has always considered these two sacraments as "mysteries" of salvation, but also as first-class educational resources, in so far as they stir up the deepest parts of the conscience and bring it into contact with grace, which builds a youngster's personality. The article stresses three fruits or aims of the sacraments:

- the "*building of christian liberty*": in christianity freedom is simply the ability to love: to encounter Christ in the supreme act of his freedom, expressed in the gift of his Body and Blood, means in very truth to find the model and motives for liberty;
- "*conversion of heart*": this does not mean a short-lived act of good will but a serious effort to persevere. Frequent contact with the grace of the risen Christ and his patient mercy is evidently a guarantee

<sup>8</sup> D. BOSCO, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249

of perseverance because it wipes out passing falls and weaknesses and sustains efforts to rise again;

— the "*spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community*": rightly is the community dimension of the two sacraments emphasized at the present day. To communicate with Christ's eucharistic Body is to communicate also with his mystical Body, to eat the Bread which has been broken at the fraternal table. Christ's pardon is received, and at the same time the forgiveness of the Church, which has been wounded by our sins. In this way a double reconciliation is brought about — with the Father, and consequently with our brothers.

The close relationship between the two above-mentioned aspects, i.e. the signs of salvation and educational resources, makes evident the continuity between the celebration of the sacraments and the educational relationship and environment.

Speaking of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the GC21 expressed itself as follows: "For the pedagogy of Penance the continuity between the style of bringing the boy closer to the educational process and that which he succeeds in establishing at the sacramental moment is characteristic of Don Bosco. It is the same fatherliness, friendship and trust which awaken in the youth an awareness of the movements of grace and a commitment to overcome sin.

"The sacramental encounter usually requires a prior educational understanding. Don Bosco rightly used to say that confession was the 'key to education', because by personally involving the boy it invited him to surpass himself. The regular frequency of the penitential encounter, the frank and serene dialogue, the resolution which promotes constancy, provide an opportunity of exceptional educational value".<sup>9</sup>

And then as regards the importance Don Bosco attributed to the Eucharist in the education of youngsters and their progress to sanctity, the thought of the Saint is well known. In his biography of Francis Besucco he wrote: "the second support of young people (following on confession) is holy communion. Blessed are those boys who begin ear-

<sup>9</sup> GC21, 93



ly in life to approach this sacrament with the proper dispositions!<sup>10</sup> Don Bosco never tired of encouraging his boys to receive Jesus in communion and to visit him in churches: the holy table and the tabernacle are the best places for a real, living and vital encounter with the risen Saviour, the perfect Friend and Model.

*The Church's liturgy  
is the most efficacious manifestation  
of the life-giving power of Christ's grace.  
Let us pray that we may bring to share in it  
all those the Lord has confided to us.*

*That together with our young people  
we may celebrate with joy and gratitude  
the encounter with Jesus,  
in listening to his Word,  
in fervent prayer  
and in sacramental life,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our youngsters may learn from us  
the indispensable importance  
of a living and committed participation  
in the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That like Don Bosco  
we too may always be consistent  
in placing the sacramental life  
at the foundation of all educational activity,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. D. BOSCO, *Vita di Besuccio Francesco*, OE XV, p. 347.

## ART. 37 VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

**We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel.**

**The family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, created by the witness of a community which gives of itself with joy, is the most efficacious setting for the discovery and guidance of vocations.**

**This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction.**

The succession of aspects which make up the totality of our educational service for the young (human development, the proclamation of Christ, insertion in the Church, group experience, liturgical and sacramental life) ends with the summit of vocational guidance.

There are in the article three nuclei around which the commentary can be developed: the commitment of salesians in this regard, the two levels at which our vocational guidance is provided, and the factors involved in vocational maturing and guidance.

### **The crown of educational pastoral work**

Vocational guidance is inseparable from youth pastoral work properly understood, and this to such an extent that pastoral work for the young is inconceivable without progressively developing their ability to make life options which conform to the Gospel; and on the other hand pastoral work for vocations cannot be thought of in separation from a more general maturing of the youngster in faith and his more intensive participation in ecclesial communion, on which such work is built as on an essential solid foundation. Confirmation of this is provided by the Second International Congress on Vocations, held at Rome:

"Pastoral work for youth and for vocations are complementary to each other. Work that is specifically vocational finds its vital working space in the wider youth work, while the latter becomes efficacious and complete when the vocational dimension is included".<sup>1</sup>

The same conclusion was confirmed by our GC21: "In the salesian perspective all educational and pastoral activity contains, as an essential objective, a vocational dimension. As a matter of fact, the discovery of one's calling, the well thought out free choice of a programme of life, constitutes the crowning goal of any process of human and christian growth".<sup>2</sup> Preparation for life choices, with appropriate advice and encouragement, is intrinsic to the processes of education and evangelization.

But it is interesting to note how this idea, which is so clearly expressed in modern pastoral work, forms part of the patrimony left by Don Bosco to the Congregation. For a fuller treatment of this point we must refer the reader to other sources,<sup>3</sup> but here we can at least recall the following traits of our Father: his confidence in young people's ability to respond to God's call; the place occupied by the theme of vocation in his educational plan, in which he always presented the choice of a state in life as a fundamental point and the principal task of the period of youth; his skill in guidance through personal interviews and involvement of youngsters in an attractive life; his preoccupation for priestly and religious vocations; his suggestions concerning attitudes, factors and experiences which favour the birth and development of vocations; and the results with which the Lord rewarded his trust, prayers and dedication to the cause of vocations.

Salesian activity in this field, therefore, in addition to motives forming part and parcel of the very concept of education and of pastoral work, is influenced by an example and tradition which make of this point not merely an aspect but the "crown" of all salesian work. For

<sup>1</sup> 2nd International Congress for Vocations, concluding document, Rome 1981, n. 42

<sup>2</sup> GC21, 106

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for example: "Le vocazioni nella Famiglia salesiana", 7th Spirituality Week, LDC Turin 1982; *La vocazione salesiana*, Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1982; P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, p. 371-385

a better understanding of this assertion it is well to link this article with what was said in art. 6 about the general commitment of salesians in the Church: "We pay special attention to apostolic vocations". But it is of still greater interest to read the article in the light of art. 22 which speaks of the salesian's personal experience of the Lord's call.

## Vocational guidance

How are we to put into practice this characteristic of our educational activity? We do so by attending to the guidance of the young in a double direction: towards the maturing of their human and christian vocation, and more specifically towards the realization of the particular vocation of each one. They are two levels which develop together, but there is nevertheless a progression between them as regards objectives and experiences.

The first objective is expressed in the constitutional article in the words: "*We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel*". Hence we help youngsters to understand that each one's existence is a vocation, because he is called to live according to the image and likeness of God. Life understood as a vocation clarifies the relationship between man and the world, the common destiny he has with other men, and especially God's invitation to an ever more explicit dialogue with Him and to a free and conscious response of collaboration, so as eventually to live in communion with Him.

The acceptance of life as a task, gift and mission, and the acceptance in it of the divine presence, is the first and most important decision for an individual to make, and the starting point for any further process of self-definition.

This human vocation acquires a new sense when man becomes aware that he has been called to become a son of God and a member of his people by following Jesus Christ.

It is within this baptismal vocation that *specific ecclesial vocations* find their place.

"All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church".<sup>4</sup> The Church is presented as the people of God and the Body of Christ with a variety of charisms and ministries. Through these charisms the faithful participate in various ways in the mission of Christ which is also that of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel, worship God and transform humanity into man's true image.

Specific vocations therefore do not add to the baptismal vocation, but are particular ways of living it.

One of the first tasks of pastoral work for vocations is that of making people aware of the interior and exterior following of Christ as the principal feature of being a christian, awakening a knowledge of the function of 'ministry', through which the whole Church is at the service of man and every vocation is a sharing in the mission of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

It will be noticed that when referring to the human and baptismal vocation, the article does not present them as two separate periods or realities, but in line with the twin characteristics of salesian activity (education and evangelization) emphasizes a point without which vocational guidance would be impossible: the close union between faith and life.

If pastoral work is given this general tone, the presentation of the various kinds of vocation (lay, priestly, religious and missionary) will find the ground already prepared and the youngsters can be steered towards the discovery of their own vocation. The educators will be able to help them to develop it through appropriate experiences.

It will be well to note that the word "*guidance*" (Italian "*orientamento*") as a specific form of accompaniment and encouragement is not just fortuitous: it is a precise term used in the pastoral context, which supposes in the guide a certain criteria and attitude, and a clear knowledge of the vocational development of the individual.

<sup>4</sup> LG 9

<sup>5</sup> *Outlines for Provincial Vocation Plan*, Youth Pastoral Department, Rome 1981

This, in fact, was one of the educational options made by the GC21: "All young people, whom the Lord in one way or another places in our path, have the right to our help in forming their personality and life 'according to the Gospel'. We must help them at every age in their efforts to discover and develop their vocation: in boyhood, preadolescence, adolescence and beyond, because each of these stages of life has its own phase of growth and entails proportionate decisions which every young man must learn and carry out in a responsible manner".<sup>6</sup>

The guidance, as a criterion and method of help towards the maturing of a vocation and life-plan, is to be understood in two senses:

- in the boy it is the interior process by which he progressively discovers his own identity and gets his bearings in life; its fundamental aspects are interior reflection, freedom and responsibility;
- on the part of the educator it consists in the help and assistance given to the youngster as the latter seeks his personal identity.

The guidance itself:

- more than a certain period or phase, even though specific and intensive, is a 'process' which accompanies the unified and harmonious development of personality;
- depends on the chief part being played by the boy who takes a serious look at what he can do, according to the possibilities at his age and in accordance with the signs given him by God;
- helps the boy to formulate his plan of life and structure his personality through:
  - an adequate and realistic relationship with himself;
  - a serene and generous rapport with others and with reality;
  - a deeply felt relationship with God.

<sup>6</sup> GC21, 111; cf. also *ibid.* 113, 117

In the guidance process the educator or vocations promoter has a facilitating role to play, which he carries out through personal encounter and formative dialogue.

### The factors involved in vocational guidance

Help in the maturing process, vocational guidance and discovery all come under the heading of the "*work of collaboration with God's design*". Our interventions are mediations between God's action on the one hand and on the other the freedom with which the individual is able to become aware of God's presence and accept his call. They are however necessary mediations in the concrete situation of youth and of the christian community at the present day.

Not every suggestion or proposal will be a meaningful mediation for the youngster. The springing up and development of the vocation, in the more specifically christian sense, is linked to kinds of mediation which can provide introductions to valid human and ecclesial experiences, develop personalities with a sense of generous self-giving, reveal the providential signs which indicate God's plans, inculcate correspondence with the movements of grace felt as the presence of love in the individual's life, and transmit God's call to those who show the right dispositions and attitudes.

Some mediations will be personal, others will be of a community nature. The constitutional article takes into account the double aspect, and also the educational and pastoral nature of our action.

As a first element, which embraces many others, the importance is affirmed of the propitious *environment* created by the family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, in which a determining factor is the "witness of a community that gives of itself with joy". This atmosphere was already fully presented in art. 16 of the Constitutions which ended with the words: "This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation".

Among the more personal mediations referred to are *personal contact* and *spiritual direction*. The list is very much condensed and does

no more than provide examples, but they indicate a synthesis (education and pastoral work, the person and the environment, faith and active intervention) and some preferences. Others could be added, linked to the same synthesis and the same preferences.

The whole is inspired, sustained and we might say enveloped in the essential mediation of *prayer* according to Christ's precept: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9,38). "The prayer of the community leads to the community's action... Prayer is not just 'a' means for receiving the gift of the divine call, but is 'the' essential means commanded by the Lord".<sup>7</sup>

*Don Bosco has taught us  
that God sows in the heart of many young people  
the germ of a vocation to an apostolic life.  
Let us pray that we may be delicate  
but efficacious instruments  
for the discovery and development  
of these gifts of the Spirit.*

*That by fostering the family atmosphere of welcome,  
in faith and love,  
we may help young people  
to discover in themselves the divine call,  
and that they may be drawn to follow it with generosity,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That your loving plan for the young you have called  
may find confirmation in the witness  
of our personal and community life,  
in unreserved and joyful self-giving,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

<sup>7</sup> 2nd International Congress for Vocations, concluding document, Rome 1981, n. 23



*That we may accompany young people  
who are groping to discover what they should do in life,  
and guide them with delicacy and respect  
through our educational commitment  
and our personal contact with them,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 38 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM IN OUR MISSION

Don Bosco has handed on to us his Preventive System as a means for carrying out our educational and pastoral service.

"This system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness".<sup>1</sup> Instead of constraint, it appeals to the resources of intelligence, love and the desire for God, which everyone has in the depths of his being.

It brings together educators and youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue.

Imitating God's patience, we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom. We then accompany them, so that they may develop solid convictions and gradually assume the responsibility for the delicate process of their growth as human beings and as men of faith.

<sup>1</sup> MB XIII, 919

For a deeper analysis of this article two lines of thought which are present in the Constitutions must be kept in mind. On the one hand the article is in perfect continuity with what has gone before. In fact, after setting out the main points in our plan for youth the text describes the pedagogical and pastoral method in its principles and basic inspirations. On the other hand, since the preventive system is at the same time a spirituality, a pastoral criteriology and a pedagogical methodology,<sup>1</sup> the article is connected with those which describe the salesian spirit. In particular art. 20 referred to the preventive system as a "spiritual and educational experience": it declared that "it permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved".

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 96; cf. also ASC 290 (1978), p. 12-14 (The preventive system, essential element of our charism)

Taking for granted its spiritual roots, the preventive system is set out in art. 38 as an educational and pastoral method in three stages:

- its fundamental inspiration;
- its characteristic elements;
- the educational relationship it creates.

### **The fundamental inspiration**

The fundamental inspiration of the preventive system is a particular understanding of the individual, the fruit of a long historical process of christian humanism, translated by Don Bosco into simple practical terms.

The three words which occur in the now famous expression — *reason, religion and loving kindness* — need separate analysis, in their mutual relationship and overall significance. They are a synthetic expression of the educational project. They suggest also for educators the attitudes from which flows the practical application of the method: faith, reason, and educational charity shown by close presence and real interest. But above all they indicate three internal personal resources which, when aroused, stimulated and developed, not only ensure good results for particular educational experiences but also create a personal structure enabling life to be confronted.

The method appeals to resources of the intelligence, the heart and the desire for God, rather than depending on external conditioning.

- "*Reason*", from the methodological point of view, asks the educator to follow the path of motivations, to take the events of the life and development of youngsters and help them to make a balanced judgement about them, to make good use of what is known about education, to stimulate responsibility, to keep in mind the possibilities of the youngster when making suggestions to him or demands on him. These are just examples.

- "*Religion*" implies believing in the creative and educational force of the proclamation of the Gospel and of contact with the Lord, of not neglecting its reminder of conscience and salvation; it means

making known the beauty of faith and its manifestations, and promoting in the life of the community religious events and motivations through feasts and other celebrations, and even through the very arrangement of the premises.

- But method requires that reason and religion must converge in "*loving kindness*". This represents the supreme principle of the preventive system.<sup>2</sup> Its foundation and source must be sought in the charity communicated to us by God, as a result of which the educator loves young people with the same love with which the Lord loves them, not only in the intensity of his self-giving but also with the human warmth shown by Christ in the Incarnation, i.e. supernatural charity, but clothed in flesh. This loving kindness is a love which is shown in a way that a youngster, especially if he is very poor, can come to understand without formal expression; it is a pleasing approach which leads to a familiar relationship, affection shown through gestures which foster confidence and create an educational relationship. It is an attitude which gives rise to an interior security in the boy, which suggests ideals to him and sustains his efforts to overcome his weaknesses. It is a pedagogical charity which "creates" the youngster as an individual and is perceived by him as a providential help to his own growth.

### **The operative elements**

The article presents two of these, of which the first is the creation of an "*educational environment*" rich in joy, humanity and commitment, which is already in itself a means for expressing values and proposals. Don Bosco discovered the value of the environment very early in his apostolate and it became a first requirement for the rest of his life.

Don Bosco was the friend and educator of many boys whom he got to know individually in a wide variety of places and circumstances, but he was also the animator of a community of youngsters, character-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 8-9

ized by certain specific features and with a programme to carry out. Psychological and sociological reasons, as well as those of faith, confirmed his conviction that an educational setting was needed where religion and application could find a natural place, and where roles, relationships and the very atmosphere spoke of love and charity.

And so Don Bosco not only chose a setting which would give stability to his Oratory and drew up a little set of regulations for it, but he also adopted the principle which he explained to his boys as follows: "Your number alone makes your games more joyful, chases melancholy from your hearts, encourages many of you to bear the burden of schoolwork, and arouses competition and the sharing of knowledge. The good example of many helps us also spiritually without our even being aware of it".<sup>3</sup>

The setting is not something generic; it has characterizing features. It is not a specific place where one goes in search of personal recreation, but a community, a programme, a process in which the participants mature and develop.

Among the many characteristics of the environment which could be mentioned in connection with the three elements already referred to, the article picks out the union between youngsters and educators, the family atmosphere, trust and dialogue.

The preference is not fortuitous, even though the list is incomplete. These are the aspects which more nearly touch the "heart", which relate more closely to "loving kindness". They reflect Don Bosco's assertion that "education is a thing of the heart"; that is where all the work starts, and if the heart is not in it the work becomes difficult and its outcome uncertain.<sup>4</sup> At the same time such characteristics highlight the eminently affective concept of education which is proper to the preventive system.

But the setting or environment is not sufficient by itself. It might never reach the individual. A second element is required: *personal en-*

<sup>3</sup> BM VII, 366

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MB XVI, 447; cf. also *Collected letters* IV, p. 209

*counter*. If it is to respond to different needs and interests, the bigger group must be split into smaller units in which are possible participation, recognition of the original nature of the individual, and the best use of the contributions he can make.

"Loving kindness" reaches the individual through the personal relationship which makes possible an enlightened view of the present, past and future of each one.

The importance must not be forgotten of personal contacts, even though brief, in the educational and pastoral experience of Don Bosco.

Some of these short contacts of our Father with his boys have gone down in history as fundamental turning points. The meeting with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of the Church of St Francis of Assisi laid the foundations of the Oratory. In the biographies he wrote of various boys, Don Bosco recalls with pleasure the contacts he had with them, and goes into details about their conversations. In the biography of Dominic Savio he gives a detailed account of their talks at the parish house at Murialdo and in his own office at the Oratory. In his *Life of Michael Magone*, there is even a chapter entitled: "A curious encounter".

Don Bosco not only relived these events but he also put them forward as an educational norm: it seems that he wanted to show us his art of getting into the life of a boy. The encounter always began with some sign of esteem, of affection, of understanding, and then he passed on at once to touch in a simple manner on the important factors in the life of his young companion, like his health, whether he had a home to go to or anyone to look after him. The conversations were serious as regards content, even though carried out in a happy and joyful manner; they often became a quite moving experience, because they concerned points of vital concern to the youngsters. Michael Magone was deeply moved; Francis Besucco shed tears of emotion; Dominic Savio "did not know how to express his joy and gratitude: he seized my hand, squeezed it and kissed it several times".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (OE XI, p. 187)

If these encounters remained so vivid in the mind of the saintly educator, if he dwelt on them at such length in the biographies of his boys to the extent of making them the chief items he narrated, it means that he was convinced that the quality of an educator and pastor is shown in personal contacts, and it was to this that the atmosphere and programme of the house were designed to lead.

When a Cardinal in Rome once challenged his ability as an educator, Don Bosco gave him a spectacular demonstration by means of a personal encounter and conversation with some boys in the Piazza del Popolo. When we read the account of the episode we find the narrative structure typical of all his other contacts: the first friendly approach, the immediate inclination of the boys to run away, followed by the overcoming of their fears and shyness, a cheerful conversation with serious undertones, and the emotional nature of the conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

All of this, and much more as well, can perhaps be read into the expression: "*we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom*".

## The educational relationship

But all we have said still fails to give a complete idea of the method. The setting, initiatives and encounters are organized and find expression in an educational relationship with particular characteristics. The same elements could evidently be used to produce a relationship which would create dependence on the educator, tend to moral subjugation on the part of the boys, and to their exploitation for the furtherance of adult interests.

The key is found in the way the relationship between pupils and educator is built up, and how it fits in with the body of educators as a whole and with the educational institution. The text mentions some guiding ideas.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BM V, 600-601

In the first place it calls for the subject to be seen as responsible for his own growth and development. The task of the educator is not to take this responsibility on himself, but to awaken it, enlighten it and get it functioning, by fostering and making it possible for the individual to make free choices based on motives and values.

The second principle is found in the educator's role of accompaniment or encouragement. It is a question of an influential presence rather than an authoritarian one. The educator plays a valid part to the extent that he is able by his adult presence to offer light and experience, and to be seen by the youngsters as a "model" to whom they can refer.

From these fundamental considerations (the youngster is the one responsible, the educator accompanies him in his efforts) arises an essential characteristic of every educational relationship: the total acceptance of the person just as he is, the greatest sign of affective maturity. Some youngsters have been favoured more than others, but they are all sons of God. The point at which we find them is the point God has chosen from which to invite them to start a pilgrimage. In this connection there come to mind some expressions from the Letter of 1884, in which Don Bosco points out the difference between those who initiate a personal relationship for selfish motives and those who really accept the youngster as a person.

An educational relationship cannot fail to give rise to suggestions and proposals, but these should be proportioned to the possibilities of the boy and to the stage he is at in his maturing process, this precisely as an expression of the fact that he is accepted as a person and of the central role that he himself has to play in his own formation.

The reference should not be overlooked to God's patience, which we want to imitate; this is not the same thing as tolerance or forbearance, but refers to the long and persevering work, in dialogue with the freedom of the individual concerned, through which the Lord, by offering his own love, calls man to communion with Him and opens to him horizons of happiness which reason by itself could never even imagine.

God's patience is more a progressive action than a gloomy forbearance; it savours more of the opening up of new possibilities than



the counting up of failures or offences. His patience is an invitation to loftiness of spirit in the relationship with the youngster, because of the freedom from any personal interest that the latter must find in us, because of our need to be tireless in making positive suggestions, and out of consideration for the youngster's ability to respond.

*Let us pray to the God of all patience  
that in imitation of the charity of Christ with his disciples,  
and following the example of Don Bosco,  
we may be able to follow the generous and difficult way  
of the "preventive system",  
and provide efficacious help to our young people  
as they develop in themselves  
the seeds of goodness and grace  
with which the Creator has endowed them.*

*That we may penetrate  
the treasures of christian wisdom  
which inspire the preventive system,  
and be faithful in continuing  
the educational work of Don Bosco,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with watchful delicacy  
we may be able to awaken  
the resources of intelligence,  
desire for God and generosity of heart,  
that young people carry within them,  
and help them to make them bear fruit,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we ourselves,  
with inexhaustible patience and adaptability,  
may be able to collaborate generously  
with the young and with their families  
in open and constructive dialogue,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 39 ASSISTANCE AS AN ATTITUDE AND METHOD

The practice of the preventive system demands a fundamental disposition on our part: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them: "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you".<sup>1</sup>

We are actively present among youth in brotherly friendship, helping them in their efforts to grow in what is good, and encouraging them to cast off every form of slavery, so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil.

This presence affords us a true understanding of the world of the young and unites us with them in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy.

<sup>1</sup> MB IV, 654; BM IV, 455

The preventive system, described in its inspiration in art. 20 and presented in its educational and pastoral principles in art. 38, is now clarified as regards its daily practice.

### Assistance

The preventive system requires as a fundamental point the daily educational presence among youth: what we call according to our tradition "*assistance*". This does not mean the charity of a benefactor who provides means and resources from a distance, but the love of one who is willing to accompany young people, to live in their midst, with them and for them, following Don Bosco's example.<sup>1</sup> This implies that if one day it should happen that the Salesians possessed many works managed indirectly, but they themselves were cut off from the youngsters, the preventive system, which was born of direct contact with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 188

youth, would no longer have any means of expression, and still less of new developments.

But what are the characteristics of assistance, which is presented as the preventive system in practice?

In the first place it means *physical* presence among young people, and hence a real sharing in their life and interests: loving what the youngsters love.

It is a presence of "*brotherly friendship*", not institutional or authoritarian. Some expressions of Don Bosco come to mind: "I need your help... I don't want you to look upon me as your superior but rather as your friend. Trust me fully. That is what I want, what I expect from you as my friends".<sup>2</sup> And in the Letter from Rome he wrote: "Let the superior be all things to all... all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him".<sup>3</sup> The effect on the minds of the young should be that they look upon their teachers and superiors as "fathers, brothers and friends".

It is an *active* presence, full of initiatives and plans as regards both individuals and environment, but with an activity which is "preventive" in the double sense of protecting from untimely negative experiences, and developing the potentiality of individuals for reaching goals to which they are attracted by their goodness and beauty.

It is an *animating* presence: it tends to awaken and foster the creativity of the young, to give them responsibility for their own growth and development, accompanying them in the process. It develops motivations based on reason and faith, and at the same time strengthens in the youngsters their ability to give an autonomous response to the demands of values and principles. It does not therefore cut out youthful expression in word or action, but rather favours it. Don Bosco wrote: "Every superior should try to get to know them, to show himself their

<sup>2</sup> BM VII, 302

<sup>3</sup> *Letter from Rome*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 260

friend; he should let them chatter away, but he should not say much himself..."<sup>4</sup>

It is a *witnessing* presence: the values professed by the educator, which become evident through his actions and behaviour, cannot fail to impress youngsters, making them think and opening new horizons before their minds.<sup>5</sup>

## Attitudes of the educator apostle

Assistance implies a basic attitude: *empathy with the young and the desire to be with them*. The expression of Don Bosco quoted in the article to explain this attitude is a very happy one. It takes us back to the example of his own life. The inference is that it is not a matter of a burdensome obligation, even though it may cost sacrifice at times, but of a contact that is desired and sought for. In it we find the joyful sense of our life which we have given to God: "*Here in your midst I feel completely at home!*"

This empathy is described by the GC21 as a "harmonious relationship with the young, liking what they like but without abandoning our adult role of educators".<sup>6</sup> It means "tuning in to their wavelength when discussing their problems, and getting into educative dialogue with them",<sup>7</sup> being solid with them, utilizing their positive contributions, and at a faith level "recognizing in them the other source of our inspiration in spreading the Gospel".<sup>8</sup>

This desire for contact and presence introduces us to the realities of the world of youth. To provide efficacious help for the young and

<sup>4</sup> *Regulations for the Houses*, General Articles, 7; (OE XXIX, p. 112); cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, p. 230 ff.

<sup>5</sup> On the theme of assistance in general, v. SGC, 188, 363; GC21, 102; ASC 290 (1978), p. 21-23

<sup>6</sup> GC21, 13

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 21

<sup>8</sup> GC21, 12

the poor one must first know and understand them: the Good Shepherd knows his sheep (cf. Jn 10,14). The study of psychology and the social sciences, information and reflection, are certainly important, but in the last analysis nothing less than being immersed in their world through a natural presence and friendly contacts can open us to a deeper knowledge. And such knowledge alone will enable us to find the right sort of language and methods for evangelization.

This sort of sympathetic knowledge leads also to an attitude of solidarity. The world of youth experiences a very rapid succession of changes and is extremely dynamic. In the face of this fact three kinds of reaction are possible:

— A reaction of indifference.

— A negative reaction which emphasizes defects and limitations, or easily attributes to young people as a whole the attitudes and behaviour of some of them; often this is combined with complete ignorance of youth phenomena. Because people of this kind find it impossible to follow the rhythm of youth, they prefer to show no interest in the problem, and still less to do anything about it.

— Finally there is the positive reaction of educational understanding and pastoral love: this is the spontaneous reaction of the salesian. Under this aspect too he stays with the young and especially the poor and "empathizes" with them, even to the extent of himself adopting their simple, sincere and dynamic style of life.

Evidently all this calls for a critical sense, and this is what is referred to in the conclusion of the article. Not everything in the ideas and behaviour of the young and the poor can be approved of; there are errors to be found there, excesses and sometimes disorders.

But the salesian tries to understand the deep underlying aspirations; he too rejects whatever in present-day society is not christian, nor evangelical, and often not even human. Retaining "all that is good" according to the dictate of St Paul (cf. 1 Thess 5,21), he adheres to the world of the young and poor "in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy". And he is well aware that this is a choice which may at times lead to painful consequences.

Summing up then, we could use the substance of article 39 to compose an introduction to a salesian "*Gaudium et Spes*": "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the youth of our time, especially of those who are poor and of all who are afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the Salesians as well. Nothing that affects the young and the poor fails to find an echo in their heart".

*Let us beg the Lord to open our hearts  
to a true sympathy and understanding  
towards those to whom he has sent us,  
so as to be cordially at their service.*

*That with Don Bosco  
we may be able to say sincerely to the young:  
"Here in your midst I feel completely at home",  
and for them make a generous offering  
of our whole life,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our presence among youth  
may be that of brothers and friends,  
open to an authentic knowledge  
of the world of the young and the poor,  
and that we may be able to sustain them  
in their growth to freedom from all slavery,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Lord our God, grant that we may share,  
in profound truth and cordial participation,  
the life of our young people  
and all their lawful interests and aspirations,  
just as your Son, in becoming man,  
shared with us everything except sin.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## CRITERIA FOR SALESIAN ACTIVITY

*"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more... To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9,19,22).*

This is another autobiographical extract from Paul, belonging to a context (1 Cor 8-10) which highlights the sense of christian liberty as a condition indispensable to the cause of the Gospel for all, starting from those who are weakest.

The meaning of the two statements of Paul is immediately clear, especially if considered in the light of the example of Jesus. But the concrete situation which forms the context of chap. 9 of the first letter to the Corinthians helps to clarify still further the union between freedom and service. Some people at Corinth were opposed to Paul: he was using his freedom to be independent of the community for his maintenance, they said, because he was not a true apostle (9,1). Paul reacts vehemently through the whole of chap. 9, making clear the real sense of his freedom: it was above all that of an apostle totally possessed by Christ's Gospel (9,12); that as such he had certain financial rights (9,4-12); but he had given up those rights so that his service of the Gospel should be more transparent, universal, all-embracing, and therefore free (9,12-18).

More than a proud declaration of principle, Paul was giving an example of a freedom so completely at the service of all as to become the gospel choice of being a "slave" of all: Jews, pagans, those of little account or who were weak and fragile from a religious point of view (9,19-22). Was he being just non-committal, or an opportunist? In reality there was a very firm principle underlying this unlimited self-abandonment: *"I do it all for the sake of the Gospel"* (9,23). Paul, like Christ, takes on all human conditions so as to make spring up within them a genuine experience of faith.

To make of freedom a service, giving up even lawful rights and therefore working absolutely gratuitously, with unconditional dedication to others, through fidelity to the Gospel understood as an absolute benefit for man, even to the point of exclaiming: *"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"*: all this forms an apostolic criterion which Don Bosco (as he appears in his historic "Valdocco experience" C 40) put into practice, and left us a legacy.

\* \* \*

## ART. 40 DON BOSCO'S ORATORY A PERMANENT CRITERION

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.

All the constitutional texts, from Don Bosco's first manuscripts onwards, have carried a brief description of our works. The present Constitutions, however, do not do so, or at least not in any great detail. The fact that salesian pastoral practice is carried out in specific kinds of work, which still constitute a fundamental presence of the Congregation at the present day, has led to the preservation of a description of them in the General Regulations. But some indication at least was needed in the Constitutions, and the diversity of the contexts in which we work and the continual springing up of new needs suggested that in this section (C 40-43) should be presented the criteria which must inspire the concrete putting of the mission into practice in the various works and activities.

The section, in fact, carries the heading "*Criteria for salesian activity*". In it we find the ideal model for reference, i.e. a characteristic "pastoral experience" of Don Bosco, realized at the Oratory of Valdocco: a model which is presented as a general criterion for discernment and renewal (C 40). Three inspirational criteria are then given for the realization of our works and activities, with their chief consequences (C 41). Finally three main lines of action are indicated for practical salesian activity: education, evangelization, and communication (C 42, 43).



## A characteristic pastoral experience

The Oratory quite literally filled Don Bosco's whole existence. It had its first expressions in the games and Sunday gatherings in the meadows of the Becchi and in the "Società dell'allegria". It developed during the early years of his priesthood, from the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli to the growth in size of the youthful community in the poor Pinardi house with the stable organization of its life and activities. At Valdocco the Oratory subsequently developed in many ways: it was the cradle of the newly born Congregation and of other religious Associations and had reached maturity by the time Don Bosco died.

When our Father wanted to put his thoughts into writing, intending to leave in this way "a norm for overcoming future difficulties by lessons from the past",<sup>1</sup> so that his followers would be stimulated to continue his work in creative fidelity, he wrote the *"Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales"*.<sup>2</sup>

When one looks back in the light of faith on the pastoral pilgrimage of Don Bosco, it becomes clear that in his encounter with the youngsters of the Oratory the foundations of a project were laid, enterprises grew in perspective, and a style came to maturity (cf. C 20).

For this reason Don Bosco's initiatives were originally called the "Work of the Oratories", and the mother-house still kept the name "Oratory of Valdocco", even after successive transformations.

But what exactly was it that made this pastoral experience a characteristic one?

An elementary knowledge of the history of northern Italy will tell us that the Oratories formed part of the tradition and practice of some of the Lombardy Churches. They were a setting for the main purpose

<sup>1</sup> MO, p. 16

<sup>2</sup> The *"Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales"* were published in 1946 (Ed. SEI Turin) and later reprinted by offset at the instance of the Direzione Generale Salesiana. In the Introduction (by Fr E. CERIA), the reason is explained for their publication, despite Don Bosco's prohibition (cf. MO, p. 1-12)

of teaching catechism to the children of the Parish, with games and entertainment offered as an inducement to attend. Don Bosco rethought the idea (and this is what is expressed in the article) to meet the needs of his poor boys. For him the Oratory was "*house, church, school and playground*": a complete programme of material relief, of family support, of evangelization, culture and social behaviour. Don Bosco transformed it from its parochial structure to an open and missionary work designed to reach those who remained untouched by the normal institutions. The Sunday activity became prolonged through the week, because his help and support for his boys was not confined to Sundays; he turned it into a youthful community, with himself at its centre to promote relationships and provide animation: a community "where friends could meet and enjoy themselves".

The GC21, on the basis of the story of Valdocco and recalling Don Bosco's original intuition, traced out the fundamental characteristics of the physiognomy of the oratory setting. They are: "personal rapport of 'friend' between salesian and youngster and the brotherly 'presence' of the educator among the boys; the creating of an environment to facilitate such a meeting; varied activities to fill leisure time; a missionary 'open-door' attitude to all lads who want to come in; a welcome for everyone, but with proper attention to individuals and groups; a gradual education of the youth community for festal celebration; a striving for firm group-life and unity — all these elements concur in forming a wholesome human and christian personality".<sup>3</sup>

In Don Bosco at the Oratory, rather than the brilliant manager of a structured work, we discover the creative affability which can size up situations and respond to them, moved by pastoral charity. He was tenaciously attached to his mission among young people. For this reason he was faithful and dynamic, docile and creative, firm and flexible, all at the same time.

Deeply convinced of his divine call to the ministry of pastor of the young,<sup>4</sup> he felt himself inspired and guided by God. But at the

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 124

<sup>4</sup> MO, p. 22 ff.

same time he was very sensitive to the passing indications of current history ("We must try to get to know our times and adapt ourselves to them"),<sup>5</sup> and attentive to the concrete situation of his boys.

This is borne out by the historical evolution of the Oratory of Valdocco in its multiple and diverse vicissitudes.

### The permanent criterion

The Valdocco "pastoral experience which serves as a model" is put forward in the article as the *fundamental criterion* for the discernment and renewal, in dynamic fidelity, of all salesian works and activity. The SGC had indicated this very clearly in the document entitled: "*Don Bosco at the Oratory, the enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*".<sup>6</sup> As is clear, it is not a case of looking at the first Oratory as a single concrete piece of work, but rather of considering it "as the matrix, the synthesis, the sum total of all the genial apostolic creations of our Founder, the mature fruit of all his efforts".<sup>7</sup>

Reference to the Oratory is indispensable, giving the word its full meaning in the fascination and charm of its early days. The Oratory, in fact, represents a pattern or yardstick for every one of our works which aims at being "a home for those who have none, a parish for those who do not know where their parish is, and a school open to all who might find difficulty elsewhere",<sup>8</sup> a playground where friends can

<sup>5</sup> MB XVI, 416

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SGC, Document 2, nn. 192-273.

In this document which is the principal source of art. 40, the SGC insists on "dynamic fidelity" to Don Bosco, which implies flexibility in the face of new requirements and creativity in responding with "new presences", not only by filling 'lacunae' or youth situations not yet reached, but also qualitatively in responding to new problems unknown in Don Bosco's time, through the development of ideas already present in embryo in the personal work of the Founder, with the Valdocco Oratory as the constant point of reference (cf. SGC, 227 ff. 249 ff. 259 ff.)

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 195

<sup>8</sup> SGC, 216

meet and enjoy themselves. These are terms of great salesian import; they evoke images of sensitivity, attitudes, convictions, programmes and style of presence.

It is symptomatic of Don Bosco that in the circular he wrote to the members on the feast of St Joseph 1885, about the spreading of good books, he has recourse to the same pastoral categories, though with reference to a reality materially distinct from the Oratory. He said in fact: "With the 'Catholic Readings' I hoped to *enter houses*. With the 'Companion of Youth' my aim was to bring the young to church (parish!). With the 'History of Italy' I wanted to sit beside them *in school*. With a series of light readings I wanted to be once again their companion *in the time of recreation*. And finally, with the 'Salesian Bulletin' I wanted to keep alive in the boys who had returned to their families the love of the spirit of St Francis de Sales and his maxims, and to lead them to become the saviours of other youngsters".<sup>9</sup>

"Don Bosco of the Oratory " emerges as the ideal criterion for salesian action, for the realization of our mission in concrete service. More therefore than an invitation to re-edit what Don Bosco started, this criterion is an appeal to act like him in the deep understanding of what he did and achieved in the service of the young and the ordinary people.<sup>10</sup>

Every salesian house worthy of the name must aim at reproducing Don Bosco's characteristic pastoral experience, and appear as a present-day realization of the Oratory's emblematic and original reality.

Practical application of all this is needed in two directions: in *discernment* and in *renewal*.

In the light of the oratory criterion, renewal means a *constant verification* of our modern activities and works to see whether and to what extent they are a faithful continuation of Don Bosco's mission, in their style of presence and their ability to respond to needs. A

<sup>9</sup> *Collected letters*, IV, p. 320

<sup>10</sup> Cf. SGC, 197: In the Oratory Don Bosco provides a wonderful example of docility to God's will and of dynamic fidelity to the mission he had received for the education of the young

readiness for continual renewal must accompany all we do, and calls for a permanent adaptation of our works and activity to the youth condition and cultural changes. We are reminded of this by the first article of the General Regulations: "Keeping in mind its own social milieu, every province should study the situation and condition of youth and the common people, and periodically verify that its works and activities are providing an effective service for young people who are poor" (R 1).

The use of the criterion for discernment means looking at things in the *perspective of development*. The field of action is great, and the young are found everywhere in enormous numbers. New and urgent questions are calling for an answer, and an answer must be given. But rather than to the quantity of our works, the reference here is to the development of a spirit and style of safeguarding them. Certainly our creativity cannot be realized without regard to cost and method. We must be able to appraise situations with intelligence and a courageous heart. What is needed, in fact, is to find concrete methods and practical applications which best correspond to the salesian mission and its apostolic project.<sup>11</sup>

*Renewal and discernment*; these are our two watchwords in the spirit of Valdocco!

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, under the heading of oratorian criteria falls also Don Bosco's solicitude for the young, "especially those who are poor, abandoned and in danger", the "predilection" spoken of in art. 14.

In the salesian the fervour of his initiatives stems from the love that prompts him to seek innovations, and even great ones, in ways of bringing salvation to youth.

The Oratory at Valdocco is the emblem of this earnest research. Indeed we can say that Don Bosco was clearly aware that in the Oratory he was giving a full response to God's call, and realizing in it the purpose of his life.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SGC, 230

*We thank you Lord,  
for giving us Don Bosco as our Father and Teacher,  
and for guiding him, through the experience  
of the Oratory at Valdocco,  
to be a concrete model  
in our apostolic life and activity.*

*Grant that we may bring him to life again in ourselves,  
and, with him as our inspiration,  
make every one of our works  
an authentic salesian "Oratory",  
"a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes,  
a school that prepares for life  
and a playground where friends can meet  
and enjoy themselves".*

*We make our prayer through Christ our Shepherd,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

## ART. 41    INSPIRATIONAL CRITERIA FOR OUR ACTIVITY                   AND WORKS

Our apostolic activity is carried out in a variety of ways, which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working.

We give practical expression to the redeeming love of Christ by organizing activities and works of an educational and pastoral nature designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church. Sensitive to the signs of the times and with initiative and continual flexibility we evaluate these activities, renew them, and create new ones.

The education and evangelization of many young people, especially among the very poor, means that we have to go to them where they are to be found, and provide adequate forms of service in the context of their own life style.

After proposing the fundamental model, the Constitutions go on in this article to enumerate, together and in their mutual interdependence, the criteria for the practical realization of the activities and works which take their inspiration from that model.

Don Bosco, living in dynamic fidelity the mission he had received, created and put into practice after careful appraisal those initiatives which charity called for. But he did not proceed in a haphazard fashion. He had precise points of reference which he followed, as a guide in the concrete realization of his ideas. The list of works in the first Constitutions reveals a well ordered development plan.

Our task today is one of fidelity in the development of the salesian mission. To interpret it as an uncritical repetition of the Founder's initiatives would be a grave mistake. Rather does it call for harmony with his perspective of commitments and agreement with the motivations underlying his actions, carried out in the characteristic style of the preventive system.

But going beyond this perspective, we may ask ourselves what are the fundamental criteria we can deduce from the Rule? Let us look at the text with an analytical eye and see what we can infer.

To give to our works and activity the physiognomy impressed by Don Bosco, art. 41 indicates three basic criteria: our works "depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working"; they must be "of an educational and pastoral nature" in salesian style; and they must be "designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church".

### **Attention to the needs of those for whom we are working**

The first criterion is a strong affirmation of the *priority of people* over structures, and of the attention that must be given to the needs of the human environment.

More than with works we are concerned with people, i.e. with those to whom we have been sent and with their needs. To their fundamental expectations we must provide a response. Our works and activities have to be continually rethought in relation to our beneficiaries and their needs. No work is of absolute value in itself. And every work recognized as suited to the attainment of the purpose and conforming to the spirit of Don Bosco is to be considered as valid and suitable for us. Our activity, in fact, is a service offered to young people of working-class areas: the young are our masters,<sup>1</sup> Don Bosco was fond of repeating, emphasizing by this phrase the great respect due to the person of the youngster, in whose regard he always adopted the attitude of an authentic servant. The vicissitudes and development of the wandering Oratory are a proof of the attention Don Bosco gave to his charges.<sup>2</sup>

Today the Salesians find themselves in the world in widely differing situations and are called upon to respond to the challenges made to them by the different environments, and to the urgent needs arising from new social and cultural circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Collected letters*, II, 361-362

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 349



The existing conditions of families, culture, work, social relationships, religious life, and living together are therefore factors which orientate our service.

This calls for great skill in detecting the sensitivity and expectations of the young, for the ability to identify their real needs and respond to the emerging idols which impoverish youngsters by alienating their spirit, and for dedication to the human and christian advancement of youth, especially those on the margin of society and the Church.

This criterion calls on the Salesians to verify the functioning of their works and activities, to make sure they are really a meaningful presence, providing an adequate response to the demands of the young and creating a space for them in which they can grow and be educated.

## Our pastoral identity

The *educational and pastoral purpose* of the work is the second discriminating criterion indicated in the constitutional article.

As Salesians we undertake many activities and different kinds of work (schools, parishes, youth centres, and centres for free-time activities, for cultural animation etc.), with a view to meeting the needs of youth and working-class neighbourhoods. We give great importance to all these activities in so far as they contribute to the overall advancement of the individual. But we have to ask ourselves whether they are set up as Don Bosco would wish, and whether they do in fact attain their desired objective.

Every work and activity finds its justification in "*the education and evangelization of many young people*". Education is our special field and our characteristic way of evangelizing. On the other hand evangelization is the *raison d'être*, the radical motivation for our educational art. This basic identity is the most characterizing note of salesian action. Without it, any structure would fail in its purpose! In other words in all our works our qualification of "missionaries of the young" must be verified, bearers of the Gospel to today's youth.

This idea is wonderfully reflected in the availability of Don Bosco, who declared himself ready for anything, even for "raising his hat to the devil", provided that by so doing he could save the souls of his youngsters.<sup>3</sup>

The terms "educate and evangelize" and the double idea "upright citizen and good christian" illustrate the richness of this inspirational criterion, without which a salesian work cannot even be imagined.

The SGC expresses this demand of our identity very forcibly when it states that "the main criterion to be followed in deciding whether a work should continue or be closed down is the possibility or otherwise of carrying out real pastoral activity there".<sup>4</sup>

Strictly linked with the educational and pastoral objectives of our work is an indispensable community presence. The action of an educating and evangelizing community is a basic requirement for discerning the validity of our presence among various opportunities offered to us.

### Sensitivity to the needs of the Church

The third criterion requires that our works shall "*meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church*". "Sensitive to the signs of the times ... we evaluate our activities, renew them and create new ones". Concern for the needs of the Church was rooted in Don Bosco's conscience, and it should be the same in ours too.

The Church is the subject of pastoral work, and hence a particular contribution in this sector will be efficacious to the extent in which it forms part of ecclesial action. In the Church the various charismata and pastoral initiatives come together to form an organic unity. The specific needs of particular Churches vary from one to another, depend-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM XIII, 325

<sup>4</sup> SGC, 398

ing on the local social and cultural situation, the level of evangelization in their neighbourhood and the resources of the Church itself. On the other hand the richness of our charism makes it possible for us to offer new and varied contributions.

Some Churches ask of us a specialized catechetical service, others that we take charge of education in schools and provide animation for the young in general, others that we work among emarginated people, and still others that we work in populous working-class areas or lend a hand in founding new communities.

Which and how many of these we should choose must not depend only on our competence or on individual taste, but on the needs of the Church and on an assessment of such needs in the light of the overall commitments of a Province.

The SGC returned frequently to this concern for the universal and particular Churches. To quote one text among many: "In the plan of action of every Province and house, priority should be given to the way we can best take our place with complete generosity in the local Church. Our exemption should be looked on more as an opportunity for service than as a privilege, something to increase our availability as we carry out our mission".<sup>5</sup> On the other hand the sensitivity of Don Bosco was no different: he was always ready to meet the expectations and requests of the Bishops. The Church, in fact, needs multiple forms and channels for carrying out dialogue with all of man and all men, and to reveal the overall design of salvation.

Certainly it must be noted that the pastoral contribution which the Salesians are called upon to offer must respond to the charism for which the Spirit has raised them up in the Church: in organized pastoral activity they are not asked to do work at random which may happen to be needed, but to bring the original contribution of their own identity (cf. C 48).

And this is a principle for efficacy, a norm for participation and a requirement for fidelity of the Congregation called to contribute to

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 438

the building of the Church by manifesting "the multiform wisdom of God".<sup>6</sup> On the other hand its particular nature and pastoral originality must be interpreted according to a criterion of adaptation to the needs of the individual Churches.

Vatican II expressed these criteria in recommendations of two kinds. The first is addressed to religious, who are invited to maintain and develop their own particular characteristics: "There exist within the Church a great number of clerical and lay institutes devoted to various aspects of the apostolate. They have contributions to make which are as varied as the graces given them: some exercise a ministry of service, some teach doctrine, some encourage through exhortation, some give in simplicity or bring cheerfulness to the sorrowful...".<sup>7</sup> "Since however the active religious life takes many forms, this diversity should be taken into account when its renewal is being undertaken".<sup>8</sup>

The second kind of recommendation is addressed to the Bishops, so that they may help the Institutes to preserve their own identity, not only as regards community life and their internal regime, but also and especially as regards their specific apostolic mission. "The hierarchy, whose task it is to nourish and feed the people of God, ... uses its protective authority to ensure that religious institutes established all over the world for building up the Body of Christ may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their Founders".<sup>9</sup>

If therefore religious are asked to make themselves available to meet pastoral needs, Bishops and Pastors are asked for discernment as regards their different charismata, so as to provide space in local pastoral work for the exercise of the gifts which the Holy Spirit has provided for the building of the Church. The document "Mutuae relationes" explicitly emphasizes this concern: "Bishops should confer on the different institutes a mission that is recognized as specifically theirs...; let specific duties and mandates be assigned to them".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> PC 1

<sup>7</sup> PC 8

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> LG 45

<sup>10</sup> MR 8

This kind of procedure will lead to the spontaneous definition of the physiognomy of the various Provinces, which are situated in specific territories and there have to render the salesian charism incarnate in the local culture and the reality of the particular Church.

## Consequences

As well as the inspirational criteria, the article also presents some consequences which it may be well to consider, even if only briefly.

Attention to persons and to the social and environmental context, the dynamics of educational and pastoral action, and the response to ecclesial requirements, inevitably imply the need to accept a *legitimate pluralism* as a natural consequence. The article, in fact, speaks of our work being carried out "in a variety of ways", of "adequate forms of service", of renewing our activities and creating "new ones".

Such a perspective is obligatory in the multiplicity of situations we are called upon to meet. Indeed Don Bosco teaches us to be ever alert to find new and previously unknown ways of getting close to youth.

The article also recalls a fundamental attitude which follows from the criteria we have spoken of. The salesian house is characterized by "*initiative and constant flexibility*", which is typical of the salesian spirit (C 19). Burning and courageous zeal finds its expression in this kind of attitude, which prompts us to active intervention in the reality of the situations we find, with persistence and intelligent openness of mind so as to adapt them to the rhythm of life.

Finally it is well to note the reference in the last paragraph to *salesian presence in the places where the young are to be found, and especially the very poor*. This is a kind of service which could be called "unstructured", and arises from the fact that it sometimes happens that the usual educational and pastoral structures fail to reach a certain number of youngsters. In today's world, in fact, as was also the case in Don Bosco's time, there are young people in social and psychological situations which keep them away from ecclesial institutions: we are well

aware how many there are, especially in distressed areas, who are completely ignorant or have only a deformed idea of the Church.

It is natural therefore that, besides the salesians working for the education of the young in schools and oratories, there should be some who go after those at a distance in the places "where they are to be found", meeting them "in the context of their own life style" to provide "adequate forms of service" for their "education and evangelization". In many cases we have to find new ways of being present and of evangelizing, in line with the flexibility and creativity which are characteristic of our spirit (cf. C 19).

Salesians called to these forms of missionary service will have to remember the requirement of community life and maintain a deep communion with the other members of their community and Province, and to foster an ever more intense evangelical and salesian spirit, in close union with Christ the Apostle and in the spirit of the "da mihi animas" of our Father Don Bosco.<sup>11</sup>

*Let us ask of Christ, the Good Shepherd,  
that all we do may be inspired and guided  
by a genuine charity  
made concrete especially  
in solicitous concern for other people.*

*That our activities may always provide a response  
to the needs of the young for whom we work,  
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*That all our works  
may always have as their first objective  
the service of the young and the poor,  
inspired by the teachings of Christ the Saviour,  
Let us pray to the Lord.*

<sup>11</sup> On "new presences", v. in particular GC21, 154-161: *New modes of salesian presence for evangelization*

*That above every secondary purpose  
our primary aim may always be  
the evangelizing education  
given us by Don Bosco as an ideal,  
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*Grant, O Lord,  
that our every thought and action  
may be always animated by the saving charity  
of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 42 ACTIVITIES AND WORKS

We carry out our mission chiefly in such works and activities as make possible the human and christian education of the young, such as oratories and youth centres, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties.

In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation.

In specialized centres we make available our pedagogical and catechetical expertise in the service of the young.

In retreat houses we provide for the christian formation of groups, especially of young people.

We dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young.

### The three areas of activity

Articles 42 and 43 refer to works and activities grouped according to the different sectors of our mission: *education, evangelization and communication*. Within each of these areas some significant examples are given which are described at greater length with their characteristics in the General Regulations.

In this way it has been possible to avoid giving a list, difficult to compile, of everything we do. By presenting the principal existing structures in groups we have been able to give prominence to the similarity in physiognomy between the different works and activities and their characteristic features. The search for possible structures which do not yet exist, or initiatives for the renewal of the present ones, are not ruled out by the text which needs to be read in the context of the whole section.

A further point must also be made to preclude the risk of misunderstanding the content of these two articles which are, moreover,



drawn up in very different ways. The main areas of education, evangelization and communication, in which the operational structures are grouped, are not to be understood as watertight compartments. A school, for example, has a characteristic educational structure, but this does not preclude the importance of social communication in it, and still less that of pastoral activity. The parish too, although characteristically a work of evangelization, is not really salesian without dimensions of education and communication. And to complete the example, a publishing house, although primarily a social communications structure, would not achieve its purpose from a salesian standpoint were it not to have also an educational and pastoral aim.

There is indeed a real distinction between the three areas, because every work and activity must maintain the basic physiognomy which characterizes it, but these should not be considered one by one in a closed and exclusive fashion, but in an open and mutually connected manner as areas of activity which complement each other.

### **Area of the education of youth**

Art. 42 provides a schematic outline of the first two sectors with a reminder in measured terms of some of the characteristic elements of the fields of activity, followed by an enumeration of the main structures.

First are grouped together those works which can be described as *educational* and *for the young*: the text, in fact, speaks of "the human and christian education of the young". This essential dimension of our activity finds practical realization in typical works in which the accent is on youth and education. In works of this kind it is possible to follow a programme of overall education following our pastoral plan, and it is indispensable that in all we do we have clearly in mind our preferential concern for the world of youth.

The General Regulations go into more details in describing the different works and their specific characteristics.

— The *Oratory and Youth Centre* (R 11-12) are seen as "an educational environment" with a "strong missionary slant". They are organized as a community service, and aim at evangelization through many different recreational, educative and apostolic activities.

— The characteristic element for the *salesian school* (R 13-14) is the overall development of the individual attained through a religious approach and a balanced openness to culture. The educational process is founded on solid cultural values and takes into account the dynamics of youth. Its social character is in line with the local social milieu, to which its cultural perspective and branches of training are also related.

— *Hostels and boarding schools* (R 15) constitute a service which enable a youngster to gain indispensable experience in a creative life environment. In them reigns a family atmosphere which facilitates relationships, promotes responsibility, and fosters a happy life together.

— The services of *vocation guidance* too reflect the characteristic aspects of our youth settings. They are fundamentally places where young people who feel called to an ecclesial commitment can find welcome, guidance and encouragement.

Although the list may well appear incomplete, the sequence of these and other works confirms our commitment to animation in the youth sector and emphasizes the educative aspect of the Congregation.

### **Area of evangelization of the poor and working classes**

The second group includes works which are strictly *pastoral* and *for the common people*.

The article says that through these works "we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people". The evangelization of such densely populated and missionary environments is a specific characteristic of such works and gives them their particular aspect and style. Even in these works, preferential concern for the young always remains the expression of our specific vocation and the distinctive contribution we make to the pastoral work of the particular Church.

— In this area special mention is made of our *commitment in the missionary field*, which had already been indicated in articles 6 and 30 as being among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission. In the light of one of the articles of the Regulations concerning the "Missions" (R 22), we can note a particular aspect of salesian missionary presence. At a time when progressively less attention seems to be given to concrete problems of global development in emerging countries, it is interesting to see the need declared for creating the "conditions favouring a free process of conversion to the christian faith with respect shown for the cultural and religious values of the neighbourhood". In this way prominence is given to the evangelizing and plebeian dimension of all our missionary work.

— With regard to *parishes*, art. 26 of the Regulations gives a clear outline of their specifically salesian qualities. They should be distinguished by their low-income population and their interest in young people. Their animating centre is the salesian community, which considers the oratory and youth centre as part of its pastoral project, sets great store by catechesis and bringing back those who have lapsed, fosters the linkage between evangelization and human advancement, and favours the vocational development of each individual.

— The constitutional article refers also to a particular task of the Salesians: *pedagogical and catechetical services in specialized centres*. This is a skilled service we are called upon to offer for a more efficacious and deeper formation and animation of youngsters by trained and competent educators.

— Finally the service provided by *retreat houses and spirituality centres* is highlighted. These provide a very valuable contribution to the growth of spirituality among groups, and especially youth groups, following the lines of the sanctity of Don Bosco. The GC21 makes explicit reference to such houses in connection with their importance as "places of vocational guidance".<sup>1</sup>

As we have said already, the article provides only examples, though they are not without significance. The field of salesian work and ac-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 118

tivity always remains open to inventiveness and creativity, provided the aim is to reach young people. In fact, says the article in conclusion, "we dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young".<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it may be asked why an article which consists simply and solely of a list of works has found its way into the Constitutions at all. Was it really necessary?

The prominence given to the kind of works, although not absolutely essential, is not something merely secondary in salesian tradition. Don Bosco, in fact, always attached great importance to the institution of "organized" works: they were the salesian "houses". These are better able to respond to the complexities of the salesian educational and pastoral plan, and the need for the community type of management which is characteristic of our educational system. Moreover an organized work does not mean that its structure is so rigid that it can never in any circumstances be changed. The perspective of the "family", which is constantly recalled, is a permanent call for structural flexibility.

The opening of a work is always a matter for planning; it is a question of how we are to place a house and community at the service and disposition of youth.

*God our Father,  
in the multiplicity of your works,  
you realize your undivided purpose  
of bringing men to you.  
Grant also to us the ability  
to pursue incessantly the final end of salvation  
in the multiple variety of our presence  
among our fellow men.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 1 (F. MOTTO, p. 73)

*By the guidance of your Spirit,  
may we live in every situation and circumstance  
the charisma of our Founder,  
for the benefit especially of poor youngsters  
and of peoples most in need,  
and in the charity of Christ,  
your Son and our Lord.*

## ART. 43 SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

We work in the social communication sector. This is a significant field of activity<sup>1</sup> which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission.

Our Founder had an instinctive grasp of the value of this means of mass education, which creates culture and spreads patterns of life; he showed great originality in the apostolic undertakings which he initiated to defend and sustain the faith of the people.

Following his example we utilize as God's gift the great possibilities which social communication offers us for education and evangelization.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. IM 1

The third area of our activity is social communication, "a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission".

Communication should not be understood as the sum total of a collection of "instruments", but as a complex and dynamic reality which enters into all we do. Nor should it be considered merely as a particular activity or a specific sector of apostolic work, but rather as a main road to the full realization of our task as educators and pastors who are also communicators.

### Social communication at the present day

In a society in which the reality of communication is invading and involving spheres formerly unexplored and not even thought of, the contents of this article are prophetic. The development perspective is no longer that of the industrial or post-industrial society, but the society of communications which are advancing with giant strides. "The mass media", said the GC21, "become ever more a massive educating in-

fluence, shaping and begetting cultures. They elaborate and broadcast accumulated evidence which underlie new life styles and new criteria of judgement".<sup>1</sup>

As a result of its incisive action stemming from the combination of highly refined technical instruments and the most sophisticated forms of the language of visual images, social communication has taken on and is playing a decisive role in the cultural dialect and in social life and customs.

The Church has recognized its importance and even its indispensability for communicating the gospel message. "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes".<sup>2</sup>

### **The Founder's example**

Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of the important implications of this phenomenon for the young and for people in general: "In his own day Don Bosco considered the press, the publication of good books and magazines, stage plays for youth, music and song not only as means for the service of educational pastoral works, such as oratories, hostels, schools, missions, but also as 'original apostolic endeavours' directed of their very nature to the mission Divine Providence gave him for youth".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GC21, 148

<sup>2</sup> EN 45

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 149

It seems evident that our Founder considered social communication a practical and authentic means of mass education, a parallel school of great efficacy and power. At the present day we hear his appeals in this regard with a new interest: "I beg and implore you not to neglect this most important aspect of our mission";<sup>4</sup> "this was one of the main tasks given to me by Divine Providence".<sup>5</sup> "I do not hesitate to call this means divine, since God himself made use of it for the regeneration of man".<sup>6</sup> Moreover Don Bosco has told us in writing that the spreading of good literature is "*one of the principal aims of our Congregation*".<sup>7</sup>

The oldest version of the Constitutions in Italian is very interesting for the space given to this matter, having regard to the undeveloped nature of the means available at the time: "... the members shall strive to preach retreats, spread good books, and use all the means that unflagging charity shall inspire, so that by means of the spoken and printed word a barrier may be raised against the heresy and irreligion which is trying to find its way by so many means among the ignorant and uneducated; that is what we are doing at present through the publication of the Catholic Readings".<sup>8</sup>

Our Father was well aware of the great power of the mass media for reaching people and of their limitless persuasive capabilities, so much so in fact that he urged the use of "every means that christian charity inspires" for promoting the faith.<sup>9</sup>

He looked to the future, undertaking also "new and original apostolic enterprises for defending and sustaining the faith of the people".

<sup>4</sup> *Collected letters*, vol. IV, p. 321

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 319

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 318

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 320

<sup>8</sup> *Costituzioni 1858*, I,5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 78)

<sup>9</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, I,7 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 79)



## Salesian commitment in the field of communication

The reference made in the article to "his example" is for today's Salesians the strongest motive for continuing along the road Don Bosco has pointed out.

The field is a vast one; new techniques for transmitting messages and news are appearing every day. We must not be found wanting in the courage shown by our Founder, who saw all the great possibilities offered by this phenomenon as so many "gifts of God".

The article invites us to think in renewed terms and to be creative in the use of means of communication. It is a case of developing our commitment to a mature and fruitful use of the mass media, understood as an ensemble of instruments, and to introduce the language of communications into our educational and pastoral work.

The salesian is a *communicator who draws his inspiration from the "perfect communicator"*,<sup>10</sup> the exemplary cause of every expression, every image and every technique. He does not consider the creative expression and use of the media as something merely incidental or subsidiary in educational projects, but is convinced that these possibilities of expression add up to a genuine new method of communication, a real language which must not be undervalued, especially in educational dialogue with the rising generations. And so he employs every means of communication relevant to his particular situation: he makes intelligent and competent use of the cinema, local TV and radio transmissions, together with other items like audiovisuals, the theatre, music, the so-called 'body language' etc.<sup>11</sup>

It was precisely "to sensitize our various fields of apostolate to this new language and to change the attitudes of those working in them" that the GC21 asked that courses should be promoted for systematic

<sup>10</sup> CP 11

<sup>11</sup> Cf. concluding address of Rector Major to GC22 (GC22, 73)

training in critical approach to the mass media's programmes and their use as normal means of educative communication.<sup>12</sup>

We note that the article indicates clearly what our objective must be as qualified communicators: *for education and evangelization.*

The first purpose is *education.* In this connection the SGC speaks of our threefold task: of liberation, of co-responsibility, and of creativity.<sup>13</sup> The influence of the mass media on youngsters and on ordinary people is enormous: they read all kinds of printed matter, they listen to all sorts of transmissions, and flock into theatres and cinemas. Often it happens that fundamental principles become distorted and even repudiated beneath the deluge of messages received every day.

From this a specific task derives for us, a work of liberation to free people from the conditioning effects of all these factors and form them to an attitude of critical appraisal in the face of the violence of hidden persuasion.

But this is not enough. We have to educate to a constructive attitude of shared responsibility, to active intervention with positive follow-up. It is a matter of developing in young people a critical aesthetic and moral sense to set them on the road to a "personal and free choice".<sup>14</sup>

The youngster must be helped to an understanding of the language, to a critical assessment of the message (which is often the expression of some ideology or mentality), and to dialogue by means of the various forms of comparison and discussion. The educator should also aim at stimulating creative imagination in this field: it is up to him to make the guiding intervention of one who is not only able to discern the underlying reality, but wants to bring his influence to bear in its regard.

The second purpose is *evangelization.*

<sup>12</sup> GC21, 152. In the "Ratio" the study of social communication forms part of every phase of initial formation (cf. FSDB, passim)

<sup>13</sup> SGC, 456-458

<sup>14</sup> IM 9

Every form of social communication represents a value to be cultivated in its own right, because it is the expression of human words which are anchored in the divine Word, the Word of God. But social communication can be put at the specific service of the spreading of the evangelical message, "at the service of the Gospel", to increase "almost infinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard, and to enable the Good News to reach millions of people".<sup>15</sup>

Experience shows that the use of the new language proves fruitful and efficacious not only at the strictly educational level but also for purposes of liturgical and catechetical animation, in formation to prayer, and in living the encounter with Christ in the sacraments.

In conclusion we may recall what the Rector Major said in his circular letter "*The challenge of the media*". After discussing the salesian dimension, he wrote: "Social communication is a 'new presence' for us".<sup>16</sup> We should be prompted to accept it by the open and courageous attitude adopted by Don Bosco in the last century.

"Don Bosco, man of vision that he was, was well aware of the ever increasing impact of social communication. Right from the early years of his apostolate he worked with enthusiasm in this particular field. He said of the printed word: 'In these matters Don Bosco wants to be in the vanguard of progress'. He was possessed of a saintly daring".<sup>17</sup>

*Let us praise the Lord  
who for the salvation of men  
provides means in every age  
for the communication of his Gospel,  
and entrusts them to the hands of his disciples.*

<sup>15</sup> EN 45

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ASC 302 (1981), p. 6-8

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 30

*For our Congregation  
that it may be able  
to communicate the message of salvation  
by expressing it in every language  
and inserting it in every culture,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For all those who with us and like us  
are called to spread the faith in the world,  
that they may be able to find in their environments  
apt instruments  
for the efficacious transmission of your Gospel,  
through a harmonious unity of faith and cultures,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Grant, O Lord, to the sons of Don Bosco,  
and to all our collaborators in the work of education  
the creativity and courage of our Founder,  
with the ability to accept and use for your Kingdom  
the riches of the means of communication  
which our times provide,  
so that we may be  
authentic communicators for the masses,  
to the praise of your glory  
and for the salvation of the world.*

## THOSE WHO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MISSION

*"He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3,8-9)*

Parties had sprung up in the community of Corinth: "I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Cephas, I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1,12). Worldly wisdom, divorced from the logic of the cross, could not recognize in the multiple ministerial expressions the unity of the gift of faith given by God in Jesus Christ. "You are still of the flesh... are you not merely men?" (1 Cor 3,3-4) asks Paul, and he goes on to specify in vv. 5-9 the sense of the roles of preachers and teachers, or more simply of the different ministries in the one Church.

At the centre stands God in Christ, the absolute protagonist of man's salvation or, to put it in the terms of the Gospel, the coming of the Kingdom. In the parables Jesus uses the image of a field to indicate humanity as the place of the Kingdom (Mt 13, but v. also the connection between people and vineyard in Is 5, or plantation in Ezek 17,7); the ministers are collaborators ("synergoi"), equally indispensable for the divine choice and for service of that choice. At this level the various interventions in God's field (planting, watering) are secondary and subaltern to the unity of the project; it may be that the difference will appear from the sense of responsibility and purity of intention with which each minister will have done what was given him to do (1 Cor 3,10-17). Paul is forthright in his admonition: "You are God's field, God's building". And the warning is addressed to the ministers, because he is saying in fact: in your different kinds of service in the one field of God, remember that that is the community in which you have to work, those are the people you have to evangelize, and above all do not forget that God is its *raison d'être* and its principle of belonging.

The pauline text is much more than a statement of principle: it is a strong warning based on concrete facts, on things which happen and bring to mind the final result, a just judgement on the validity of the service rendered. But still more it is a stimulus to grow in stature as spiritual men recognizing their common equality, though in different roles, before the one God who is the Father of all and works in all.

The Constitutions apply this teaching of Paul within the Congregation and the Salesian Family. We can never forget Don Bosco who unified everything in his "Da mihi animas", and at the same time did so much to bring his collaborators to understand and practise unity in brotherhood as they worked at different tasks for the salvation of the young.

## ART. 44 THE MISSION IS GIVEN TO THE COMMUNITY

The apostolic mandate which the Church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility.

The provincial and the rector, as promoters of dialogue and team work, guide the community in pastoral discernment, so that it may accomplish its apostolic plan in unity and fidelity.

### The community the subject of the mission

The title given to this section reveals at once the perspective of the articles which make it up (C 44-48). We are concerned with defining the *subject of the mission*, or in other words to whom the apostolic mission is confided. And the answer is clear: it is given to the community.

The community takes up and puts into effect the apostolic mandate received from the Church. The salesian mission is not something entrusted to the responsibility of individuals, but is a reality involving a group of people who share responsibility.

Among Salesians, therefore, there is neither room nor justification for individualism in apostolic work. Each member obviously brings his own talents to the mission and plays his part in the responsibility for its fulfilment (cf. C 22). But his indispensable personal task forms part of a community commitment. Here we have a first decisive statement about the community dimension which gives the hallmark to our apostolic work and style of education. We are not speaking of a generic kind of community concern, but of being clearly aware that it is the community as a whole that takes up the mission received, and that puts it into practice as a group.

Those therefore to whom the mission is given in a particular place are at a practical level "the provincial and local communities" concerned.

The "*provincial community*" has a particular importance as regards responsibility for apostolic work. It is in fact "the institutional salesian unit which best corresponds to the local Church".<sup>1</sup>

As will be said later and more explicitly (cf. C 58 and 157), the province is not to be considered simply as an administrative entity, but as a "communion of local communities" which recognize that they share responsibility for the salesian mission in a particular region.

This permits the offering of a specific and diversified service to the particular Church, thus manifesting the life and pluriform mission of the Congregation.

The "*local community*" carries the responsibility at a more restricted level, defined by the neighbourhood in which it is situated and carries out its specific apostolic tasks.

It follows that each member and each local community, while carrying out a particular activity, acts in the awareness of being solid with other members for the fulfilment of a common mission of wider extension.

## Unity and joint responsibility

In the community which is responsible for the mission "*the members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important*" like living organs of a single body. This was an image dear to Don Bosco,<sup>2</sup> and it expresses very well the idea, on the one hand that the fulfilment of the mission depends on many functions which differ one from another, and on the other that these functions cannot be understood in isolation from each other and from the whole organism.

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 84

<sup>2</sup> V. conference of Don Bosco to the salesians, 11.03.1869: BM IX, 267-271

According to the law of enriching diversity and mutual complementarity, we find in the salesian community confreres with different tasks to carry out and with widely differing talents, abilities and qualifications.

Each of them needs the others because the contributions of all of them are important, even though they differ in nature and prominence.

Each one, in line with what was said in art. 22, should feel a correlative relationship with the other members of the community.

But for the achievement of pastoral objectives a mere structural arrangement of tasks and roles is insufficient. It is of much greater importance that the members be conscious of their dependence on each other, and that they accept the implications of this. This is what the text means by the phrase "*through unity and joint brotherly responsibility*".

The word 'unity' here refers particularly to an objective situation of working together and the sense of mutual belonging; and on the other hand the phrase 'joint brotherly responsibility' expresses more particularly the subjective attitude in conscience of the various members, each of whom shares the responsibility of his confreres, and carries out his own task in a responsible manner and with the intention of building unity and working coherently with the others.

The Constitutions take up this concept again in the chapter on the fraternal community (chap. V), when dealing with the community obedient to the will of the Lord, and also in connection with the service of authority (cf. especially C 66 and C 123).

## **The pastoral guide**

The second part of the article is closely linked with the first.

Action by the community implies the unity of the members in the diversity of their individual tasks. This obviously requires a guide in pastoral discernment so as to ensure union and fidelity in carrying out the apostolic plan.



Who is this guide foreseen by the Rule for these apostles who share responsibility for their community operations? He is the Provincial in the provincial community and the Rector in the local community.

But shared responsibility means more than the members just waiting for or receiving directives; they have to work together in appraising situations and studying possible options. The superiors, therefore, are to be regarded as "promoters of dialogue and teamwork".

We must not look on them simply as works-managers, but be aware that they are called to *guide an apostolic community* so that the latter may proceed in united fidelity to their specific salesian mission, without which it would not be possible to achieve the objective of the apostolic plan conceived by Don Bosco.

The article points to a central trait in the physiognomy of the salesian superior, which will be completed in due course by other aspects in later parts of the Rule (cf. C 55, 121, 161, 176). The one who presides, in his capacity as salesian superior and coordinator of the community's religious life, is essentially the one who gives orientation to its educational and pastoral commitments. In him religious authority implies, and even demands, his role as a pastoral guide and vice versa. In Don Bosco's plan the guide of the salesian community is the apostolic and spiritual educator of a group of other pastors and educators, the coordinator of their individual efforts, the animator of the spirit which prompts missionary activity considered in its totality.

The GC21, in depicting the figure of the rector, says that he is "the pastoral guide of the salesian mission in a threefold function, as teacher of the Word, as sanctifier through the ministry of the sacraments and as a coordinator of apostolic activity. He holds principal responsibility for the mission among the young and the people entrusted to his community; he preserves and renews the fidelity of the confreres in their pastoral commitment to the preventive system; he cooperates with the Bishop and the diocesan clergy in the combined pastoral action of the local Church".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 52

It is a question of a skilled ecclesial service called for by the very reality of the salesian community, which in the mission received from the Church finds its tenor and specific way of life (cf. C 3).

*God our Father,  
awake and develop in us  
the awareness of the mission  
which through the Church and our Society  
you have entrusted to us to be carried out  
in our local and provincial communities.*

*May your Spirit help us  
to know, understand and love each other  
in mutual collaboration.*

*Make us glad to have so many brothers at our side,  
grant that we may be solid in our aims and efforts,  
as we try to be truly united around our superiors  
for the achievement of your loving designs.*

*We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 45 COMMON AND COMPLEMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one salesian vocation.

The salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life.

The salesian priest or deacon brings to the common work of promoting human development and of educating in the faith the specific quality of his ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.

The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness.

In art. 44 it was stated that the one single mission entrusted to the community is carried out by members who "have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important".

Now art. 45 presents briefly the figures of the members who make up the community and work in it for the same mission. It expresses in synthetic fashion:

- the vocational unity;
- the specific characteristics of the salesian coadjutor brother (or "lay salesian") and of the salesian priest or deacon (or "clerical salesian");
- their essential reciprocal relationship.

### The vocational unity

The priest or deacon and the brother are presented in the first place in their fundamental equality. *The salesian vocation*, says the Rule, *is the same for both*. The two figures are referred to as the "salesian

*brother*" and the *salesian priest*": what is fundamentally common to both is that each is a *salesian*" (the term being used not as an adjective but as a noun), thus expressing their fundamental equality. The manner of living the common salesian vocation, on the other hand, is spelled out by the specific characteristics which define the particular condition of each of them, priest and brother, and the respective tasks which devolve on them as a result.

The article begins by taking up again the theme of art. 44 and stating that each of us is responsible for the common mission and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts. The expression "each of us" is to be understood in a collective sense: the brother and the priest. It is another way of emphasizing the fundamental common responsibility, which is followed by the reference to the original contribution provided by each of the two figures. One and the same religious consecration, the identical apostolic mission and participation in community life are at the basis of the equality between brother and priest.

Don Rinaldi put it like this in 1927: "When Don Bosco began to think about founding a religious Society, he wanted all its members, priests, clerics and laymen, to enjoy the same rights and privileges... The brothers ... are salesians obliged to strive after the same perfection and carry out the very same apostolate which belongs to the essence of the Salesian Society".<sup>1</sup> Don Rinaldi's words reflect those of Don Bosco himself; when speaking of the Congregation to the young apprentices he said: "It is an association of priests, clerics and laymen, especially artisans, who want to live in unity so as to love each other and do each other good... Between the members of the Congregation there are no divisions: we all look upon ourselves as brothers...".<sup>2</sup>

And so the Constitutions give prominence to the unity of the salesian vocation, but also to the necessity of two kinds of members for the fulfilment of the original mission of the Congregation.

<sup>1</sup> ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 121

"The sons of Don Bosco", wrote Fr Ricaldone, "must stand side by side, complete one another, and go forward in carrying out the aims of their identical mission... they are not separate or divergent elements, but the heirs, instruments and executors of the same divine plan".<sup>3</sup>

This joint presence of laymen and clerics and their indispensability for the mission is not just something incidental but has its roots in the very identity of the Congregation.

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, wrote: "We find in the Congregation's single vocation two fundamental aspects: the sacerdotal and the lay. It is not simply a case of this or that confrere ... preferring the ministry or things temporal; it is a matter involving the salesian community as a vital organism, i.e. *the Congregation as such*, which has of its essence a peculiar and simultaneous sense of both the sacerdotal consecration and the lay dimension, each imbuing the other and forming together a unique life of communion".<sup>4</sup>

## Specific characteristics of the two figures

But vocational unity does not deny or disregard the specific nature of the two figures, and the second and third paragraphs of the article dwell on some characteristic features of each.

### 1. *The salesian brother.*

The Rule presents the salesian brother in the first place in his singular salesian vocation, as a "brilliant creation of the great heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians", to use the delicately sensitive expression of the Servant of God, Fr Philip Rinaldi.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> ASC 93 (1939), p. 14

<sup>4</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The lay element in the salesian community*, ASC 298 (1980), p. 15

<sup>5</sup> ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574

seventh successor of Don Bosco points out the lofty ecclesial significance of this vocation, comparing it with that of the ministerial priesthood: "Radically the difference is not one marked by any negative quality or lack of ecclesial endowment; it is a case of a different choice: the brother has opted for a positive christian ideal not determined by the sacrament of Holy Orders but constituted by a number of values which form of themselves a true vocational objective of high quality. The GC21 points out clearly the nature of this choice, calling it a 'vocation' which is in itself 'specific' (with its own special character), 'complete' (it lacks nothing), 'original' (the brilliant creation of the Founder), and 'meaningful' (of particular relevance at the present day)".<sup>6</sup>

As a salesian the brother is first and foremost an "*educator*", dedicated by vow to the overall advancement of the young and the common people. He carries out tasks of a cultural, professional, social and financial kind, in addition to those which are of a catechetical, liturgical and missionary nature; in other words he is engaged in "*every field of education and pastoral activity*". Because, as a religious, he does not act in his own name but receives his mission from the Church, he shares deeply in the pastoral ministry, giving a particular expression to his baptismal priesthood.

But while the salesian brother is carrying out these tasks, he is also giving his characteristic contribution to the community, a contribution which the Constitutions see as deriving precisely from his lay condition. "There are some things", said Don Bosco, "that priests and clerics cannot do, and you will do them...";<sup>7</sup> they are precisely the things which his condition as a 'lay' religious enables him to do.

Hence, after stressing the authentic and fundamental salesian religious vocation and its community dimension, the text goes on to consider the specifically 'lay' form in which the brother lives it. As the GC21 said very clearly: "The lay dimension is the concrete form in which the brother lives and operates as a salesian religious".<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> ASC (1980), p. 10; cf. GC21, 173 ff.

<sup>7</sup> MB XVI, 313

<sup>8</sup> GC21, 178

article of the Constitutions says the same thing in different words: the brother "brings ... the specific qualities of his lay status". It should be noted that precisely because of this kind of presence, as well as the traditional name of "salesian brother" the Constitutions and Regulations in certain contexts use the term "lay salesian".

We may ask: in what precisely do the "specific qualities of his lay status" consist, that distinguish him from the lay qualities of the man living in the world?<sup>9</sup>

The SGC gives the following answer: "With the characteristics proper to religious life, he lives his vocation as a member of the laity, seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to God's plan; he exercises his baptismal priesthood, prophetic witness and kingly service, and in this way truly shares in

<sup>9</sup> It will be useful to keep in mind the significance of some terms in frequent use. "*Laity*", according to the accepted usage in ecclesial documents (cf. especially IG chap. IV and AA) refers to those who through Baptism have been incorporated into Christ and constituted members of the People of God; in their own way they share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole christian people in the Church and in the world (cf. IG 31). In the Council documents and in the CIC the layman is considered from the vocation standpoint as a member of the faithful distinct from clerics, who are in sacred Orders (cf. IG 31; CIC, can. 207). The religious state is one with peculiar characteristics in the Church, linked with a charism of the Spirit; the conciliar documents explicitly state that the faithful who are either clerics or lay can become religious. (cf. IG 43; CIC, can. 588).

In the documents of the magisterium frequent reference is made to secular tasks as belonging to the laity (cf. IG 31: "Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity"). The term "*secular*" (and related terms) refers to tasks connected with the "secular" reality, i.e. all temporal realities which concern the present age (as distinct from the realities which directly concern the last end). In one sense the whole Church, because of its pilgrim nature, has a secular character, and therefore all its members are linked to some extent with secular realities. But the laity are more specifically inserted in such realities and it belongs to the laity to insert in them the gospel ferment through their professional contributions.

A distinction needs to be made between *secular laity*, who foster secular realities and raise their level in a christian fashion, acting within them in virtue of their own duties and laws, and *religious laity* (which include the salesian brother) who work in specific sectors of the secular realities in virtue of their consecrated status and according to the spirit of their Founder (cf. ASC 298, p. 25 ff.), and bring to them through their professional competence the charitable activity of the Church, offering a living witness to the fact that "the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes" (cf. IG 31)

the life and mission of Christ in the Church; with the intensity that derives from his specific consecration, and by 'mandate' of the Church (and not merely as a private individual), he fulfils the mission of spreading the Gospel and of sanctifying in a non-sacramental manner; his works of charity are undertaken with greater dedication within a Congregation devoted to the integral education of youth, especially those in need; finally, as regards the christian renewal of the temporal order, since he has renounced worldliness he exercises this form of apostolate as a religious in a most efficacious manner, educating youth to the christian renewal of work and to other human values".<sup>10</sup>

The salesian brother is called to live his lay condition according to the salesian charism and in the context of his community.<sup>11</sup> The reality of his lay status is not cancelled by his religious profession, but rather gives a special slant to every aspect of the confrere's life: the salesian mission, life of community, apostolic activity, profession of the counsels, prayer and the spiritual life.

It gives to the salesian community too its characteristic aspect that Don Bosco wanted: enriched by its lay aspect the community is able to approach the world more validly as regards its apostolic objectives.

The text does not refer directly to the different roles of the salesian brother, but stresses that his lay condition and his experience, united with a deeply salesian heart, make him particularly "*close ... to the young and to the realities of working life*". History bears witness to the fact that in the Oratories, in technical and trade schools, in the missions the brothers have carried out a very rich apostolate and have had a most efficacious influence!

We may well think that in the ever more secularized world in which we are living, the presence of the salesian brother becomes correspondingly more urgent and valuable.<sup>12</sup>

We may note finally that the entire text of the Constitutions reveals the interior attitude which underlies the characteristic vocation of the

<sup>10</sup> SGC, 149

<sup>11</sup> Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 29-30

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 47-49; the Rector Major presents two authoritative appeals, quoting Don Albera and Don Rinaldi



brother, on account of which his salesian heart is anchored in the transcendence he lives in temporal realities, into which he injects the radical power of the Gospel. This enables him to move in a secular context with a mentality which is at the same time both technical and pastoral, and this is of great value to the community!

## 2. *The salesian priest or deacon.*

The "*salesian priest or deacon*" is the sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, the sacrament of his ministry as Head of the Church.

Priests, according to Vatican II, exercise the function of Christ as Pastor and Head in proportion to their share of authority".<sup>13</sup> In fact, "by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, priests are signed with a special character, and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head".<sup>14</sup>

Between the ministerial priesthood (deriving from the sacrament of Order) and the common priesthood of the faithful (deriving from the sacrament of Baptism) there is a mutual complementarity: they are ordered one to another.<sup>15</sup> From the standpoint of the final purpose of christian life, primacy belongs to the common priesthood: "All the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God. They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs."<sup>16</sup>

But from the point of view of the sacramental efficacy of their insertion in the sacrifice of Christ, the priestly ministry has an essential role on account of the "sacred power" of which it is the bearer:

<sup>13</sup> PO 6

<sup>14</sup> PO 2

<sup>15</sup> Cf. LG 10

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

priests, in fact, "exercise within the limits of their authority the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head".<sup>17</sup>

What happens is that the service of the priestly ministry renders efficacious in the Church the common priesthood of all the faithful. But if priests exercise their role of presiding they must also, as St Peter warns in his first letter, avoid acting "as domineering over those in (their) charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5,3): they must be able to show that they are at the same time both "leaders and members"; "truly 'fathers', but also 'brothers'; teachers of the faith, but mostly 'fellow-disciples' of Christ; 'masters of perfection' for the faithful, but 'witnesses' also by their personal holiness".<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of this doctrine of the Council, the Constitutions ask in the first place that salesian priests be all that they should be.

It is both pleasing and significant to recall what Don Bosco said to the Minister Ricasoli who had invited him to Palazzo Pitti at Florence on 12 December 1866: "Your Excellency, I want you to know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys, a priest in Turin, and a priest in Florence. He is a priest in the house of the poor and a priest in the palace of the king and his ministers".<sup>19</sup>

This is a wonderful indication of personal identity and unity of life in Don Bosco. "In this way", declares the Council, speaking of priests, "by adopting the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity".<sup>20</sup>

The salesian priest feeds his heart on pastoral charity which can only come from Christ the Shepherd. This is a basic attitude which prompts him to seek through his every word and gesture to be an *authentic pastor* with the heart of Christ himself. It is his first and chief task!

<sup>17</sup> LG 28

<sup>18</sup> MR 9

<sup>19</sup> BM VIII, 239

<sup>20</sup> PO 14

Recalling the decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis", the SGC had this to say: "The priest is the spiritual man and must always have before his eyes the image of Christ, servant and shepherd. His ministry is an act of service, eschatological in character, the visible signs of which are his preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. In virtue of his office he publicly proclaims Christ as Saviour of today's world; he gathers together the christian community, uniting them in Christ's sacrifice, and as their guide he leads them to the Father through Christ in the Spirit".<sup>21</sup>

But the Constitutions emphasize that the salesian priest is called to exercise his ministry *according to the salesian charism in the context of his community*. His model is Don Bosco, whom Pius XI in his Encyclical on the priesthood cited with John Mary Vianney and Joseph Cottolengo as a "star of the first order" and a "true giant of holiness". The salesian priest is a priest according to the spirit and apostolic guidelines which made of our Father a sign of Christ for the young and the common people.

The Council itself recognized that within the one priesthood there could be different roles: "All priests contribute to the same purpose, the building up of the Body of Christ, and this demands many kinds of duties and fresh adaptations, especially in our own times".<sup>22</sup>

There are therefore different ways of exercising one and the same priestly ministry.

There are many tasks which may await the salesian priest: responsibility for a youth centre, preacher and catechist, teacher and educator, work in a parish, chaplain, group animator, missionary, superior of a community, etc.

The common denominator is the fulfilment of his task with a priestly heart; that he proclaim the Word, that he sanctify and animate a community. The text expresses these intentions and tasks by the word "especially".

<sup>21</sup> SGC, 142

<sup>22</sup> PO 8

The salesian priestly ministry is not something isolated and practised individually. It enters into the communion of pastoral objectives for the complete christian education of the young which involves also other equally indispensable contributions.

Nevertheless the text emphasizes a basic orientation. Among all their tasks, salesian priests give priority to those characteristic of their ministry, because "it is the first task of priests to preach the Gospel of God to all men",<sup>23</sup> and they are ministers of the sacraments, particularly of the Eucharist and Penance. And so the Gospel, the altar and the confessional represent the priorities for the ministry of every salesian priest.

### Essential reciprocal relationship

The last paragraph of the article emphasizes the *essential mutual relationship* that must exist between the lay salesian and the salesian priest in the community, if the latter is to assume its full apostolic physiognomy. This means that in the salesian priest must be found some of the aspects found in eminent form in the vocation of the brother and vice versa, and this to such an extent that the priesthood has no meaning from a salesian point of view if it is not seen in relationship with the figure and contribution of the lay salesian.

On the other hand the lay religious character of the brother does not find its true meaning without conscious reference to the figure and ministry of his priest confreres; the brother lives and works in spiritual and pastoral communion with them.

The article ends with the statement that *the significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness*. This is an expression in other words of Don Bosco's explicit desire concerning the "form" of the Salesian Society (cf. C 4): the Salesian Congregation would no longer be itself if one of its components

<sup>23</sup> PO 4

were missing; in every provincial and local community the presence together of clerics and lay members is needed for its "apostolic completeness".

The priestly and lay dimensions require each other and penetrate in a specific spirituality of apostolic activity. Each is in so strict an integrational relationship with the other that they become mutually essential. In the salesian community priests and brothers take part in a vital exchange of their different aspects, and forge the bond of an intrinsic inter-relationship for carrying out their common mission.

As the Rector Major said at the end of the GC22: "Every confrere, be he cleric or lay, if he has the true awareness of being a 'member', will feel that he shares the responsibility for everything, bringing to it the gift of himself and his particular vocation. The priestly and lay components do not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, running on parallel lines and eventually putting together the efforts of each group, but rather a single community which is the true recipient of the one salesian mission. This requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each clerical salesian there is an intimate feeling of being linked to and coinvolved with the lay dimension of the community, and in the heart of each lay salesian in turn there is the same feeling in respect of the community's priestly dimension. It is the salesian community, in each of its members, which bears witness to these sensitivities and carries out undertakings which are at the same time both 'priestly' and 'lay.'"<sup>24</sup>

From all this it is not difficult to understand why the Constitutions indicate the "significant and complementary presence" of clerics and laymen as an "essential element" for the "apostolic completeness" of the salesian community. And one can understand too the importance, in pastoral work for vocations, of presenting and illustrating adequately the two figures of salesians, with the specific and rich contribution that each of them brings to the common mission for the young and the poor.

<sup>24</sup> GC22, 80; cf. also GC21, 194-196

*God our Father,  
you distribute your gifts in a variety of ways,  
and direct them all to the common end of salvation.  
Grant that in our communities  
the common riches and diverse gifts  
with which you endow lay and priestly members  
may be received by each one with gratitude  
and used to good effect  
for the harmonious building of your Kingdom,  
especially among young people.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 46 YOUNG SALESIANS

The family spirit and the dynamic drive which is characteristic of our mission among young people make particularly important the contribution of young salesians in the apostolate.

They are closer to the rising generations; they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm; they are ready to try new solutions.

The community, by encouraging and guiding this generosity, helps them to mature as religious and apostles.

This article assigns a particular function to young salesians, clerics and young coadjutor brothers, in the realization of the salesian mission. They are deeply involved in apostolic responsibility, even though still in their period of formation. Don Bosco showed a great capacity "for sharing responsibility, even with the youngest of his helpers...; he could find for everyone the right job, suited to his temperament, ability and formation, so that all felt satisfied".<sup>1</sup>

Don Bosco's example brings us to the two main points of the present article: the apostolic contribution of young confreres and the attitude of the community in their regard.

### The contribution of young salesians

The tremendous importance which the Church today, and Don Bosco yesterday, attribute to the period of youth is undeniable. It is important to the existence of individuals and to the future of humanity; it is a benefit for all, a benefit for humanity itself. "Youth" in fact

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 498

'represents a heritage of values for the individual, for society and for the Church. It is a treasure in itself for what it is and for what it gives: the richness of its 'being' and the fruitfulness of its 'sharing'. ... Youth is a time for making discoveries, a time when future prospects are seen, a time for making choices, for planning, a time for making responsible and fruitful personal decisions. All this, it is true, is a possibility that in practice is not always realized; but the possibility is nevertheless an objective one, especially in the light of the additional energy and life enjoyed by the 'new man' risen through baptism".<sup>2</sup>

These considerations are even more valid in the case of our young confreres and well explain the significance of their presence in our communities. They represent the offering of fresh possibilities, a sowing for the future, a springtime of ideals, a flourishing of life.

It is not a matter of fostering idyllic visions. We know that in their heart is found the true measure of what they are, but their eager desires and their freshness of approach have a significant effect in the community. The article of the Constitutions gives prominence to this, without at the same time getting starry-eyed about it.

The text recalls two characteristic aspects of our spirit and mission to explain what it is that makes the apostolic contribution of young salesians particularly valid.

Every community is committed to the building of a "*family*": every member can contribute efficaciously to this objective. But it is evident that young confreres through their joy and enthusiasm their spontaneity and expansive nature, and their generosity, are the most lively element in our communities: they are the ones who help most in maintaining the family spirit which renders the communities attractive.

The other reason which makes the contribution of young confreres so valid concerns apostolic activity. Dynamism is a characteristic trait in salesians: by the very fact that our mission is addressed to youth, it must necessarily be carried out with a spirit of initiative and renewed enthusiasm. Moreover, art. 10 of the Constitutions says that the centre

<sup>2</sup> E. VIGANÒ, AGC 314 (1985), p. 6-7



and synthesis of the salesian spirit is "pastoral charity characterized by youthful dynamism". Our young confreres are best fitted for maintaining and fostering the *"youthful" style* of our apostolic activity.

The value of their contribution is expressed in three traits which they exhibit.

In the first place the Rule states that the young confreres are *"closer to the rising generations"*. We know how difficult it is at the present day, and at the same time how important, for an educator to remain sensitive to young people; and a basic attitude of this kind is obligatory for the salesian; "an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them", so as to be able to understand them and share with them (C 39).

Young confreres achieve this spontaneously and without any difficulty, because of their infectious cordiality and their own youthful tastes and interests. They help the community, therefore, to keep in touch with the young; they provide a natural bridge between youngsters and older educators.

The text adds a second trait: *"they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm"*. This is furnished by the novelty of their first pastoral experience, their desire to respond with all their strength to the Lord's call, and the creative freshness natural to their age.

Finally, says the article, *"they are ready to try new solutions"*. In apostolic work continuity is a good thing, but not obstinate rigidity. Dialogue between older and younger confreres helps in the finding of adequate solutions which are based on experience but at the same time open to new ideas and initiatives.

We should never forget that our Congregation was founded with young people, and that the daring missionary endeavours of the first generations were the work of young salesians!

### **Welcome by the community**

The community welcomes the young confreres as members sharing the common responsibility. It is in its own interest not to waste

but rather to develop this new strength given by God to the Congregation. The community must therefore foster their maturing as religious and their apostolic growth, so that their valuable contribution be not lost.

To attain this end the members encourage the young confreres in their generosity, help them to overcome any misgivings, support their initiatives even in the face of passing frustrations, willingly receive their suggestions and new ideas, and bring them in when plans are being made or programmes drawn up.

It is of interest here and much to the point to quote a famous passage from the Benedictine Rule. "... If we have said that we are all called upon to express our opinion, it is because very often the Lord reveals the best decision to one of the younger members".<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco's style was no different. His biographer writes: "Thus Don Bosco trained his clerics to use their talents, contenting himself with laying down guidelines and then letting them pursue the goal. Nevertheless he was always ready to come to their assistance".<sup>4</sup>

As well as encouraging the young confreres in their activity, the community is also called upon to guide the direction in which their youthful energies are expended. Apostolic activity needs care and is accompanied by certain risks: that of individualism which separates the confrere from the community, activism which leads to superficiality, and fragmentation which is an obstacle to growth in internal unity.

The wealth of pastoral experience already gained by the community should help to strengthen the favourable conditions and lessen the risks, by example, by advice, but especially by the full insertion of the young confreres in well planned pastoral activity.

These considerations make very clear the urgent need for a real family spirit between salesians of different ages. A happy formula to keep in mind is: Let the older confreres remember that the Congrega-

<sup>3</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. III, "The calling of the brethren to council"

<sup>4</sup> BM V, 26

tion does not end with them, and let the younger ones not forget that with them it does not begin!

*God our Father,  
you sow the seeds and a sign of hope  
in those who are young.  
Bless our young confreres,  
guide them in their choices  
and sustain them in their difficulties,  
so that in generous self-donation  
and in more direct contact with the rising generations,  
they may be efficacious mediators of the Gospel,  
and give to our communities new enthusiasm  
in the spirit and style of Don Bosco.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 47 THE EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY AND LAY PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR WORK

We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us.

In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all their own, because of their experience and pattern of life.

We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system.

We foster the spiritual growth of each of them, and to those who may be so inclined we suggest a closer sharing of our mission in the Salesian Family.

### The educative and pastoral community

The article opens with a very simple statement: "*We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community*". This takes on particular importance in putting our educational plan into effect, by contributing to the attainment of the objectives of our apostolic action.

For this reason the salesian community does not close itself in the religious group, but rather expands its communion in ever-widening concentric circles.

Don Bosco did not use the kind of terminology we use today, but in practice he adopted the idea of the educative community by gathering collaborators around him and involving the youngsters themselves in a deeply educational setting. The educative community, therefore, is a characteristic need of our system, which requires a vigorous environment of participation and constructive relationships, and associates everyone, educators and youngsters alike in a single dynamic experience.<sup>1</sup> All educational and pastoral activity inevitably requires

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 102

a community structure, not only because of the multiplicity and necessary convergence of the different factors involved, but especially because it implies a tissue of relationships and active involvement on the part of all concerned.

The educative community is also a decisive factor in evangelization. The strength of unity lived in an evangelical spirit is already in itself a living testimony, as well as an efficacious way of announcing the Gospel. An evangelized community is of itself an evangelizing power.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, as the goal ultimately sought, the educative community is a manifestation of Church, which is a reality of communion. This is why in the concrete realization of such a community the ideal should always be aimed at making of it a true "Church experience".

As the Constitutions point out, the educative community is characterized less by the organization of its roles and structures (which are necessary nonetheless) than by the spirit that animates it and by its *family atmosphere*. The ability to meet together, cordial collaboration, simplicity and spontaneity of style, all come together in a family atmosphere of kindness and goodwill. But above all it tends naturally to become a community of faith, where God is present and communicates himself, where there is the ability to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel, where is possible an authentic experience of Church as a place of communion and participation, so that the young may feel for themselves the worth and significance of human and christian communion with God and with their fellow men.

And so the community should be seen as a continually growing reality, advancing in form and achievement.

Who are the members of this progressively developing community?

The constitutional text replies: "*young people and adults, parents and educators*"; or in other words all those concerned in the educational and pastoral work. These are involved and must allow themselves to be involved, they must share and collaborate in the work.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. GC21, 62

There would be little point in giving a longer list. The salesians have a great work facing them: many people are required for a work of education and all are called upon to make their contribution, even though at different levels and with different roles. It is a question of uniting all their efforts for the realization of a common project for the benefit of the young.

To bring this about, clarity must be maintained concerning the plan's inspiration, organic unity and consistency, and its practical influence on the programming of various initiatives.<sup>3</sup> The awareness of the common mission must be developed; the shared responsibility must be recognized of all who take part in the planning of the work, and the collaboration of each one must be encouraged according to his abilities and the possibilities for personal fulfilment and the sharing of experiences.

## The lay people

In the life of the educative and pastoral community valuable and indispensable strength is provided by the "*lay people associated with our work*". The article makes special mention of them and gives prominence to their distinctive contribution.

There are many reasons why we should give careful consideration to their presence: their large number in both educational and pastoral structures; the important contribution they make as professional people; their willingness to collaborate in passing on the educative message.

But above all these stands a reason of an ecclesial nature. Vatican II provides a rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral teaching on the theme of the laity. They are the basic element in the People of God,<sup>4</sup> called

<sup>3</sup> Cf. GC21, 68

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the term 'lay' (or 'layman', 'lay person', 'laity' etc.) as currently used in some environments can be ambiguous. We use the term in the conciliar meaning of 'member of the People of God'. Cf. in this connection the Rector Major's letter on *The*

to a prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry which they exercise by giving christian animation to the temporal order. The decree "Apostolicam actuositatem" indicates active and responsible participation in the Church's mission as being proper to them and absolutely necessary;<sup>5</sup> the decree "Ad gentes" points to the importance and even indispensability of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church;<sup>6</sup> the Constitution "Gaudium et spes" describes the commitment of lay people as significant and decisive in the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world. Without their presence, in fact, the many secular environments would not have the benefit of christian witness and action. In particular the Church's magisterium has made abundantly clear the role of the laity in educational structures.<sup>7</sup>

These authoritative indications have contributed to the profile of the layman and recognition of his specific function.

It is not the intention of our Constitutions to summarize the conciliar doctrine on the laity, but to make clear that their presence in salesian work is not just instrumental.<sup>8</sup> They are there because of an intrinsic need in our Family: Don Bosco recognized and passed on to us the urgent necessity "of uniting the efforts of good people in helping each other to do good".<sup>9</sup> Lay people therefore are actively present in the salesian educative and pastoral community, in which they have a specific role because of the "*contribution all their own*" which only they can give. Their experience, professional ability and the model of life they provide represent a great and indispensable element in education and pastoral work. The figure of the layman provides young people with a more complete range of models of christian life, allows for a more wide-ranging dialogue on contemporary problems regarding the family and the professions, and gives greater opportunity to the

*lay person in the Salesian Family*, in AGC 317 (1986)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. AA 2-3; cf. also LG 31

<sup>6</sup> Cf. AG 41

<sup>7</sup> V. "*Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith*", CEC, Rome 1982

<sup>8</sup> Cf. The Rector Major: "The fact that the laity are in the mission with us, and we with them, is not simply a matter of a quantitative summation of forces, and still less is it an addition forced upon us by our losses and absences"; in AGC 317 (1986), p. 14; cf. also GC21, 66

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, I

salesians to dedicate themselves to the specific field of animation; the layman exercises an educational role all his own, different from ours but capable of integration with it.

The Constitutions are referring particularly here to the laity who participate fully in the mission of the Salesian Family, but are addressed too to all those lay people who, even though not belonging to our Family, share with us the responsibility for putting our plan into effect. Lay people can be valid and necessary collaborators who efficaciously complement our educational, pastoral and evangelizing work. In the common task each one maintains his own identity, because from this stems the educational and pastoral richness. But it is also indispensable to cultivate a mutual communion for reciprocal enrichment. As the Rector Major wrote: "It is evidently necessary to be able to bring about between lay and consecrated persons a true ecclesial communion of complementary vocations, founded on Christ, moved by his Spirit, and nourished by convictions of faith, by mutual witness, and by a concrete and practical choice of tasks. In other words it is a question of a deep communion in the same apostolic spirituality".<sup>10</sup>

## The animating role of the Salesians

The salesian community has a particular task in respect of the educative community as a whole and of each of its members.

The apostolic plan entrusted to the community requires the salesians to take on the role of animators of all the forces which collaborate. This is said explicitly in art. 5 of the General Regulations which describes the salesian religious community as the "*animating nucleus*" of the educative community.

The constitutional text speaks of three specific tasks in this work of animation: the involvement of all the collaborators, their formation, and the proposal of a salesian vocation.

<sup>10</sup> AGC 317 (1986), p. 14



— The community of salesians undertakes in the first place to *welcome and encourage their collaboration*. With regard to the lay person associated with the community's work, the salesian is called on to adopt a positive attitude of welcome acceptance in a family spirit for the contribution given to the realization of the educational project. But that is not sufficient. The authenticity of the welcome and the sense of belonging to a human group are measured by the degree of participation. This is a need at the present day of all associations, and implies a style of involvement in programming and evaluation. The salesian therefore is asked for a creative and positive attitude, able to promote convinced adherence and to open possibilities and space for active participation.

— But participation means more than a quantitative calculation of convergent elements. It implies a common and constantly developed frame of reference, and aims which are shared by all; otherwise it can end up in harmful conflict. And so the second recommendation comes in: *we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the preventive system and foster the spiritual growth of each one*.

The salesian spirit and the preventive system are the key points in educational and pastoral sharing. No intervention can possibly be efficacious without a frame of reference that is valid for all and a common system of values to put before the youngsters. The preventive system ensures common action and unity of intention; the salesian spirit creates harmony of heart and feeling.

— The final paragraph of the article extends the formation aspect to the vocational field. Our lay collaborators are not only our fellow educators, but are also christians in need of continual spiritual growth and of care in the process of their vocational maturing. As salesians, bearers of a charisma which fosters the growth of individuals to full maturity in Christ, we feel responsible for sharing our charism first of all with those who collaborate with us in educational and pastoral work: lay people have the right to expect from us encouragement and an example of holiness.

In particular the text emphasizes the logical consequence of the path which the salesians and their lay collaborators follow together: *a closer sharing of our mission and of Don Bosco's spirit in the Sale-*

*sian Family.* If lay people find themselves welcome in a family atmosphere and environment, if they are formed to the values of the preventive system and the salesian spirit, if they feel personally involved in the great objectives of the education and evangelization of youth, it is natural that they may wish to join those lay Associations which Don Bosco himself thought up for uniting all those who wanted to share in his mission. It is the responsibility of the salesians to foster the process and suggest to them a salesian vocation.<sup>11</sup>

*God our Father,  
raise up in our communities  
able and generous lay christians.  
May your Spirit inspire and guide them  
in sharing with us the education of young people,  
and the advancement of your Kingdom in their hearts.  
Help parents to be fully aware of their responsibility  
as the first educators of their children.  
May faith and charity inspire our relationships,  
so that we may be able to realize with them  
a true Church experience.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

<sup>11</sup> Concerning the significance of the Association of Salesian Cooperators for those who are in the mission with us, cf. AGC 317 (1986), p. 19-21

## ART. 48 SOLIDARITY WITH THE PARTICULAR CHURCH

The community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment within the particular Church. We become part of its pastoral action which has the Bishop at its head<sup>1</sup> and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as a springboard for action on a wider scale.

We offer the particular Church the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy, and we receive from it direction and support.

To forge more systematic links we share initiatives with other groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes.

We are ready to cooperate with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development.

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 678,1

### In the Church

Articles 6, 31 and 44 of the Constitutions have already spoken of our participation in the Church's mission. This article gives special prominence to the place of our apostolic service in the local Church.

The opening statement emphasizes the rich theological content of the theme. The Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" made the forthright statement: "This is how the Lord wanted his Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind or which Peter drew in with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, a flock which a single shepherd pastures. A universal Church without boundaries or frontiers..."<sup>1</sup> "Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of

<sup>1</sup> EN 61

a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum".<sup>2</sup>

It is in this perspective that the article asserts, as though as a premise to what comes later, that the salesian community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment in the particular Church, echoing in this way what is said in the document "Mutuae relationes": "The particular Church is the frame of history in which a vocation expresses itself in concrete form and fulfils its apostolic responsibility. It is here, within the ambit of a definite culture, that the Gospel is preached and received".<sup>3</sup>

Our vocation as salesian religious has a universal character. To quote "Evangelii nuntiandi" again: "The individual Churches should keep their profound openness towards the universal Church. It is quite remarkable, moreover, that the most simple christians, the ones who are most faithful to the Gospel and most open to the true meaning of the Church, have a completely spontaneous sensitivity to this universal dimension".<sup>4</sup>

"But, at the same time, a Church 'toto orbe diffusa' would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship between the universal Church and the individual Churches".<sup>5</sup>

It is in the light of these considerations that we accept the reference to the Bishop as bearing the first responsibility and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as indispensable guidelines in our apostolic action. In fact, the individual Bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church".<sup>6</sup> For this reason the Council recommends religious to collaborate in the various pastoral ministries,

<sup>2</sup> EN 62

<sup>3</sup> MR 23

<sup>4</sup> EN 64

<sup>5</sup> EN 62

<sup>6</sup> IG 23

due consideration being given to the particular character of each institute.<sup>7</sup>

The article makes these exhortations of the Council concrete for us salesians by means of two guiding statements: to be faithful to our own charism "*we offer the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy*"; and to be attentive to the Church "*we receive from it direction and support*".

The first point emphasizes the special values we are to bring to the particular Church: the kind of pastoral activity which is typical of Don Bosco and his preventive system.

The second, on the other hand, urges us to accept the guidance of the Bishops, to enable us to play a consistent part in the combined pastoral work and to have the whole particular Church behind us in our own work.

### **In communion with the groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes**

Within the particular Church our Constitutions emphasize the fact that if our pastoral service is to be coherent it must be organically connected with two realities: the Salesian Family and the religious life as a whole.

— The different groups of the Salesian Family are at the service of the local Churches just as we are. Don Bosco said, for instance, of the Cooperators: "The Association will depend absolutely on the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishops and the Parish Priests in everything appertaining to religion".<sup>8</sup> Don Bosco's charism is a *single unified reality* and must be offered as such in the Church; its visible manifestation is the *Salesian Family*, which must be ever more present in the Church

<sup>7</sup> CD 35

<sup>8</sup> D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, V, 2

as a united group. The linkage and coordination, therefore, between its component groups is important for fostering a better insertion and more efficacious salesian service: this is what was already suggested in art. 5.

— As regards the connection with other *institutes of religious life*, the Church herself has given norms indicating how this is to be done: it consists in sharing, through appropriate organisms, in common initiatives for the increase of religious life in the Church.<sup>9</sup> In our case this is also a precious heritage left to us by the Founder, who was always attentive to every charism given by the Lord's Spirit for the good of his Church (cf. C 13).

With this text the Congregation intends explicitly to make its own the doctrine of Vatican II on the mystical greatness of the particular Church and on its pastoral reality, and indicates some practical consequences.

- The organization of any pastoral plan takes place at two levels:
- at the diocesan level in so far as the Church finds its centre of unity in the Bishop;
  - at national or regional level with a group of dioceses which have social and cultural affinity with each other, and common traditions of a linguistic, theological and spiritual kind: episcopal conferences are the organisms best suited for the expression of common pastoral concern at national level, or at regional level covering more than one diocese.

## **In the neighbourhood**

A fundamental norm of pastoral action is collaboration, based on common sense and humility.

<sup>9</sup> V. the Council's observations on "Conferences of Major Superiors" in PC 23; cf. also MR 48. 61

We do not pretend that by ourselves we can solve all the problems of youth, nor are we so ingenuous as to dissociate these problems from the intricate overall picture. We know that around us exist organisms, movements and people who are as zealous as we are for the integral development of youth. In the article, the horizons of cooperation become ever wider. Every salesian community considers it an apostolic duty to collaborate with all the active forces present in society.

Art. 57 will say that the salesian community is "attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work, at one with those among whom it lives" and that "it cultivates good relations with all". If we put alongside this note the brief practical indication in the present article regarding cooperation with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development, there emerges the image of an *apostolic community actively inserted into its neighbourhood*, in active interaction with the dynamic factors which contribute to its development. The community is called to be a centre with open doors, ready to deal with the collective repercussions of its activities, committed to participate in the life of the human community in a give-and-take fashion, and not retreat into its own ivory castle.

The civil organizations dealing with education and social development would seem to be the most suitable organisms to which we can offer our cooperation in fulfilment of our policy of service to the young and the poor. The Rector Major said in his Report to the GC22 on the state of the Congregation: "It is not humility to have no weight at national and international level in youth problems".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> GC22, RRM 1978-1983, 337; on the insertion of the salesian community into the neighbourhood, v. "*Comunita salesiana nel territorio*" (Department of Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1986)

*God our Father,  
by virtue of its apostolic mission  
you insert each of our communities in a particular Church.  
Grant that under the guidance of the Bishop  
and in collaboration with other forces in the Church  
we may work with dedication and loyalty for its growth.  
Give us the grace of faith, ardour of charity,  
detachment from ourselves and zeal for your Will.  
May we be able to discern what is true and good,  
that we may be able to cooperate with human organizations  
for the education and promotion of youth.  
Above all, make us generous in our communion  
with the other groups of our Family,  
so that by all means and in every way  
we may contribute to the building in unity of your Church,  
the mystical Body of your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.*



## CHAPTER V

### IN FRATERNAL AND APOSTOLIC COMMUNITIES

*"Let love be genuine...: love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour... Contribute to the needs of the saints, practise hospitality... Live in harmony with one another" (Rom 12,9.10.13.16).*

The length of the quotation leads us to meditate on the whole of chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans, which is rich in theological and pastoral motives for a sound and intensive community life. First however let us recall the more general context of Rom 12-15: it is the great pauline exhortation full of imperatives, following on the indications concerning grace contained in the preceding chapters of the Letter. It is the "agape" poured out by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed (Rom 5) which is the foundation, inspiration and justification for the new life of christians, among themselves, in their various life environments, and in the face of political authorities (chap. 13). They must never forget the very natural reasons, rooted in faith, for living in a worthy manner the ethical responsibilities of this faith.

More specifically, chap. 12 — but also other passages in Rom 13-15, and even elsewhere in the New Testament (C 51 expressly quotes Col 3,12-13) — begins with a "leit-motiv" of extraordinary importance: the living of relationships of charity and mutual service, with the awareness and desire of making a living sacrificial gift, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12,1-2). From this follows the intention, and with it the strength, not to oppose the various charisms one to another but to put them in common (12,3-8), to live in mutual love, a love which is genuine and authentic (v. 9), imbued with brotherly affection ("philadelphia") shown in reciprocal esteem (v. 10). The realism of situations often calls for solidarity with one's brothers (i.e. the "saints") in their needs, particularly those making apostolic journeys (missionaries) and who therefore need generous hospitality (v. 13); but love means a sharing stemming from deep feelings with an intuition and delicacy coming from the heart, the mutual sharing of joys and sorrows, and at the same time the mortification of impulses to selfishness and conceit (vv. 15-16).

It is truly striking how the great axioms of evangelical love acquire concrete qualities in the light of human needs whenever people live together. The articles of the Salesian Constitutions, following Don Bosco, spell out the realism of this christian love, of which the details are not without significance since in love everything is of value.

*"To live and work together is for us salesians ... a sure way of fulfilling our vocation".* The salesian apostolic plan is a *community project*: our evangelical life develops in a brotherly community, to which in the first place the apostolic mission is entrusted (cf. C 2. 3. 24. 44). This chapter V of the second part dwells in particular on a description of the community dimension of our life and mission.

## 1. From Don Bosco to the present day

The treatment of the fraternal and apostolic community in the first Constitutions, written by our Founder, is rather brief and fragmentary, although the experience of community life was deep and enriching.

In the draft of 1858 only the first article of chap. II on the "form of the Congregation" describes the fraternal community in words and expressions graven in the heart of every salesian, which are an emblematic presentation of the spirit desired by the Founder: "The associates all live together in common, bound only by the bond of brotherly love and the simple vows, which so unite them as to make them one in heart and soul in order to love and serve God".<sup>1</sup> The spiritual and practical implications of brotherly communion were then illustrated in various parts of the Constitutions (forms of the Society, obedience, poverty, practices of piety, etc.).

But that brotherhood lived in common was one of the essential requirements in the mind of Don Bosco in founding his Society is borne out frequently in what he said and wrote. We may recall in particular his conference of 11 March 1869, when he made use of the pauline image of the "body" made up of many coordinated members all subordinated to the head to exalt the value of brotherhood, and explained what it meant for him to "*live in unum locum, in unum spiritum, in unum agendi finem*".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni 1858* II, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 82)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM IX, 267-271

Until the GC19 the treatment in the Constitutions of the fraternal and apostolic community underwent no significant modifications or changes.

The text of the Constitutions as revised by the SGC, with the involvement of the whole Congregation, contained an entire chapter on the "fraternal and apostolic community" (art. 50-57). Behind the drafting of these articles lay the careful work of revision and updating desired by Vatican II, and especially the deeper ecclesial analysis which had matured during the Council and a new understanding of the concept of brotherly community as Don Bosco had meant it for his Salesians.

The GC22, as we know, completed the study of the salesian community, in the light of the Congregation's experience and also of the norms of the new Code of Canon Law, enriching the material and putting it in a different order.

## 2. The leading ideas expressed in the text

For a full understanding of chapter V as a whole it is well to keep in mind some basic ideas which guided the General Chapters in drafting it.

### a. *The "communion-community" relationship.*

The text gives a clear presentation of the fraternal and apostolic community's life in its profound linkage with the mystery of the "communion" manifested in the community.

When we speak of "*communion*", we have in mind the gift of the Spirit through which man is called to be part of the same communion which exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is glad to find everywhere, especially among those who believe in Christ, brothers with whom he shares the mystery of his relationship with God. Through the gift of communion the christian lives in the charity and builds the unity for which Jesus prayed.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "*Comunione e comunita*", Italian Episcopal Conference, Rome 1981, 4. cf. also the Final

Communion in its deepest aspect is a specific witness which religious must offer to their brothers: "Experts in communion, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design... Religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union of man with God, who is loved above all things. Furthermore ... they are a sign of fraternal fellowship".<sup>4</sup>

Communion is lived, manifested and transmitted in the "*community*", a concrete form of aggregation, built on the foundation of stable visible relationships, with mediating structures and instruments which make it possible to share the gift of God and participate in it in charity. The structure and development of the *common life*, therefore, starts from the central nucleus constituted by the "mystery of communion" and, through the visible mediation of the community in various ways, eventually reach concrete ways of life such as, for example, living together in the same house.

The constitutional articles in this chapter aim at illustrating both the communion (the trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological aspect) and the community, formed by groups of confreres who, at various levels, share the values of the salesian vocation.

b. *Specifically salesian communion and community.*

The articles of the Rule which deal with the fraternal and apostolic community avoid all generic statements and describe the specifically salesian elements, with constant reference to the thought of Don Bosco and salesian practice; they also endeavour to locate the theme in the general picture of the Congregation's *family spirit*. In this perspective communion is presented as a gift of the Spirit bestowed on every salesian with his vocation; it is a gift which must permeate the structures of living together, information, interpersonal relationships and apostolic activities.

Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, 1985 (II C,1), which gives a synthesis of the Council's doctrine on the mystery of "communion" in the Church

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "*Religious and human promotion*", CRIS, Rome 1980, 24

c. *Relationship between individual and community.*

The constitutional text develops at some length the relationship between the individual and the community. On the one hand the salesian community, trustee of Don Bosco's charism, is of its nature the place where a deep and authentic experience of God according to the salesian spirit can be obtained; on the other hand it is in the community that the experience is communicated and shared by each confrere.

In fact, the desire for this spiritual experience, sustained by the atmosphere of joy and brotherly welcome, is a valid help for the "creation of surroundings favourable to the spiritual progress of each member of the community".<sup>5</sup>

Each confrere who is accepted and inserted in a community will mature fully as a salesian if, under the dynamic urge of pastoral charity, he grows in the love of God and of his brothers, and commits himself to the construction of the brotherly community in which he lives, by the total, coherent and faithful offering of himself. From this standpoint, even aging and sick confreres have an important part to play in the mutual and affective exchange of spiritual and material benefits between the community and the individual members.

d. *Significance of community structures.*

In the overall picture of salesian religious community life the various communal structures of communication, service, government etc., acquire their authentic significance.

Basically the structures have a double purpose, which must be pursued together: they aim in the first place at the complete and harmonious religious maturing of each individual mission entrusted to the community.

If looked at incompletely only under its juridical or functional aspect, the community may seem to be a structure whose sole purpose is a particular work; but if observed from the standpoint of its "mystery",

<sup>5</sup> ET 39; cf. also "*Religious and human promotion*", 15

it rises above the purely functional or instrumental level and becomes "a family gathered in the Lord's name".<sup>6</sup> Such a family, by its very existence, is already a sign of the presence of the risen Lord, the permanent source of communion in the Spirit for the entire People of God.

Every structure in the Congregation finds its justification to the extent in which it is a bearer of saving love. The individual confrere and the community as a whole, using all the structures, become forces of salvation; and so each member and the community as such, filled with the charity of Christ the Shepherd, from being saved become also saviours of others, illustrating Don Bosco's slogan: "*salve, salvando salvati*".

### 3. Plan of the chapter

An overall glance at the handling of the fraternal community in the text allows us to get a rapid impression of the main ideas developed and the relationship between them.

#### A. *Significance and bonds of communion:*

*art. 49:* Importance of life in community

*art. 50:* The bonds of unity

#### B. *Interpersonal relationships between members of the community:*

*art. 51:* Relationships of fraternal friendship

*art. 52:* The confrere in the community

*art. 53:* Sick and aging confreres

*art. 54:* Death of the confrere

*art. 55:* The rector in the community

#### C. *A solid and open community:*

*art. 56:* A welcoming community

*art. 57:* An open community

<sup>6</sup> PC 15

*art. 58:* The provincial community

*art. 59:* The world community

After stating in the first two articles the values and bonds which essentially identify every salesian community (A), the next five articles present at some length the fundamental personal relationships (B) which, starting from the primacy of the person, translate the salesian charisma and spirit into terms of experience, commitment and community style. Only after a consideration of these interpersonal aspects in the community, a further four articles (C) go into details about some more directly structural aspects which concern hospitality, insertion in the neighbourhood and the local Church, and linkage between the communities of the province. The final article presents the world community from the aspect of a fraternal and apostolic community.

Schematically therefore the treatment of the subject begins with a description of the community seen as a *mystery of communion*, passes on to the *interpersonal* relationships through which the mystery becomes a living and practical fact in the *person* of each salesian, and finally deals with the *structures* in which salesian communion is incarnated and made visible.

## ART. 49 IMPORTANCE OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY

To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation.

This is why we come together in communities,<sup>1</sup> where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person.

The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity: there we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity.

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 608

### **Living and working together, a fundamental requirement of our vocation**

The first paragraph of the article provides a direct linkage with the preceding section dealing with the mission and with the entire salesian apostolic project. The text opens with a fundamental statement: the Salesians form a Congregation whose members feel the intimate need of communion of life and activity: *"To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation"*. This is an explicit option which goes with our religious profession.

It means that the salesian vocation is inconceivable without concrete communion in common life among the members. It is precisely the communal bond between the confreres that constitutes their living and working together as Salesians.

The fundamental reasons for this statement are not far to seek: because we are baptized, the requirement of fraternal life is born of the fact that we are members of the Body of Christ and sons of the same Father; as religious we feel obliged to live in meaningful fashion the radical aspects of brotherhood; but here it is especially in our quality



as Salesians that we are aware of being called to form a true family, practising charity in a tangible way and making youngsters sharers in it.

Art. 49 is a clear echo of what the Constitutions have already said earlier in art. 2 ("We, the Salesians of Don Bosco, form a community of the baptized, ... resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan"), and especially in art. 3 ("Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration"). The communal aspect gives its full meaning to the personal commitment of the salesian who, "as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks" (C 22; cf. also C 44-45).

If the mission is entrusted first and foremost to the community (cf. art. 44), the individual salesian must perceive as a "fundamental requirement" of his vocation his openness to the community and his constant intention to put at its disposal for the common mission his gifts of nature and grace. Our complex educational and pastoral tasks need "teams" of workers whose members are closely united and animated by a living charity.

A dynamic charity of this kind, which makes the individual gravitate towards the community, even overcoming every barrier of selfish individualism so as to put everything in common, is "a sure way of fulfilling our vocation" and a guarantee of success as regards personal holiness and apostolic efficiency.

### **"We create communion between person and person"**

In the second paragraph the article goes on to explain in a more intimate sense the communion which binds us together. Our relationships in apostolic work are not of the purely functional "professional" kind ("You're in charge of sport, I'm in charge of liturgy"), nor even exclusively hierarchical ("You're the rector, I'm a rank and file confrere; you're the parish priest, I'm a curate"). Before all else our relationships are "brotherly": beyond his office and function I see the other person as a brother with his unique vocation, and I am seen in the same way: "our love for each other leads us to share all we have".

This brotherly love is at the foundation of our community life: Don Bosco spoke simply of "*family spirit*". Just as in a true family, in sharing everything we bring about the meeting and communion of individuals on the basis of a loving exchange: this is what makes a "true" community! Art. 16 already indicated this perspective very clearly, presenting it as one of the characteristic traits of the salesian spirit; art. 51 will specify it still further.

We emphasize the expression "*we create communion between person and person*". In introducing the chapter it was said that communion is the objective to which community life tends. Here the concept is taken up again and, going in a certain sense beyond the idea of "common life" alone (indispensable though it be), it is stated that communion concerns individuals, who feel themselves welcomed, valued and loved. Communion of this kind finds its root in God (we are "one" in the Lord Jesus and in his Spirit), but it needs the collaboration of everyone: it is never realized automatically, even in the most favourable conditions, but is the result of continual effort on the part of all members of the community, each of whom must play his daily part in this unending work of construction.

### **"The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity"**

The last paragraph is a synthetic expression of the greatness of a community which courageously strives for communion in love. This communion is manifested in three directions: in relationship to God, with regard to the members of the community, and in relationship with the beneficiaries of our mission.

The highest quality of fraternal communion is without doubt that of making the community a *reflection of the very mystery of the living God*. What, in fact, is the Trinity, if not a total and infinite communion of love? It is the perfect encounter of three Persons, absolutely original and essentially related to each other, in sharing the riches of the unique divine nature.

The Church, the fruit of the loving design of the Trinity, is seen to be "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

Like the Church and in the Church, the authentic salesian community shares in the mystery of the Trinity, realizing the supreme prayer of Jesus: "(I pray) that they may all be one: even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee" (Jn 17,21). Such is the origin and destiny of our community. Through its reflection in the Trinity, the salesian better understands why "to live and work together" is a "fundamental requirement" of his vocation, and why charity is the community's connecting medium.

On the other hand, we know very well that man is made to love and be loved. Love, received and given, is the sun which opens the human heart. One does not enter community to suffer but to be happy. Don Bosco has told us: "When this brotherly love reigns in a community towards one another, and all rejoice in another's good just as though it were their own, then that house becomes like heaven itself, and justifies the words of the prophet David: 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity'".<sup>2</sup>

The recent General Chapters have been at pains to emphasize the *human value of the salesian community*;<sup>3</sup> it is quite normal for the confreres to seek and find in it a maturing process, balance and happiness.

Finally the text highlights how fraternal communion is directly concerned with the salesian educational and pastoral mission. This communion is the sign and concrete proof of the truth we teach and the charity which animates us. The love of the God who is Charity, diffused in hearts by the Spirit of Jesus, is the very essence of the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> LG 4; cf. also the Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, Rome 1985, II. C (The Church as communion)

<sup>2</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 236

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 483-488; cf. also GC21, 34-37; E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 36-37

and of christian salvation. The truly united community can proclaim Jesus Christ successfully; its life is a constant and eloquent sermon: *"we become for the young signs of love and unity"*. On the other hand the Apostolic Exhortation *"Evangelii nuntiandi"* warns us that *"the power of evangelization will find itself considerably diminished if those who proclaim the Gospel are divided among themselves"*.<sup>4</sup>

In this way we are encouraged to do everything possible to realize a kind of community able to enrich us with so many precious benefits.

*Lord, one God and perfect Trinity,  
source and end of all our being,  
infuse the charity and light of your Spirit  
into our communities,  
and make them a clear reflection  
of your mystery of communion.*

*Grant that we may love each other in a family spirit,  
in the total sharing of every good,  
so that we may build  
a true communion of persons,  
to manifest to the eyes of men  
the presence and power of your eternal Love,  
and direct them to you, the one true good.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. EN 77

## ART. 50 THE BONDS OF UNITY

God calls us to live in community and entrusts us with brothers to love.

Brotherly love, our apostolic mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion.

We thus become one heart and one soul to love and serve God,<sup>1</sup> and to help one another.

<sup>1</sup> cf. C 1875, II, 1

In the face of numerous and repeated obstacles which our frailty raises in the life of communion (selfishness, diffidence, cultural differences, unpleasant temperaments, different views on apostolic projects etc.), we wonder whether brotherly communion can really animate our community<sup>1</sup>, and make it the sign of the love of the Trinity spoken of in the preceding article.

In a faith perspective and in harmony with Don Bosco's teaching the present article asserts that communal charity stems from the very gift of the salesian vocation; because of this the bonds of unity and communion originate in the dynamic structural elements of the salesian vocation, which are: love for every confrere, the common apostolic mission, and the practice of the evangelical counsels which we share together.

### Salesian vocation and brotherly communion

The first paragraph links love of one's brothers with the interven-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 493; GC21, 34

tion of God who has called us all to share the christian and salesian vocation.

The text takes us back, first of all, to the reality of our baptism, through which we have been introduced into the great family of God and have acquired many brothers in Christ; it then recalls the specific bond which has linked us to the religious family, in which Don Bosco's charism has united us in a true spiritual consanguinity in order to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people" (C 2).<sup>2</sup>

In this way the Rule emphasizes the *supernatural origin of the community*, which is born of the grace of God.

Community life, therefore, an essential element of our vocation (cf. C 3), is a gift of God given at the moment he called us; but it is a gift which must become an explicit and uninterrupted personal commitment. In the light of faith we recognize that we do not choose our own confreres but receive them from God our common Father. He "entrusts" them to us as so many "brothers to love".

In this context we draw attention to the particular significance of the word "*brothers*": it is a reminder that, beyond differences of origin, age, culture and functions, every salesian is sensitive in the first place to everything that unites us in brotherly equality: we are all equally salesians; the same call of the Father has committed us to a common mission to be fulfilled together; the very superiors are first and foremost brothers who have received particular tasks and responsibilities for the good of all.

## The bonds of unity and brotherly communion

The second paragraph states that our brotherly communion is consolidated and continually develops when nourished by the three key

<sup>2</sup> One of the sources from which the text draws its inspiration is also a passage from *Gaudium et spes*: "God desired that all men should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood" (GS 24)

elements of our salesian vocation: the practice of brotherly love, the carrying out of the apostolic mission, and the practice of the evangelical counsels. These are the "bonds of unity" indicated also by our Founder in the Rule he wrote himself.<sup>3</sup>

a. *Brotherly love.*

The conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" declares that the daily gestures of brotherly love become a source of unity and communion in the light of the Lord's Passover: "Religious, as members of Christ, should live together as brothers and should give pride of place to one another in esteem (cf. Rom 12,10), carrying one another's burdens (cf. Gal 6, 12). A community gathered together in the Lord's name enjoys his presence (cf. Mt 18,20), through the love of God which is poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf Rom 5,5)".<sup>4</sup>

Brotherly communion is not something automatic; it requires the daily overcoming of barriers created by personal selfishness, diversity of temperament, jealousy and discord etc.; this subjugation is possible if each religious strives to cultivate in his heart attitudes of forgiveness and reconciliation. As one author writes: "Sharing and generosity in material things make practical a communion of spirits and hearts which has its origin in the presence in all believers of a single Spirit which makes all of them participants in God's feast of love; this interior communion is indicated by Christ's Passover, of its nature it implies forgiveness... This explains why it often happens that the first place is occupied by the need for reconciliation and not by the joy of unity found among people who spontaneously agree with one another: my brother will be first of all the one given to me by God to love as part of my incorporation in Christ".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, II, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83); cf. also the entire chap. I of the same text, which deals with the object and aim of the Society

<sup>4</sup> PC 15

<sup>5</sup> J.M.R. TILLARD, *Davanti a Dio e per il mondo*, Alba 1975, p. 229-230

In his Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco, after stating that "the house becomes heaven itself", goes on to say that it becomes changed into hell "as soon as self-love gains dominion there, and disagreements and dislikes arise among the members". Our Holy Founder, with the richness of his human and religious experience, continues his reflections on brotherly charity by comparing the joy of the communal relationship lived by those who are "reconciled", with the harm done by grumbling, strife, anger and refusal to forgive. For Don Bosco the good religious becomes an authentic witness when he "speaks well of his fellow religious and, when occasion arises, seeks to excuse his failings".<sup>6</sup>

b. *The salesian mission.*

The mission entrusted to the community is a powerful means for creating a deep communion: we cannot forget that the first community of salesians was built up around Don Bosco to carry out a "*practical exercise of charity*".<sup>7</sup>

A glance at our apostolic mission is a constant stimulus to us to overcome every form of selfishness and individualism. We become aware that as a community we cannot limit ourselves to being a "convent", rich in peace and recollection, or simply a well organized and efficient working team; with the strength and light of faith we must cross the threshold of the mystery and recognize that we are living members of the Body of Christ, with a well defined function and mission in God's designs.

The place which God, in his plan of salvation, assigns to the Congregation, to its individual communities and to each confrere depends entirely on the unity and strength of cohesion intended by the divine

<sup>6</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 236

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Minutes of meeting of 26.1.1854, BM V, 8



saving plan itself. For an integral living of the salesian mission it is necessary, therefore, to live in perfect "koinonia" one's membership of an apostolic community.

The individual apostolic actions of the confreres find their unique significance of communion at various levels in the eternal plan of the Father, in the saving mission of the Church, in the educational and pastoral mission of the Congregation, in the concrete project of each single community, and finally in the charity which inspires and unifies the life and existence of the individual confrere (cf. C 14). At the very moment when the salesian uses his powers of saving love to the maximum to reach the youngster who is poorest and farthest away, he needs to draw in his innermost depths on the most genuine salesian principles. This is possible only if he is in communion with the rich salesian patrimony which has come down to us from Don Bosco, and in close union with the community where he must be able to regenerate every day the charism of the salesian spirit.

When Don Bosco, on 11 March 1869, told the salesians and youngsters of Valdocco of the approval of the Salesian Society, he said that charity is the force of cohesion and unity of spirit and action, and that carrying out the mission together is the source of unity and communion: "If, as members of this body which is our Society, we are willing to perform any task, if we are animated by charity and guided by obedience, our Society will prove its worth and will have the energy to perform great deeds for God's glory, for the good of our neighbour, and for the welfare of its members... We must also keep in mind our Society's purpose, which is the moral and intellectual education of poor destitute boys by the use of such means as Divine Providence shall send us".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> BM IX, 270

c. *Practice of the vows.*

We shall see later in greater detail (cf. chap. VI) how the evangelical counsels are lived in the fraternal community, but even at this point the Rule gives prominence to the fact that the evangelical life of the counsels has a special role to play in the building of love.

*Obedience* is the strength of union, of love and convergence, and of availability for the common mission. It is in fact obedience to the Lord himself for his service. It is expressed in the fidelity of all to the same Rule and in the acceptance of decisions of the community and the superior. Obedience implies "convergence" in the two phases of seeking and fulfilling God's will.

*Poverty*, in turn, makes a powerful contribution to uniting us with the beneficiaries of our mission, and to making us dependent on each other. Each one contributes his own goods and resources, and in this way helps the community to gain a livelihood. But in return each one also receives according to his needs. Solidarity works in two senses: each one is useful to all and gives to them; each one has need of all and receives from them. A continual movement of giving and receiving circulates among the members and deepens their communion.

True *chastity* is a strong expression of love: it has never dried up the sources of affection; on the contrary it points them in an evangelical direction, it purifies and intensifies them. By renouncing by vow the carnal expression of love, we are made more free to love all our brothers in the strength of the Spirit. Later on art. 83 will say that chastity "encourages true friendships and helps to make the community a family".

One cannot overemphasize the point that the vows are at the service of love and communion. In the salesian spirit obedience, poverty and chastity cannot exist without their fraternal aspect; their authenticity can be judged by the effectiveness of their contribution to a peaceful and unruffled community life.

## "One heart and one soul"

The article ends with a paragraph which takes up again a thought which has been expressed in the Constitutions from the very first text: "The associates all live together in common, bound only by the chains of brotherly love and the simple vows, which unite them in such a manner as to make them *one in heart and soul, in order to love and serve God*".<sup>9</sup> This is a clear reference to the life of the first christian community, described in Acts 4,32, from which our Founder drew his inspiration, as also did explicitly the Council.<sup>10</sup>

In a passage referring to fraternal charity in his Introduction to the Constitutions, Don Bosco wrote: "Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren dwelling in his house *in unum*, i.e. united in heart and mind, serving God and *helping one another* in charity. This is the praise given to the early christians by St Luke, that they so loved one another that it seemed they had but one heart and soul".<sup>11</sup> We can understand better these words of Don Bosco in the light of his conference on 11 March 1869 from which we have already quoted: "Oh how good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers! It is beautiful to live united by a bond of brotherly love, strengthening one another in prosperity and hardship, in joy and sorrow, in mutual assistance and counsel by word and deed".<sup>12</sup>

After such insistence by our Founder it would indeed be strange not to find in our Constitutions an appeal for "cor unum et anima una". It is true to say that in these days of tension and easy divergence Don Bosco's teaching is still practical and right up to date.

There is no true salesian community without hearts imbued with mutual goodwill, which does not seek unanimity of spirit, which does not strive to bring about a convergence of wills in a double concern

<sup>9</sup> *Costituzioni 1858*, II, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83)

<sup>10</sup> Cf. PC 15

<sup>11</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 236

<sup>12</sup> BM IX, 268

of the members to help each other and serve the Lord with the same enthusiasm. This paragraph should be seen as among the richest in its evangelical and salesian overtones.

*God our Father,  
you have called us to live in community  
and given us brothers to love.  
Make efficacious among us the sacred bonds  
which bind us together and to you,  
so that we may grow every day  
in our commitment to live in communion,  
and so form one heart and one soul  
to love and serve you,  
to help and sustain each other,  
and to bring your Gospel to our fellow men.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 51 RELATIONSHIPS OF FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP

St Paul exhorts us: "Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other".<sup>1</sup>

The family spirit is the hallmark of the salesian community and inspires every moment of its life: work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters.

In an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows, and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences.

<sup>1</sup> Col 3,12-13

Articles 51-55 describe how brotherhood in the salesian community works in practice: they deal, in fact, with the principal interpersonal relationships which must be instituted between the members of the community. The description opens with an article which presents some fundamental attitudes, in which are incarnated various facets of brotherhood covering every moment of the day, which together create the characteristic "family spirit" which must distinguish Don Bosco's community; also emphasized is the way in which the atmosphere of brotherly friendship becomes participation and shared responsibility.

### Virtuous communal attitudes

The quotation from St Paul (Col 3,12-13) is an exhortation to practise the communal virtues which make possible and enrich brotherly friendship in the christian community. They are virtues which are eminently human, but which nevertheless find their basic reason for the christian in the fact that he has been chosen by God, has been placed in the orbit of Christ's salvation, and is by definition "loved by God". The new life of the baptized person (chosen, made holy and full to overflowing with divine love) must make evident the love of

God which is poured into the heart of the believer; such a manifestation of love in the life of every son of God becomes, according to the nature of the interpersonal relationship, *"compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness"*.

The Constitutions apply all this to the salesian community and, avoiding any contrast between the natural and supernatural, situate the brotherly friendship which must develop in the community in the context of our experience of being "chosen, holy and beloved"; every salesian in fact (like every baptized person) makes love for his fellow men concrete in genuine brotherly friendship. When Christ gathers us together in community — a "little Church" — he invites us to love each other after his own example: "Love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn 13,34).

Our authentic tradition from St Francis de Sales to Don Bosco and on to Dominic Savio shows us that a friendship inspired by God can perfectly integrate "human" aspects; it adds to them its own "grace" and rejects any selfish imitations. This is what is indicated in the first paragraph of the article which, through the mouth of St Paul, invites us as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, to commit ourselves with a generous heart to those attitudes which are typical of evangelical friendship: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness: demanding virtues which have always been the mark of true friendship!

### **Family spirit in the community**

The human attitudes of which the Apostle speaks, strengthened by grace, lead therefore to brotherly friendship, that deep friendship which Jesus showed to his disciples ("I have called you friends" — Jn 15,15), and which is the ideal for every true evangelical friendship. The article, right from its very title ("Relationships of fraternal friendship"), proposes this same ideal to the salesian community.

It may be useful at this point to recall the path that each one is called upon to follow. Incorporation into the community brings with it the gift of brotherhood: this is something objective, perceptible by

the light of faith, through which God gives us to each other as a "brother to love" (cf. C 50). It is a question of behaving in such a way that brotherhood blossoms into friendship, i.e. tends to open up to a deep intercommunication, to a reciprocal relationship in which is felt the giving and exchange of affection, a participation by each one in the life of the other. Evidently this is not a matter of exclusively human friendship, but one which is born of the Lord's gift (cf. also C 83).

The text reminds us that this ideal is realized in our case in that "*family spirit*" which is characteristic of our community. Already art. 16 has stated that the family spirit is one of the components of the salesian spirit: the salesian community is the primary environment where we experience and share this spirit: "the salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good".

According to salesian tradition the family spirit integrates and completes the relationships of brotherly friendship with those of the father-and-son kind between superiors and confreres and between salesians and youngsters. Enlightening in this regard is a page from the historian who was steeped in the atmosphere of Valdocco at the time of our Founder: "Writing on 9 June 1867 to the Salesians at the Oratory, Don Bosco told them of his ideal that they should form '*a family of brothers around their father*'. Speaking more generally he said in 1873 that every rector 'is a father who cannot fail to love his sons'... Family life among the confreres is the best way to ensure the same kind of life among the youngsters... Where it exists it is a real panacea for outlawing nostalgia, long faces, conspiracies and other nuisances, and ruinous insidious disorders in schools in which authority is suffered as a punishment or endured as a restraint to be whittled away like a yoke to be shaken off. Where the atmosphere is that of a family, as Don Bosco wanted it to be, you have only to look into the eyes of the youngsters to realize that peace and harmony make life happy there".<sup>1</sup>

Salesian friendship, shared in a family spirit, is a style of living together which pervades all interpersonal relationships and is manifested

<sup>1</sup> E. CERIA, *Annali della Societa Salesiana*, vol I. p. 730-731

in every situation of community life; work, prayer, meal times and recreation periods etc. are all occasions when the salesian community shows forth its rich content of love. The family spirit enables every confrere to live joyfully every moment of each day, sharing the values associated with work, prayer and other communal manifestations like meetings and community assemblies.

## Communication and sharing

The final paragraph of art. 51 points to two items which are characteristic of brotherly friendship lived in a family spirit, two aspects which permeate salesian life in its affective relationships and in apostolic work; they are mutual communication and sharing of responsibility.

*Interpersonal communication* is something of the greatest value for the growth of the individual and of the community. It deeply imbues problems at a personal or communal, ecclesial or civil level, and leads to great communion and joy in seeking the true well-being of persons and the coming of Christ's Kingdom. But if it remains at a purely superficial level, it does not create communion but risks leaving individuals in more or less melancholy isolation and beset by problems.

The second value referred to is that of *brotherly sharing*. Art. 49 had already stated the communal principle according to which "our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person". Religious life does not destroy our affective life, but places it in the existential context of the salesian vocation. Sorrows and joys lose none of their capacity to inflict interior pain or exultant gratification; we live these situations and share them as St Paul teaches us: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another" (Rom 12,15-16).

Sharing takes place also in our apostolic work. Elsewhere in the Constitutions the shared responsibility obtaining in the salesian community is spoken of more specifically (cf. especially C 66 and C 123);



here it is merely stated that it forms part of the salesian family spirit, and that it is a sign of authentic brotherly friendship to share with our confreres the plans and experiences of our educational and pastoral work by which we extend God's kingdom.

If the community is the first recipient of the apostolic mandate received from the Church (cf. C 44), it must constitute a point of reference for every confrere, not only for official recognition of his work but also to discover the fraternal sharing, the salesian support and the ideal moment for praising God for the good he performs each day.

An indication of how intensely Don Bosco lived the values of communication and fraternal sharing can be found in his letters. Listen to what our Father wrote to Fr Lasagna, a missionary in Latin America, on 30 September 1885: it is a wonderful page which well illustrates the "family spirit" in action:

"I feel my life is drawing to its close, and so I have thought it well to leave you some thoughts in writing as a testament of one who loves you and has always done so... We want souls and nothing else. Make that message resound in the ears of our confreres. Lord, give us crosses, thorns and persecutions of every kind, provided that we can save souls and among them our own... Study, plan, do not worry about expense, provided that you can give some priests to the Church, especially for the Missions. When you have occasion to speak to our Sisters or our confreres, tell them from me of the great pleasure with which I receive their letters, their greetings, and it gave me joy and great comfort of heart to know that they had all prayed and continue to pray for me... I am here at Valsalice for the spiritual exercises. My health is not too good, but I manage to keep going. May God keep us all in his holy grace.

Your affectionate friend,  
Fr John Bosco"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Collected letters*, vol IV, p. 340-341

*Lord our God,  
you inspired Don Bosco  
to base the life of our communities  
on the family spirit.  
Send us your Spirit of love  
so that among us may reign that brotherly friendship,  
made up of human warmth and supernatural delicacy,  
which fosters communion in joy and sorrow  
and sustains us in moments of difficulty.*

*Grant us charity, faith and simplicity,  
that we may be able to listen together to your Word,  
speak to you together,  
and share our apostolic plans and experiences  
in real co-responsibility,  
guided only by the search for your glory.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 52 THE CONFRERE IN THE COMMUNITY

The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity. It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace. It provides for his needs and sustains him in moments of doubt and difficulty, weariness and ill health.

Don Bosco used to say to those who asked to remain with him: "Bread, work and heaven: I can offer you these three things in the Lord's name".

The confrere pledges himself to build up the community in which he lives. He loves it, despite its imperfections, and knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ.

He accepts fraternal correction, fights whatever he discovers in himself which militates against the community, and gives his own generous contribution to the community life and work. He thanks God that he is among brothers who encourage him and help him.

<sup>1</sup> MB XVIII, 420

After the description in art. 51 of the relationships of brotherly friendship which are at the basis of communion and community life among us, art. 52 analyzes the action of the community as regards each confrere and the contribution each salesian must make to his own community, so that the family atmosphere which distinguishes our life may be realized.

Communal unity, in fact, does not aim at uniformity, and still less at anonymity, but rather at the overall expression of the multiplicity of gifts which the Holy Spirit bestows on every member of the community. To use an image from the musical world, one could say that the community is like a large orchestra: while the individual instruments play accurately their own part, the orchestra as a whole reproduces a symphonic masterpiece; or more exactly it reproduces the masterpiece composed by God from all eternity for that particular community. And while he continues to call other musicians to play in this living orchestra, the Lord renews their repertory of musical compositions, adapt-

ing them from time to time to the possibilities and characteristics of the conductors.

### The community welcomes each confrere

The arrival of a confrere in a community always causes delicate problems of integration and readjustment. It imposes new duties on each member. The community, says the constitutional text, "receives" and "accepts" the confrere: two precise verbs which indicate the steps in integration into the community.

In the Body of Christ, each one has his gift from God "for the common good" (1 Cor 12,7; cf. C 22). On the other hand every confrere needs to be enriched by the gifts possessed by others. Hence the requirement for reciprocal welcome and acceptance, which does not suppress diversities (which are all "gifts of the Spirit") but uses them to advantage for the benefit of all.

*"Receives each confrere with an open heart"* means internally to immediately give him proper esteem, and externally to let him see that he is a brother and not a stranger, and to put him at ease.

*"Accepts him as he is"* means recognition of his own individual personality, rejoicing at the qualities he will bring to the community, avoiding the use of his limitations or past weaknesses to justify leaving him on the fringe: he is a brother whom God has given us to love, says art. 50.

The community is called upon to *"foster the growth to maturity"* of each of its members, a task which never ends. The text goes on to explain how this is to be done: "It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace", which does not mean the opportunity to practise his hobbies, but to provide each one with the possibility of using his particular skills in the common work, encouraging his spirit of initiative and sense of personal responsibility.

But above all the community helps each confrere to realize fully his vocation: to this end it not only provides what he needs for his

health, studies and work, but supports him especially in times of difficulty, doubt or sickness.

To provide for all this, good community organization is certainly useful but above this there is needed a living and always attentive charity.

### "Bread, work and heaven"

Between the description of what the community does for the confrere (first paragraph) and what each confrere does for his community (third paragraph), has been inserted an emblematic phrase of Don Bosco. It expresses all the joy Don Bosco felt in his family, and which he wanted to communicate to his sons: he really felt himself to be in the House where the Lord wanted him, where there was precisely "work, bread and heaven". It is the same promise that at the present day, as a hundred years ago, the salesian can repeat to every youngster who accepts the call to stay with Don Bosco: *"Bread, work and heaven: I can offer you these three things in the Lord's name"*.<sup>1</sup>

### The confrere builds the community

The building of the community is a shared responsibility: the communion of individuals is created through the patient charity of all; the communal commitment is born of the personal effort of each one. And so the first attitude the salesian has to cultivate in himself is the awareness of being in the community as a responsible member; he feels that the construction of genuine salesian brotherhood depends partly on him, and for that reason he is glad to make his contribution. If it is true that the community is at his service, it is equally true that he is at the service of the community.

<sup>1</sup> MB XVIII, 420; cf. also MB XVII, 251; BM XII, 443

The sense of responsibility stems from a deep inner feelings: from the *love* which the confrere has for his community. This love is not the result of idealizations or a juridical formality; it is a concrete genuine affection which is not blind to his shortcomings and limitations but nevertheless wishes the community well and, enlightened by faith, "knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ". His practical gestures of love and communal service will be the more generous and continuous the more he fosters within himself the conviction of faith that Christ is living and present in the brothers he finds around him.

In line with this concrete love the Constitutions emphasize the importance of "*fraternal correction*"; so as to build community the salesian gratefully accepts the help given him by his confreres and tries to correct "whatever he discovers in himself which militates against the community", remembering that selfishness and individualism have deep and mysterious roots in the heart; he also makes himself a minister of fraternal correction towards his brothers, in the gospel spirit recommended by Christ (cf. Mt 18,15-17).

The Rule then gives prominence to a very practical sign which manifests the commitment of each one to the building of the fraternal and apostolic community: it is *his own generous and active contribution "to the community life and work"*. We all learned during our Novitiate that "it's not my business" is a "salesian blasphemy", and that the corresponding positive ejaculation is "I'll do it!"<sup>2</sup> It is wonderful to see so many confreres who, while spending themselves for the benefit of the young, are glad to be able to live in their own community, and humbly and generously make daily sacrifices to make it a welcoming "house" for all. It is a moving experience too to see so many aging and sick confreres who stick to their work in the desire of being useful to the community, even when their strength is waning.

Finally the salesian builds community by his attitude of gratitude to his brothers for the love they show him.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*. Turin 1985, p. 57

There is a double task, therefore, that of the community to the confrere and of the confrere to the community: the reciprocal relationship is necessary for the production of true communion. This alone can form a community which is at the same time a family, avoiding both standardization and individualism, and refraining from anything that might cause clashes or frustration.

*Father, you welcome all who come to you;  
pour into the heart of each one of us  
the same spirit of welcome.*

*Make us able to accept  
and open ourselves in trust to our confreres,  
so that in sincere and mutual love  
we may form a true family,  
united in your service  
and in that of our young people.*

*Grant us the strength to act in our community  
with a constructive spirit,  
and so help to build your Church in charity.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 53 SICK AND AGING CONFRERES

The community surrounds its sick and aged confreres with care and affection.

They in their turn, accepting their condition and serving the community in whatever way they can, are a source of blessing for it; they enrich its family spirit and deepen its unity.

Their life takes on a new apostolic significance: as they offer their limitations and sufferings in a spirit of faith for their brothers and for the young, they are united with the redeeming passion of the Lord, and continue to share in the salesian mission.

In dealing with the interpersonal relationships that develop within the salesian community, the Constitutions give special attention to the care and affection given to sick and aging confreres. Art. 53 treats of the duties of the community to these confreres, the communal significance of their presence among their brothers, and the new apostolic import of an existence marked by pain.

### **The commitment of the community for aged and sick confreres**

The relationships of brotherly friendship which should reign in the community become expressed in a quite special way in love and thoughtful care for those who are old or sick. The family spirit becomes almost tangible when the whole community brings to bear the riches of its affection and service on its weaker and suffering members.

Evidently such solicitous manifestations of love and service will be all the more stable and fraternal the more every confrere is convinced that Christ is present, in different ways and with different needs, in all the members living in the house.

Through what is done by individuals, the whole community serves the Lord in its most needy brothers. And the community becomes a clear sign of the Father's love which, through the christian community



which is the Body of Christ, reaches out to sustain, save and care for its weakest members.

In salesian tradition, going back to the time of Don Bosco, the sick are surrounded by special attention. Of Don Bosco himself we read in the "Biographical Memoirs": "'On arriving (at a house) he immediately asked if anyone was sick', declared Fr Luigi Piscetta, 'and would at once visit him. His was a mother's concern for the sick, and he checked to see they were properly cared for.'" <sup>1</sup> The recommendation to look after the sick is also found in various letters of Don Bosco, as for instance in that of 24 September 1885 to Fr Allavena in Uruguay: "Take particular care of the children, the sick and the aged". <sup>2</sup>

### **The commitment of the sick and aging for the fraternal community**

The Constitutions highlight the deep significance of the presence of the sick and aging in the salesian community. They make a singular contribution of great value to the community by the services they can still render, but especially by their example and suffering. And if they can no longer fill the posts of direct responsibility they once occupied, nevertheless by "accepting their condition", and remaining undisturbed, trusting and open to the community without any sign of bitterness, they place at the service of their brothers their experience, their family spirit and the witness of their abandonment to God.

The Rule tells us that for the community the old and ailing are not a burden but a "*source of blessing*"; they have, in fact, been marked in a special way by Christ's passion and hence live more intimately, for themselves and for others, the mystery of pain which redeems and saves. As writes John Paul II: "Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrec-

<sup>1</sup> BM X, 426

<sup>2</sup> MB XVII, 616; cf. also MB XII, 200 (Letter to Fr Perino); BM XIII, 667 (Letter to a parish priest at Forli)

tion, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ".<sup>3</sup>

The article adds that the sick and aged confreres "*enrich (the community's) family spirit*"; in fact pain not only purifies the one who suffers and the community who share it, but reawakens in the confreres reserves of sharing, of endurance and of service which are characteristic of the most genuine family spirit. And so the text can rightly assert that these confreres "deepen the unity" of the community: the confreres unite around their suffering brother to offer the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. Let us never forget that christian suffering is productive of good; redemption, in fact, comes from the cross!

### Apostolic significance of sickness and old age in confreres

For a salesian accustomed to exuberant activity, serious illness and the infirmities of old age are particularly painful trials which form an appeal to a more living faith and a new kind of fidelity, and they call for a deepening of vocation itself. The confrere has to convince himself that *his life is still fully apostolic*. In what way? Thanks to the thrust of his salesian spirit, which does not change, and the 'salesian' utilization of his practical possibilities, he accepts his reduced activity (and sometimes the complete lack of it) and offers his sufferings and his prayers in union with his brothers and for the welfare of the young, with whom in many cases he likes to preserve a living contact: in this way he continues to live within himself the "*da mihi animas*".

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, Rome 1983, 23

By the daily renewal of his own existence marked by pain, the sick or aged confrere is "united with the redeeming passion of the Lord": at every moment of the day his suffering or weakened life, united to the Crucifix, acquires a unique redemptive value and is therefore eminently "apostolic". From this intimate attitude of the offering of himself in Christ to the Father for the salvation of the world, springs almost spontaneously the explicit prayer which has a special place in the long hours of his patient suffering; in this way he continues to live in the heart of the community and "continues to share in the salesian mission".

Every province can provide illustrious examples of confreres who have lived and are living to the full the christian and salesian values described in the Rule. Among many others we may recall Fr Andrew Beltrami who realized his full fidelity to his salesian vocation in long suffering, leaving an example for our imitation. We remember too the witness of Fr Joseph Quadrio who, accepting his illness from the hands of God, reorganized his life in the following resolutions:

"In the most holy name of Jesus and by his grace I promise while I am in hospital:

1) to live with Him in communion of thought, sentiment and continued oblation;

2) to smile and spread tranquillity among the doctors, nurses, sick and Sisters. Each of them must see in me the "benignitas et humanitas Salvatoris nostri Dei";

3) to give loving attention to prayer: Mass (when I can), Communion, Breviary, Rosary, Way of the Cross etc. I will fill the day with prayer:

4) to occupy every moment of spare time in useful reading;

5) to imbue all my conversations with a simple and discreet priestly tone."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> E. VALENTINI, *Don Giuseppe Quadrio, modello di spirito sacerdotale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 164

*God our Father,  
grant that our community  
may be able to welcome and understand  
our sick and aging brothers,  
and sustain them in the family spirit.*

*Give to each of them  
the grace of a living faith,  
so that in union with the passion of Christ your Son,  
they may fulfil in accordance with your will  
their salesian vocation,  
by perfecting their offering of love  
for their brothers and the young.*

## ART. 54 DEATH OF THE CONFRERE

The community supports with greater love and prayer the confrere who is gravely ill. When the hour comes for him to bring his consecrated life to its highest fulfillment, his brothers help him to enter fully into Christ's paschal mystery.

Death for the salesian is made bright by the hope of entering into the joy of his Lord,<sup>1</sup> and when it happens that a salesian dies working for souls, the Congregation has won a great triumph.<sup>2</sup>

The memory of departed confreres unites, "in a love that will not pass away",<sup>3</sup> those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Mt 25,21

<sup>2</sup> cf. MB XVII, 273

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 13,8

The three paragraphs of art. 54 develop the following ideas:

- the community sustains the confrere in his last days of life;
- hope makes bright the salesian's death;
- after death the confrere remains united with those who are still alive in the "love that will not pass away".

### The community surrounds the gravely sick confrere

The approaching death of a confrere is for all the members of the community an appeal for a more impelling charity. It is important that the sick member be helped to give to the supreme moments of his life all their significance.

The Rule incites the community to close ranks around the gravely sick confrere to help him to appreciate the deep sense of the mystery of the death of a consecrated person. The article emphasizes in a particular manner two aspects of this mystery.

The death of a religious is directly linked with his religious consecration. On the basis of his baptismal consecration, he "offers himself totally" to God and to his service on the day of his profession, and commits himself to be faithful to the end. Now, on the last lap of his fidelity, he is asked to give once again to God the last proof of his love and filial abandonment: it is his "*highest fulfilment*", his final "Yes, Father!", his "consummatum est!"

But there is another mystery which is fulfilled in him. To be baptized, and to commit oneself by religious profession, means to enter into the Lord's Passover, to choose to die to oneself so as to be reborn to the life of the Risen One. As death approaches, this participation reaches its fullness: it is a question of uniting his own sacrifice with that of his crucified Master, so as to live again to the full in the life of Christ the Lord.

That the salesian may have the grace to persevere in these faith perspectives, the Constitutions invite all the members of the community to help him with the most intense charity in these decisive moments of his existence.

### The sense of the salesian's death

Don Bosco said a great deal about death to his confreres and boys. He realistically "exercised" them every month for a "happy death", teaching them to die to sin so as to be ready one day to welcome death in the joy of divine friendship. The salesian therefore has a special reason for looking at death without any alarm.

The second paragraph of the article firmly orientates the salesian to look at death in the light of the apostolic reality of his life. He has lived, in fact, "serving" God in his younger brothers, and hopes therefore to hear those words. "*Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master*" (Mt 25,23). This is the assurance given us by Don Bosco, who spoke to his confreres of the reward reserved for them and pointed to Paradise as the place where he and his sons would meet

together, the goal of all their endeavours, the place of rest.<sup>1</sup> To the first missionaries he gave this souvenir: "In time of fatigue and suffering do not forget that we have a great reward prepared for us in heaven".<sup>2</sup>

The text quotes another well known phrase of Don Bosco, in which our Father equates the happy outcome of the existence of a salesian who has been faithful to his mission, with the success of the Congregation itself: "When it happens that a salesian yields up his life whilst working for souls, you can say that our Congregation has registered a great triumph and that on it will descend in abundance the blessings of heaven".<sup>3</sup> The salesian never goes into retirement, even though he may be offered the possibility to do so by some insurance policy. He works "for souls" as long as he has any strength left, and is willing to die doing such work.

This is the supreme application of "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*": Lord, take from me even this final period of rest that all men look forward to, if by my work I can still do some good to a soul somewhere! In this sense art. 54 is linked with the very first article of the Rule, where was quoted that other phrase of Don Bosco: "*I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys*". The salesian is an apostle to the end, and dies as an apostle, in line with our Father's exhortation: "We shall rest in heaven".<sup>4</sup>

## The salesian "communion of saints"

Article 9 made reference to our patrons and heavenly protectors. The present article concludes with a reminder of our "communion"

<sup>1</sup> For Don Bosco's many references to Paradise, cf. for example: BM III, 49; VI, 249; VII, 436; VIII, 200; X, 173; MB XVIII, 533, 550 ("Tell the boys I am waiting for them in heaven")

<sup>2</sup> D. BOSCO, *Souvenir to first missionaries*, BM XI, 365; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 266

<sup>3</sup> D. BOSCO, *Spiritual testament*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 270

<sup>4</sup> BM XIV, 325

with our dead brothers, which is realized not only in prayer, as art. 94 will say, but in a permanent bond of charity. The text takes its inspiration from the Constitution "Lumen Gentium", 49, where it is said: "All of us share in the same charity towards God and our neighbours, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (Eph 4,16). So it is that the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is in no way interrupted but, on the contrary, is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods". The daily reading of the necrology (cf. R 47) should not only remind us of the confreres we have known, but should revive our present communion with them in the risen Christ. Our relationship with the heavenly Jerusalem thus becomes fruitful for our vocation and our very community life.

*God our Father,  
we recommend to you our confreres  
who are close to death.  
Sustain them in the hour of their last sacrifice,  
that they may be able to bring to fulfilment  
in fidelity and love  
what they promised on the day of their profession,  
and be united in the eternal Passover  
with all your Saints.*

*Revive our hope in the face of death,  
and help us to work for you to the end.  
Keep united in charity which will not pass away  
those still in pilgrimage on this earth  
with those already enjoying their heavenly repose  
in Christ your Son our Lord.*



## ART. 55 THE RECTOR IN THE COMMUNITY

The rector represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father. He is at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognize his responsibility and authority.

His first task is to animate the community so that it may live faithful to the Constitutions and grow in unity. He coordinates the efforts of all, bearing in mind the rights, duties and capabilities of every member.

He also has a direct responsibility toward each confrere, he helps him realize his own personal vocation and carry out the work entrusted to him.

He extends his solicitude to the young for whom we work and to our collaborators, so that they may share in the community's mission with increasing responsibility.

In his words, frequent contacts and opportune decisions he is a father, teacher and spiritual guide.

Art. 55, which describes the role of the rector in the community, is the last of the articles which outline the interpersonal relationships which must be created among the confreres. The latter, living in the same local community, share the mystery of communion in the same salesian style and in a brotherhood totally directed to the pastoral mission. In this context the figure of the rector takes on a singular physiognomy which derives from the communion lived in the fraternal and apostolic community. In fact every community in the Church requires a role of animation which renders the cohesion among its members possible and efficient. The special charism of the rector is primarily to provide for the community the brotherly and apostolic service of "koinonia". Even though he may have the task of "director" of some work he must always remain a "brother", and his first concern must be for the persons whom he must unite for the fulfilment of the mission (cf. R 72, 176).

The rich and complex figure of the salesian rector has been the object of deep and wide-ranging study, especially in the GC21 whose

guidelines were fully incorporated in the revised constitutional text and in the drafting of the admirable "Rectors' Manual".<sup>1</sup>

Art. 55 is not the only article of the Constitutions which speaks of the rector; in fact the various aspects of his figure are described, in different connections, in various parts of the Rule and in particular:

- in art. 4 his role concerning the "form" of the community is referred to in a general way;
- in art. 44 the rector is presented as the animator and guide of those who share responsibility for the salesian mission;
- in this art. 55 he appears mainly as the animator and guide of the fraternal and apostolic community;
- art. 65 and 66, which deal with obedience, will emphasize his role in the communal discernment of God's will;
- the structural aspects of his ministry of government are found in the chapter on the "service of authority in the local community" (art. 176-186);
- art. 121 in particular says that "communities are guided by a member who is a priest".

The text of art. 55, which we are now studying, develops five ideas: the place of the rector in the community; his duties to the community; his duties to the individual confreres; his relationship with the educative community; the salesian manner in which he exercises his authority.

## The rector, visible centre of the fraternal communion

The Council's decree "Perfectate caritatis" recalls that religious superiors are God's representatives.<sup>2</sup> The salesian Constitutions make

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 46-61. In accordance with the decision of the Chapter a "Manual" was produced with a title in which is condensed the singular nature of this figure: "*The Salesian Rector. A ministry for the animation and governing of the local community*".

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PC 14

this assertion more precise when they say that the rector "represents Christ" in one of his most important functions, that of *uniting his disciples to make them communicate together with the will of the Father*, making them available for his service and that of their fellow men. Christ has always been the perfect 'Servant of the Father, "obedient unto death". But it was his will to gather disciples around him to associate them with his own service of the Father for the salvation of the world. This is the image and function of Christ to which the superior is referred, "in a spirit of evangelical humility".<sup>3</sup>

We may note that the authority of the religious superior in a community is not of the hierarchical kind. The latter is at the foundation of ecclesial communion and gives rise to a community in so far as he is the "visible source and foundation of unity"<sup>4</sup> (as is the Roman Pontiff for the universal Church and each Bishop for a particular Church). Religious authority on the other hand, which is raised up by the Spirit within a community, appears as the point of convergence of the calls received by the individual members, so as to steer their efforts to the realization of the common project indicated by the Rule.

The name "superior" given to the rector must not create a wrong impression: he is not "superior to" his brothers in the sense of being "above" them, but remains on the same level, a "brother among brothers"; nevertheless in their midst he occupies a "central" position, in virtue of his unifying and animating role. But equality of level does not suppress the authority vested in the superior; he has been chosen to be in the midst of his brothers the sign of Christ, the Centre and Head, and his brothers "recognize in faith his responsibility and authority".

This perspective throws a great deal of light on the task of the superior. What the Eucharist brings about under a sacramental form when it builds the community in Christ as a brotherly communion (cf. C 88), what is realized in an invisible way by the Spirit when he

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 644; GC21, 52-53

<sup>4</sup> Cf. LG 23

prompts the different members to come together in brotherly love, the superior for his part does visibly in the name of Christ, sustained by the trusting and coherent efforts of all his brothers.

## The duty of the rector to the community

The GC21, in defining the role of the rector, uses the term "*animator*"; art. 176 will combine this in practice with the other characteristic task of the rector, that of governing.

The present article 55 declares that the principal duty of the rector as animator, concerns the community in all aspects of its salesian life: fraternal communion, the apostolic mission, the practice of the evangelical counsels and the life of prayer.

Such animation, as has already been said, has a fundamental objective which must be fostered continually: the unity of the community in charity; but it also concerns the plan which all the members of the community are called upon to realize in every circumstance, according to the ideal expressed in the Constitutions. And so the salesian rector is on the one hand a man looking forward to the future with dynamic hope and trust, and on the other a man faithful to authentic salesian tradition. In our community of consecrated apostles he is the one who "presides in charity", the one who builds and preserves the union of hearts and ideals in charity.<sup>5</sup>

*"He coordinates the efforts of all"* in the fulfilment of the mission, because if apostolic work is to be efficacious it must be convergent, and unified action is one of the most powerful elements in fraternal unity. But the rector animates and coordinates the efforts of his brothers, with each of them in mind, so as to prompt their best energies, "bearing in mind the rights, duties and capabilities of every member".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 502, 644, 646b; GC21, 46

And so his animating role requires of the rector that, while keeping in mind the perennial salesian ideals expressed in the Constitutions, he be able to exploit and unify the gifts of the individual confreres for the life and salesian maturing of the community.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the rector guides the community in seeking and fulfilling the Father's will. "Lord, what would you have us do, here and now?" He carries the main responsibility, and this not only from a juridical point of view (cf. C 176); but nonetheless he carries out his task in real shared responsibility with his brothers.

### The duty of the rector to each confrere

As well as the foregoing, the rector must help each confrere to respond to the same question in his own personal circumstances: "Lord, what would you have me do, here and now?" Art. 52 laid on the community the obligation to offer to each confrere "the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace"; now the Constitutions are saying that the local superior has a particular responsibility in this connection: he has been given the task of guiding and encouraging his brothers in the realization of their salesian life.<sup>7</sup> And so the rector is available for meeting the confreres, and must try to make himself ever better equipped as a valid spiritual guide. The confrere, for his part, has recourse to his rector with confidence as regards both his apostolic work and progress in his vocation.

Articles 67-70 on salesian obedience will go into greater detail about the aspects of this mutual relationship, indicating how his

<sup>6</sup> Don Rua, addressing provincials and rectors, explained the task of animation like this: "The rector should be the centre of everything, the central driving force; but with the pupils your action should be a *mediate* one: all will go well in the house if each salesian plays his part well, and you must watch, encourage and teach, so that in fact each one does fulfil his own duty" (Letter of 25.04.1901, in *Circular letters*, p. 309-310)

<sup>7</sup> Don Bosco did not hesitate to say: "Every rector is accountable to God for the soul of each of the confreres entrusted to him" (during the retreat at Lanzo 1871), BM X, 585

meetings with individual confreres can be of great help to the rector in his task of guiding the community.

### **The duty of the rector to our collaborators and young people**

The fourth paragraph of the article recalls that in salesian tradition the rector is not only the director and father of the confreres, but also of the youngsters entrusted to the pastoral care of the community. His ideal model is always Don Bosco at Valdocco, whose fatherliness extended in different ways and different modes of expression to both the confreres and the boys of the Oratory. The rector of a work of education who did not make contact with his pupils would seriously damage his fatherly aspect as a salesian!

In an analogous sense the same is true of the collaborators in our works and activities. If the rector is the centric of animation of the fraternal and apostolic community of the confreres, the lay people too who are engaged in our educational and pastoral work must relate to him as the main driving force, through the intermediate roles entrusted to other confreres. This is what the GC21 was emphasizing when it said that the rector is the "pastoral guide of the salesian mission" and the guide in "the work of education and of human development required of his community".<sup>8</sup> The text of the Constitutions rightly indicates that the purpose of this reference to the rector is the growth in both youngsters and non-salesian collaborators of a real shared responsibility in the common mission.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. GC21, 52

## "Father, teacher and spiritual guide"

The final paragraph dwells in particular on the salesian way in which the rector, following the example of Don Bosco, carries out his duties. It recalls that through his words, contacts and decisions he is called to be a "*father, teacher and spiritual guide*". To match up the individual ideas one might say that by his words he fulfils his task of teaching; by his frequent contacts and sanctifying activity that of father; and by his opportune decisions that of guide.

The title of "*father*" is linked with a long salesian tradition which sees in the rector the representation and incarnation of the fatherliness of Don Bosco. In the first paragraph it was said that the rector is a "brother among brothers", here it is specified that he is a brother who acts as a "father". Can a brother undertake tasks of a fatherly kind? Vatican II, speaking of Bishops and Priests, said that he can.<sup>9</sup> This in fact is what Christ did in the highest degree. The SGC comes back repeatedly on this point: "(The superior) must be a brother who, in imitation of Jesus, takes his place among his brethren as a revelation and a sign of the fatherhood of God";<sup>10</sup> "(his) model is Christ who mirrors the Father's love for mankind."<sup>11</sup>

An equally valid reason for this characteristic of the salesian rector, as was mentioned earlier, is the family spirit and the long tradition of fatherliness in the superior, and particularly the example of Don Bosco. We recall the significant testimony of Don Rinaldi: "Our Founder was never anything else but a father, in the most noble sense of the word; and the Church now invokes him in her liturgy as Father and Teacher of youth. His entire life is a complete treatise on that fatherhood which has its source in the heavenly Father, and which Don Bosco lived here below in a full and almost unique way towards youth and towards all... And just as his life was nothing but fatherliness, so his work and his sons cannot subsist without it... In this sense fatherliness

<sup>9</sup> Cf. IG 28, 32; PO 9

<sup>10</sup> SGC, 502

<sup>11</sup> SGC, 644

is the business of all of us, and we are all obliged to keep it alive in our hearts and in our works". But, goes on Don Rinaldi, "the external practice of this fatherliness has been passed on in a special way to the rector of the house, not only that he may preserve it but that he may practise it according to the teaching and example of Don Bosco",<sup>12</sup>

The normal thing in every community is for the fatherly presence of Don Bosco to be portrayed in the affable figure of the rector. A presence like that of Don Bosco, so rich in kindness, availability, free from any trace of paternalism, is able to stimulate in his sons a wide sharing of responsibility for apostolic work.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual fatherliness in salesian style is the most sublime task of the rector, and salesian tradition tells us what an influence on the heart of a rector for increasing his fatherliness is the exercise of his priestly role in the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

The terms "*teacher*" and "*guide*" acquire their significance in the light of that of "*father*": the rector is the father of his family, which he "*teaches*" and "*guides*". The SGC has given details of these tasks of teaching and authoritative guidance, which devolve upon the superior in view of a constant commitment to renew the common vocation, deepen its spirit and give new effect to the mission, so as to meet the needs of the times and of young people.<sup>15</sup> Art. 44 of the Constitutions has spoken of the rector as "*guide*", and art. 175 of the General Regulations will go into some aspects of his task as "*teacher*".

It should be noted that the article makes no direct reference to individual spiritual direction and to direction of conscience, which are nevertheless among the tasks of the rector (cf. C 70), but to the true and real "*communal*" spiritual direction, which is given through teaching, persuasion, encouragement and even in the invitation to make an evaluation of the spiritual and apostolic life of the community.

<sup>12</sup> ACS 56, 26 April 1931, pp. 939-940

<sup>13</sup> Cf. SGC, 496-499, 502, 647

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ACS 56, 26 April 1931, loc. cit.; cf. also E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian rector and animation*, ASC 306 (1982), p. 27-28

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SGC, 646



*Let us pray to our Father in heaven  
who, by uniting us in Christ  
through the work of the Holy Spirit,  
has multiplied in our Society  
the gift of spiritual fatherhood.*

*That in our communities our superiors  
may be a living image of Christ the Good Shepherd  
who offers his life for his flock  
and unites them in the service of the Father,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That we may be able to see in our rector  
the presence of the heavenly Father,  
and love, honour and collaborate with him  
in the common work entrusted to us,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That our rector may be given  
the spirit of true fatherliness,  
to enlighten him and make him for every confrere  
a skilled guide in the ways of the Lord,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

## ART. 56 A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

With simplicity the confreres lead a life of self-giving and sharing, by welcoming others and offering them hospitality. By their kindness and cheerfulness they are able to draw everyone into the salesian family spirit.

Nevertheless, to foster mutual respect and expressions of brotherly communion, every community should reserve for the confreres alone certain parts of the religious house.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 667,1

The salesian community is an apostolic community, which the mission inserts into the social and ecclesial reality, thus prescribing a series of relationships "ad extra", particularly with young people: it is an eminently "open" community.

After a more direct consideration of its fraternal aspects, the Constitutions now dwell on the relationships of the community both with other communities and with people involved in its mission. This is the theme of articles 56-59.

Art. 56, in particular, deals in two paragraphs with the topic of welcome and hospitality, and with that of the areas reserved to the confreres.

### Welcome and hospitality

These are two evangelical values, based on the teaching and example of the Lord. One has only to recall that Jesus put these two items among those that will be the object of the final judgement: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me... When did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee?... As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25,35-40). We know that the first chris-

tian community saw in hospitality a special manifestation of brotherly charity.<sup>1</sup>

The salesian Constitutions tell us that these gospel values are very important elements in our family spirit. Every salesian, after basing his whole existence on self-giving and sharing, has already radically overcome a selfish closing-in on himself, and is ready to make his charity practical "by welcoming others and offering them hospitality". This must happen especially in the community which, precisely because of its fraternal dimension, is called to bear witness to the love which binds the members in concrete fashion to those who come to them in the name of the Lord.

Faithful, therefore, to salesian tradition, the community welcomes its guests and surrounds them with delicate attention and fraternal salesian cheerfulness.

Later on the Rule will speak of special solidarity with the very poor and the 'little ones' (cf. C 79). Don Bosco has taught us to give special attention to the poor: that loving hospitality which he had learned from Mamma Margaret he passed on to his sons. In his house the poor had always to be given a place of honour.

### **Sectors reserved for the confreres**

The second paragraph indicates a point which, at first sight, might seem to put limits to the sense of welcome we have just spoken of; in point of fact it is a safeguard for the essentials of living together. As well as helping the community to achieve the objectives of authentic brotherhood, this prescription is of great advantage also for regulating its relationships with persons who come in contact with it. The values particularly emphasized in the Rule are the need for "mutual respect"

<sup>1</sup> On the sense of christian hospitality, cf. also Mt 10,40; Mk 9,41; Lk 7,44 ff.; Lk 14,13-14; Rom 12,13; 1 Tim 3,2; Tit 1,8; Heb 13,2; 1 Pet 4,9

among the confreres, and the possibility of having space for the expression of special moments of fraternal communion.

For these reasons "every community should reserve for the confreres alone certain parts of the religious house". This is a traditional norm in religious and also salesian life, and is endorsed by the Code of Canon Law.<sup>2</sup>

The methods for putting this article into practice are presented in art. 45 of the General Regulations.

*Lord Jesus, you once said:  
"I was a stranger and you welcomed me".  
Help us to see in everyone who has recourse to us  
that you yourself are the mysterious guest  
knocking at our door,  
so that those whom you send to us  
may find in our welcome and availability  
the path to attain more certainly to you  
in the common House of our Father.*

<sup>2</sup> The SGC and the GC22 had left this norm in the General Regulations. The Apostolic See however, in harmony with canon law, asked for the contents to be transferred to the constitutional text

## ART. 57 AN OPEN COMMUNITY

The salesian community works in communion with the particular Church.

It is open to the world's values and attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work. At one with those among whom it lives, it cultivates good relations with all.

Thus it becomes a sign revealing Christ and his presence among men, and becomes a leaven giving rise to new vocations after the example of the first community of Valdocco.

The article continues the treatment of the relationships of the local community with the ecclesial community and also with the social and cultural environment in which it is situated. The openness of the salesian community, which is an indispensable condition for its insertion into the human neighbourhood group, is a premise for a fruitful apostolate, even to the extent of the communication of the salesian vocation itself.

What is expressed in the article has its foundation not only in the tradition of our Family (love for the Church and active insertion in the neighbourhood, cf. C 48) but also in Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion. According to the Council every ecclesial community or group, without prejudice to its own identity, should be open to intercommunion, in harmony with the life of the local Church and collaborating in its activities;<sup>1</sup> moreover in the area in which it works it should experience "a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MR 10, 11, 14

<sup>2</sup> GS 1

## Communion with the particular Church

The Constitutions have already stated in art. 48 the principle of the insertion of the community in the particular Church and of its availability for collaboration in the fulfilment of its apostolic mission. The same principle is now endorsed<sup>3</sup> from the standpoint of communion: the openness of the community to the particular Church and its union with it are a testimony based on the very nature of religious life. The text clearly draws its inspiration from the doctrine of Vatican II which is summed up in the document "Mutuae relationes" in the following words: "A religious is totally dedicated to God, his supreme love, and is committed to the honour and service of God under a new and special title. This unites the religious to the Church and her mystery in a special way and urges him to act with undivided dedication for the good of the entire Body (cf. LG 44). It clearly follows that religious life is a special way of sharing in the sacramental nature of the People of God... (Religious) offer to the world a visible witness of the unfathomable mystery of Christ, in so far as in them Christ is shown contemplating on the mountain, announcing God's Kingdom to the multitudes, healing the sick and the maimed, converting sinners to a good life, blessing children, doing good to all and always obeying the will of the Father who sent him (LG 46)".<sup>4</sup>

### Insertion in the social and cultural environment

The salesian community is not estranged from the surrounding world, but seeks rather to become incarnate in it and to understand its values, needs, problems and power for doing good; only in this way

<sup>3</sup> The GC22 voted explicitly to endorse the obligation of communion with the local Church, already expressed in art. 48, to draw attention to the fact that it is not only a question of a commitment to apostolic service, but of an aspect which characterizes the physiognomy of the salesian community and the witness it is called to give

<sup>4</sup> MR 10

can it enter into an efficacious dialogue for the announcement of the Kingdom and the communication of the salesian charism.

The salesian community, inserted in the life and culture of its own environment, will feel itself to be a living element of the region, the city, the local area in which it is situated and works. Inculturation and acculturation problems of christianity will be lived by the community in close harmony with the pastoral plan of the particular Churches in which it is working. And if art. 56 stressed the need for a minimum environmental structure to safeguard the intimacy of fraternal life, here it is equally affirmed that the community lives for others.

At the level of conscience the community expresses and fosters solidarity with the human group in which it is inserted, and this can have consequences of no little importance if one thinks, for example, of communities in densely populated and very poor areas. As far as relationships are concerned, the community gives welcome to all in its neighbourhood, even to those who are not the primary groups who form the object of our apostolate.

The Acts of the SGC provide a clear and concise comment on this article: "The community shares in the dynamism of the Church and is intended for (and open to) the service of its fellow men, offering to all the benefit of the graces which the Lord has showered on us. It joyfully cultivates and enlivens with its faith the relations which bind it to other people and backgrounds, whether through kinship, inspiration, work or ideals, or on the grounds of duty, suitability, friendship or charity. By these external contacts the community expresses its relationship with the world, but is also enriched by the integration of fresh spiritual values into its mission and is thereby the better able to carry out its apostolic activity".<sup>5</sup>

The same SGC also makes it clear that the commitment thus expressed finds a particularly intensive application in the case of the "small communities" which are called "to insert themselves into special types of life and work, where a witness of charity and christian enterprise

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 507

is needed especially among people on the fringe of society".<sup>6</sup> In these cases we should not forget the reminder made by the GC21, after appraising the situation,<sup>7</sup> that such experiences be carried out in a salesian apostolic spirit: "a new presence is not to be sought for the purpose of experimenting with new forms of religious community life, but to offer services which otherwise could not be provided".<sup>8</sup>

### **Productive testimony of the community**

The third paragraph of the article highlights a logical and important effect of the insertion of the community in the surrounding world: the salesian community, a living cell of the particular Church, deeply inserted in the social and cultural environment, becomes a visible and efficacious sign of Christ the incarnate Saviour.

In and through the community Christ is made present among men and offers to all of them, but especially to the young who are poor and abandoned, his salvation, peace and joy.

Just as every living community is the bearer of life, charismata and ministries, so the salesian community, which bears Don Bosco's charism attained through intimate communion with the Valdocco model "*becomes a leaven giving rise to new vocations*", both salesian and of every other kind for the Church's service (cf. C 6, 37).

We are back once again with the dynamism of the grain of wheat. The community is inserted in the Church and the group of humanity, and gives to the utmost of its salesian riches; from such an offering, which has a certain resemblance to death through love, is born new salesian life in the heart of those who have shared this gift in the Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> SGC, 510; cf. also SGC, 515

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GC21, 159-161, with note 27 to 161

<sup>8</sup> GC21, 161



## The salesian community, "a house of the young"

A global consideration of the articles of chap. V of the Constitutions on the "fraternal and apostolic communities" might give rise to the impression that not enough emphasis has been given to the openness of the community to those to whom our mission is primarily directed (C 26). In point of fact there are references in the chapter to the young when speaking of the rector, who must extend to them his fatherly care (cf. C 55), and of the sick confreres who offer their own sufferings for them.

But this chapter must evidently be integrated with the remainder of the Constitutions, and the special relationship between the salesian community and youth then becomes clear. We recall here some of its essential elements:

- The *salesian house* is not only a "parish" that evangelizes the youngsters, and a "school" that prepares them for life; it is also a *home that welcomes them* and a *playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves* (C 40).
- The *family spirit* is not reserved to relations between the confreres; "the salesian house", says the Rule, "becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, *both confreres and young people*, feel welcome and responsible for the common good" (C 16).
- The *preventive system*, our characteristic method of educating and evangelizing, "*brings together educators and youngsters* in a family experience of trust and dialogue" (C 38). The educative community, of which the salesian community is the animator, "involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere... (C 47).
- *Salesian assistance*, an important element of the preventive system, which supposes on the one hand the salesian's "willingness to be with them", requires of him on the other "*to be actively present among youth*", and to show them brotherly friendship (cf. C 39).
- Even our very salesian prayer requires that we not only pray "for the young" but also "*with the young*". Because of this adherence

to youth and the youthful style that goes with it, "salesian prayer is joyful and creative, simple and profound" (cf. C 86).

From all this it is evident that a salesian community without permanent contact with youth would no longer be itself. It can be truly said that the salesian house is the "house of the young"!

*It is God's will that all men should be saved  
and come to the knowledge of the truth.  
Let us pray that as individuals and communities  
we may bear constant witness  
to the divine will of salvation.*

*That we may never become closed  
in our own particular interests,  
but keep open our minds and hearts  
to the good of the Church and of the world,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to combine in harmonious unity  
fidelity to our charism  
with fidelity to the Church in which we are inserted,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our minds may be always ready  
to accept the good qualities  
of the world that surrounds us,  
and develop them for the coming of God's Kingdom,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may generously set aside  
our own tastes and inclinations,  
and make ourselves all things to all men,  
after the example of Christ and Don Bosco,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*God our Father,  
make us individually and as communities  
a manifestation of the love of your Christ,  
so that all men may come to know you, the only God,  
and Him whom you sent,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 58 THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY

Local communities are a living part of the provincial community. The latter fosters fraternal communion among them and supports them in their mission.

It shows a loving concern for new confreres; it is solicitous for the formation of every member, rejoices in their success and the happy occasions in their lives, grieves over their loss and keeps alive their memory.

Attentive to the youth situation, it coordinates and evaluates our apostolic work through its various services; it encourages collaboration, stimulates pastoral work for vocations, provides for the continuity of our works, and is open to new activities.

It cultivates the spirit of brotherhood and expresses it concretely through solidarity with other provinces, with the Congregation and with the Salesian Family.

The brotherly communion present in the local community (referred to particularly in articles 49-57), extends and is realized in the wider salesian community; in the province, as described in this present article, and in the entire Congregation, a family united in Don Bosco, to which art. 59 will be dedicated.

The article we are now studying presents the province, not from a juridical or administrative standpoint (which will be taken up in the fourth part), but as the source and place of manifestation of the fraternal and apostolic community for a certain group of confreres and local communities.'

It should be noted that communion is not the same thing as cohabitation, i.e. living together in the same house; and although living together, with its practical requirements, continually provides numerous occasions for maturing in communion, charity and forgiveness, the members live an authentic "koinonia" with their brothers who form the same "province", to such an extent that one can speak of a true "*provincial community*". Art. 58 describes some aspects of this community in its dimensions of brotherhood and apostolic service.

## The local and provincial communities

The first paragraph, after declaring that local communities are not isolated from each other, but a "living part", i.e. living cells of the organism known as the provincial community, recognizes in fraternal communion and in the common mission the two basic values which bind together the different houses in the province.

The SGC laid great emphasis on the province as a *structure of communion*, even to the extent of saying that "the renewal of our religious and salesian life must be based fundamentally on the rediscovery and re-evaluation of the provincial community as the bond of union between the different local communities, the other provinces and the whole Congregation". The SGC goes on to say that "this new outlook allows the salesian to become more convinced of the spirit of solidarity among all the confreres of the province, and encourages him to carry out his apostolic work in the context of the local Church".<sup>1</sup> The province plays an *essential role in the realization of the Society's apostolic project*, and also in the vocational growth of each confrere. One may say that in the province the salesian finds the reality of the whole Congregation incarnated in a specific territory. And it is certainly true that he sees his membership of the Society as a whole, through the mediation of his incorporation into the provincial community which took place on the day of his profession (cf. C 160).

The Constitutions indicate the two principal objectives of the provincial community with regard to the local communities: the fostering of brotherly communion ("ad intra" and "ad extra") in the individual communities, and its support under various aspects (spiritual, pastoral and economic) for the realization of the mission entrusted to each house. These objectives are described at greater length in the rest of the article.

## The provincial community and the confreres

The activities of the provincial and his council, of the provincial chapter, of the various teams and service structures, together with the use of means of information and communication, lead to the establishing and development of a strong relationship between the confreres and the provincial community.

The second paragraph explains how the province follows the development of the salesian vocation of each confrere from its beginnings to its maturity:

— *"it shows a loving concern for new confreres"*: the vocation planted by the Lord in the heart of the young salesian needs to be supported and developed; it finds in the members of the provincial community, and especially in the provincial and those in charge of formation, a valuable help. The third part of the Constitutions will make it plain that the provincial has a specific responsibility in the care of the various phases of the initial formation and in the admission to the different stages of salesian life (cf. C 101, 108);

— *"it is solicitous for the formation of every member"*: the provincial community is a formation community which guarantees through its structures, but more especially by the living example of its members, the permanent growth of each confrere in his salesian life programme;

— *"rejoices in their success and the happy occasions in their lives"*: not only in their own local community but in the province as a whole the confreres feel that family affection which rejoices at the success of its members and praises the Lord with them;

— *"grieves over their loss and keeps alive their memory"*: the word 'loss' here has a double significance; it refers to the death of a confrere and also to one who leaves the Society; like any human family the province feels their loss and remembers them, especially in prayer. In the case of confreres called to the Father's House it feels deep communion with them and gratitude (cf. C 94).

## The provincial community and apostolic work

We have already spoken of the province's role in the carrying out of the salesian apostolic project. The text goes into one or two details in this connection. The frame of reference is still that of the "youth condition" of the environment, which must be studied and kept in mind as a fundamental element which can give full significance to our mission.

The article presents in synthetic form the five main tasks of the provincial community, which constitute the concrete objectives of the animation it has to provide by suitable programming:

a) in the first place the province "*coordinates and evaluates our apostolic work through its various services*": in this connection the General Regulations recall that the drawing up of the pastoral and educational plan is of the utmost importance (cf. R 4);

b) "*it encourages collaboration*" between the communities, between the confreres who have animating roles to fulfil, between individual confreres, groups of the Salesian Family, lay people working in the communities; this is an important task of the province for the achievement of that unity of the salesian plan required by our vocational identity within the particular Church;

c) "*it stimulates pastoral work for vocations*": this is done through those appointed for the purpose by vocational guidance structures and planning, but especially by the encouragement and appraisal of the educational plans of the individual communities and the promoting of initiatives and exchanges. In this way the provincial community keeps this essential dimension of the salesian mission very much alive and is concerned for its growth;

d) "*it provides for the continuity of our works*": both by seeing to the training of the necessary personnel for attaining the specific purpose of each of the works, by revising and redimensioning their activities when necessary, and providing for their financial support;

e) finally, "*it is open to new activities*": it belongs in fact to the provincial community, especially through the provincial chapter and provincial council, to carry out the work of discernment which will make

possible the spreading and re-expression of the charisma of Don Bosco in its territory.

### The provincial community and its openness "ad extra"

The final paragraph asserts that the spirit of brotherhood which is expressed "ad intra" in every provincial community will be cultivated and expressed "*concretely through solidarity (of ideals, personnel and goods) with other provinces, with the Congregation and with the Salesian Family*".

Discreetly, but quite clearly, the text refers to various possibilities of interprovincial and regional collaboration that can be promoted: they can be realized through the provincial conferences, which represent an intense form of solidarity and pastoral sharing in a territory with social affinities and ecclesial links (cf. C 155), or through other initiatives which extend beyond individual provinces and which foster the growth of communion and fidelity.

The following article will deal more completely with the unity of the province with the world community; here the emphasis is on the fact that linkage with other provinces and openness to the Salesian Family enable salesian brotherhood to be developed in real solidarity and in concrete communal projects of salesian presence and activity, which allow Don Bosco's charism to be expressed in all its pastoral, educational and missionary vitality.

*God does not call us to live as so many dispersed units,  
but has willed  
that we form a living organism in the Church.  
Let us pray that we may have a clear awareness  
of our membership of the provincial community  
so as to be in it, individually and in groups,  
elements of cohesion and apostolic efficacy.*



*That no confrere and no community  
may erroneously close itself in,  
but that in the provincial community we may all learn  
to know, understand and help each other  
in the fulfilment of our common mission,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That we may be personally concerned  
about vocations in the province,  
and be attentive to discern in every youngster  
the germ of the divine call,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

*That by sharing with all our confreres  
and with all the communities of the province  
their joys and sorrows, successes and misfortunes,  
we may deepen our sense of belonging  
and strengthen our family spirit,  
let us pray to the Lord.*

*Lord our God, grant that in our provinces  
may reign brotherly love and the cooperation of all  
in the apostolic work you have entrusted to us,  
so that the Church in which we work  
may enjoy the fruits of our charism,  
especially for the benefit of the young and the poor.*

## ART. 59 THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Religious profession incorporates the salesian in the Society, making him a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its life within the Universal Church.

Union with the Rector Major and his council, solidarity in apostolic initiatives, communication and exchange of information about the work of the confreres, all increase this communion, deepen the sense of belonging and dispose us to give our service to the world community.

In addition to the communion among the members at local and provincial level, that among all the confreres at world level too gives rise to a series of relationships proper to a true salesian world community.

Art. 59 deals in two paragraphs with this world community to which every salesian belongs from the moment of his profession, and with the principal means which foster this particular communion.

### **The salesian forms part of a "world community"**

The text begins with a reminder of the significance of religious profession, and especially of perpetual profession, which brings to an end the process of vocational discernment with a double decision:

- the one making his profession feels that he is now ready to say "yes" to the Lord, who has called him to "stay with Don Bosco" and gives him so many brothers in Christ (his salesian "confreres");
- the Salesian Society, through the Rector Major in whose name the profession is received, recognizes him as a member and gives him joyful welcome (cf. C 24).

In addition to the juridical fact of "enrolment" (or "incardination") in a particular "circumscription" (cf. C 160), the text emphasizes that

the professed confrere becomes a member of a religious family with a *universal dimension*: to become a salesian is to enter a big community which the Founder himself foresaw and desired to be without geographical limitations. This openness, this worldwide aspect is one of the finest features of our salesian spirit.

The article points out that this fact puts us at the direct service of the universal Church: the Congregation as such lives in the Church an original "communion of spirit, witness and service", which evidently presupposes that all salesians, in fact, live one and the same spirit and converge in the same kind of activity which gives rise to the same kind of witness. Each member, therefore, should feel that he shares in this spiritual wealth and apostolic work in their world dimensions.

In short, as the GC21 put it, the Congregation as a world community "shines forth in the universal Church as a distinct community of brothers".<sup>1</sup>

### Means for fostering the world community

The article's second paragraph describes the values and elements which increase communion among salesians at world level.

— The first factor is *"union with the Rector Major and his council"*. We are speaking here of union not simply as a juridical fact but as a spiritual and loving bond with the Successor of Don Bosco and his more direct collaborators in the animation of the whole Congregation. To accept his directives and meditate on his guidelines is one of the most practical ways of cultivating fidelity to the Founder and strengthening unity in the Congregation.

— *"Solidarity in apostolic initiatives"* which the Congregation undertakes on a world scale is also a powerful means of unification. One need only think, for instance, of the results of the cohesion and

<sup>1</sup> GC21, 34

missionary drive given to the whole Congregation by "Project Africa". The meaning of 'solidarity' is evidently not confined to its economic aspects (which are spoken of specifically in art. 76 of the Constitutions), or to simple feelings of individuals. Solidarity implies active commitment, mutual help of many kinds between the provinces of the world, involving apostolic plans, availability of confreres, and possible participation of the Salesian Family etc.

— The article also indicates as an efficacious instrument for promoting world communion "*communication and exchange of information about the work of the confreres*". The SGC had already stated that "each confrere must be conscious of the fact that all communication inside the Congregation or among outsiders must be such as to help and not hinder communion".<sup>2</sup> Here we recall in passing the importance which also the GC22 gave to social communication, specifically entrusting it to a member of the General Council.<sup>3</sup>

The article ends with a reference to the positive results that will follow from a wider and deeper world communion: in the confreres and local communities there will be an increased *sense of belonging to the Congregation*, and the commitment of openness and availability "for the service of the world community" will develop more and more.

*Lord our God,  
by calling us to the Salesian Society of Don Bosco,  
which by your will has spread throughout the world,  
you have made us sharers in the richness of its spirit,  
in its life of communion,  
and in its activity in the Church.*

*Give greater breadth to our love,  
ecumenical dimensions to our desires  
and universal openness to our plans.*

<sup>2</sup> SGC, 516

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C 137; GC22, 73-75

*Make us happy to have so many brothers  
who differ in race and language.  
May we be solid with their efforts  
for the spreading of your Kingdom,  
desirous of promoting and sharing true unity  
around our superiors,  
and witnesses of the presence of our Father and Founder.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## CHAPTER VI

### FOLLOWING CHRIST, OBEDIENT, POOR AND CHASTE

*"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ... because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil 3,8.12).*

Paul's energetic declaration of total donation to Christ has been chosen to express the radical nature of the following of Christ already noted in connection with the religious profession (Mk 1,17-18). At this point its consequences are taken up (cf. C 60). It is a matter of each one adopting Jesus' *"form of life"*, of which the three evangelical counsels are the classic expression.

In the New Testament Paul has given us a very good glimpse of the extraordinary relations between himself and Christ (1 Cor 4; 2 Cor 10-13; Gal 1-2). He does it again now, writing to the Philippians, and not without polemical intent. A group of promoters of Jewish observance accused Paul of betraying his Jewish heredity, putting themselves forward as what perfect Christians should be. Paul responded by showing them in the first place that his break with his Jewish past, which had been a glorious one (3,4-6), had been caused by the fact that Christ had seized him (the conversion on the road to Damascus, Acts 9,5-6), and that in consequence Christ had now such a hold on him that he counted every alternative as so much rubbish (3,8). But if Christ had seized Paul in a warm embrace, Paul felt in conscience that he was bound to continue to gain Christ. He is not yet as perfect as his denigrators think themselves to be. The life of Christ had been a journey which started at Bethlehem and ended with his Passover, and the Apostle says with humility, thus stamping his donation to Christ with the seal of sincerity: "I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (3,13-14).

One cannot easily forget what following Jesus meant for Paul: the recognition that Jesus had taken the initiative in seizing him, the courage to make a painful break with values that were good but had been wrongly placed above Christ himself, patience in accepting the consequences (which meant persecution), the humble admission of being still on the way to his goal, and the eschatological dimension which gave rise to hope.

All this is basically what the Constitutions are saying about the evangelical counsels: they represent not merely the practice of virtue, but first and foremost the radical following of the Master, putting Paul's words into effect through grace by "finding the fullest meaning of life in Christ the Saviour" (C 62).

After presenting the obligations of the apostolic mission and analysing the communal character of the mission and the salesian's whole life, the Constitutions describe in chapter VI the third fundamental element which combines with the two preceding ones to form a complete picture of our apostolic consecration: *the following of Christ in the practice of the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty and chastity.*

As is well known, the profession of the evangelical counsels has been, since the earliest christian tradition a characteristic of consecrated life in its various forms.<sup>1</sup> It is the response to the gratuitous call by God on the part of a man who wants to conform himself to Jesus even to the extent of taking up the same form of virginal, poor and obedient life, committing himself totally to God and his Kingdom. This kind of existence is publicly recognized by the Church as belonging to her own life and holiness.<sup>2</sup> The Church, in fact, not only accepts the vows or other sacred bonds by which individual members of the faithful profess their wish to follow Christ through the way of the counsels, but makes herself the guarantor of the authenticity of the evangelical life inspired by God in the Founders of the various institutes;<sup>3</sup> each institute carries all the riches of its particular charism in the way it lives the Gospel.

<sup>1</sup> A look at the most ancient christian tradition reveals the special honour that was given to virginity or celibacy for the Kingdom. The Fathers of the Church were at one in exalting it as an excellent way of following Christ. Little by little as new forms of religious life came into being, first the hermits and then the coenobites, other obligations were added to characterize the kind of life of these men and women who wanted to dedicate themselves to God's service; there was often a tendency to make the obligations assumed at profession three in number. In the writings of the Fathers these three began to correspond to the triad "poverty-chastity-obedience", but not always. In Latin monasticism, for instance, obedience began to be promised, but not poverty or chastity. The classical threefold commitment is clearly indicated by St John Climacus in the seventh century (he speaks of renouncing things, persons and one's own will). Only among the canons regular, in the tradition of priest communities, does celibacy come to be linked with the communion of goods and the vow of obedience. Later St Thomas will speak expressly of the religious state as being characterized by the profession of the three counsels of poverty, perpetual continence and obedience

<sup>2</sup> Cf. IG 44

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 2; CIC can. 573, 576

Don Bosco was called by God to carry out in the Church a mission for the benefit of poor and neglected youth, and was inspired to found a Society (the Society of St Francis de Sales), in which apostolic service is lived in complete dedication to God expressed through the public profession of the evangelical counsels. The Special General Chapter, reflecting on the fact that Don Bosco wanted his closest collaborators to commit themselves by vow to an evangelical life of obedience, poverty and chastity (we recall the solemn moment of the first profession, 18 December 1859),<sup>4</sup> explains the reasons which led the Founder to link service of the young to the practice of the evangelical counsels.

Admitting that the linkage between the two is not an absolute one (one could dedicate oneself to youth, even adopting the salesian style, without necessarily becoming a religious), the SGC detects in a vocational fact the principal reason for the *connection, which for us is essential, between apostolic service and the profession of the counsels*. It was the gratuitous initiative of the Holy Spirit which prompted Don Bosco to found a Society of "*evangelical*" educators, in whom the commitments of the active life would be animated through full conformity to Christ, lived through the religious vows. Without any doubt Don Bosco was given signs from on high (one need only recall the dreams of the ribbon tied round the foreheads of his collaborators, of the pergola of roses, and in particular the dream of the wheel and that of the ten diamonds),<sup>5</sup> but he also sought advice from enlightened persons (Don Cafasso), and even from Pope Pius IX.<sup>6</sup>

We can get an even deeper understanding of the significance of the evangelical counsels in salesian life. Love of one's neighbour is the fruit of an authentic love of God. Don Bosco's zeal was such that he wanted his sons to be ready to commit all their time and the whole of their very existence to the service of youth in a stable and enduring work. The Spirit led him to understand, not least by experience, all

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM VI, 181

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BM II, 233; III, 25; V, 297; VI, 531-544; VII, 199; MB XV, 183-186

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the advice of Don Cafasso, cf. BM V, 452; for Pius IX's opinion, cf. MB IX, 345, and the *Introduction to the Constitutions* written by Don Bosco



the objective resources and fruitful prospects for an apostolic mission that derive from life lived in perfect imitation of the obedient, poor and chaste Christ. The interior dynamism of the evangelical counsels means that their generous and faithful practice not only orientates people towards God, but also strengthens the quality and efficacy of apostolic action and of the spirit which characterizes it.<sup>7</sup>

Starting from these considerations, which are at the foundation of our vocation, chapter VI of the Constitutions gives a deeper significance to the evangelical counsels for our life and our apostolic mission to the young.

The plan of the chapter is quite simple: after a brief introduction which considers in a general fashion the "sequela Christi" in the way of the counsels, the individual vows of obedience, poverty and chastity are presented successively in a connected manner in three sections.

The scheme is as follows:

*Art. 60-63: Introductory articles*

- Overall significance of the evangelical counsels in our life (*art. 60*)
- Fruitfulness of this evangelical way for the life of fraternal communion and for apostolic service (*art. 61*)
- Its particular witness value
  - in proclaiming the Gospel to youth (*art. 62*)
  - of the hope given by the death and resurrection of Christ (*art. 63*)

*Section I Art. 64-71: Our obedience*

- Evangelical foundation of our obedience (*art. 64*)
- Obedience and salesian mission: characteristic style of salesian obedience and authority (*art. 65*)
- Obedience in the salesian community: united in looking for God's will (*art. 66*)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SGC, 117-120

- Personal obedience:
  - attitude of faith and responsibility (*art. 67*)
  - requirements of the vow (*art. 68*)
  - personal gifts and obedience (*art. 69*)
  - colloquy with the superior (*art. 70*)
- Obedience and the mystery of the cross (*art. 71*)

### *Section II Art. 72-79: Our poverty*

- Evangelical foundation of our poverty (*art. 72*)
- Poverty and salesian mission: witness and service after the example of Don Bosco (*art. 73*)
- Personal commitment to poverty:
  - requirements of the vow (*art. 74*)
  - attitudes in a poor life (*art. 75*)
- Communal poverty:
  - communion of material and spiritual goods (*art. 76*)
  - witness in community life and in our works (*art. 77*)
- Characteristic features of our spirit of poverty:
  - work (*art. 78*)
  - love for the poor (*art. 79*)

### *Section III Art. 80-84: Our chastity*

- Evangelical foundation of our chastity (*art. 80*)
- Chastity and the salesian mission (*art. 81-82*)
- Consecrated chastity in community life (*art. 83*)
- Means for preservation and growth in chastity (*art. 84*)

To the above we may add three further observations concerning the criteria which led to the arrangement of the contents of the chapter.

a) We note in the first place that the treatment of the three evangelical counsels has been gathered into *one single chapter, even though it is divided into three sections*. The intention was to give prominence in this way to the unity of evangelical life according to the counsels. Although the individual counsels have their own significance and content (each of them points to the relationship with one aspect of the mystery of Christ, consecrated and sent by the Father), it must be kept in mind that together they define consecrated life in its essential features of the "sequela Christi" and the radical acceptance of the

demands of the Gospel. In Christ the mystery of obedience to the will of the Father ("obedient unto death") is strictly linked with the poverty he assumed for love of us ("he humbled himself"), and with the virginity through which he loved all with undivided heart even to the extent of giving his life ("he loved them to the end"). So too in the disciple, who follows his Lord, obedience, poverty and chastity are three facets of the commitment to live as Jesus lived: the three vows therefore mutually integrate and shed light on each other.

b) Secondly it should be kept in mind that the Constitutions describe the life of obedience, poverty and chastity not in the abstract but *according to the characteristics proper to the salesian apostolic plan*. This is in line with the indications of the Code of Canon Law, which says: "Each institute, taking account of its own special character and purposes, is to define in its constitutions the manner in which the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are to be observed in its way of life".<sup>8</sup>

In conformity with this principle the text, after setting out the gospel foundation for each of the counsels, considers them in the light of Don Bosco's experience and of salesian life and activity; it always gives prominence therefore to the links between the counsels, the apostolic mission and the fraternal community, and emphasizes the characteristic manner, suggested by the Holy Spirit, for the salesian practice of the vows, i.e. according to the teaching and example of Don Bosco. This is the scheme followed in all three sections.

c) A last remark concerns the *order in which the three counsels are considered*: it will be seen at once that this is not the same as that adopted in the documents of Vatican II (chastity poverty obedience, which was also the order chosen by the SGC), nor is it the traditional order (poverty chastity obedience) which had been inserted in our Constitutions after the promulgation of the Code of 1917.

The GC22 decided to restore the order which had been used in the Constitutions written by Don Bosco himself: *obedience poverty*

<sup>8</sup> CIC, can. 598

*chastity*. This order has been approved by the Apostolic See and therefore becomes one of our characteristic features.

The first reason why the GC22 put obedience first was the historical and traditional one just referred to. Don Bosco, in fact, although making reference as far as we are aware<sup>9</sup> to sources using the traditional order of the vows (poverty chastity obedience), adopted for his own Society a different order which emphasized the central position of obedience in the spiritual and apostolic experience the Lord had inspired in him. On the other hand, we know too the great value Don Bosco assigned to obedience in the Society's mission: think, for instance, of the importance given to obedience in the dream of the ten diamonds.<sup>10</sup> We shall see in due course how the Constitutions themselves provide clear evidence of the strict linkage between obedience and the salesian mission (cf. C 64, 65, 66).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. MOTTIO *Constitutiones Soc. S. Francisci Salesii, Fonti letterarie*, RSS July-December 1983, p. 348-356

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The salesians according to Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds*, ASC 300 (1981)

## ART. 60 FOLLOWING CHRIST

By religious profession we mean to live the grace of our baptism radically and more fully.

We follow Jesus Christ, who "virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified mankind by his obedience",<sup>1</sup> and share more closely in his paschal mystery, in his self-emptying and in his life in the Spirit.

Surrendering ourselves totally to God whom we love above all else, we commit ourselves to a form of life based entirely on gospel values.

<sup>1</sup> PC 1

In presenting the essential significance of the profession of the evangelical counsels in our life as religious apostles, the Constitutions follow closely the doctrine of Vatican II, which gave a vivid description of the spiritual experience lived by an innumerable throng of disciples and witnesses of Christ.

In three successive paragraphs art. 60, after linking religious profession with the universal vocation to holiness of all the baptized, indicates the christological and theological dimensions of life according to the counsels.

### **The gospel way of the counsels, a development of the grace of baptism**

The opening statement of chapter VI of the Constitutions takes us back to art. 3, which from the outset presented our life of the Lord's disciples as a free gift of the Father, who consecrates us through his Spirit, and as our free and loving response in offering ourselves "to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3).

Now this double movement of love — God's initiative and our humble response — is deeply rooted in the grace of baptism, through which the Father has called us to be sons in the Son and, marking us

with the seal of the Spirit, has made us members of the new people, the Church, and sharers in its mission of salvation. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "(Every christian) is called to realize this baptismal vocation in evangelical charity inspired by the beatitudes: a single commandment, filial love of the Father and fraternal love for his neighbour, after the example of Christ, is the only way towards the same sanctity for all the baptized".<sup>1</sup>

The linking of the gift of religious profession with the one vocation of all the baptized to sanctity is significant. As was said in the commentary on art. 23, it is clearly in line with the Council's intention, which in the Constitution "Lumen gentium" placed religious among the one People of God called, by a specific vocation, to follow the path of christian holiness.

The text of art. 60 explicitly recalls n. 5 of the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis".<sup>2</sup> The SGC commented as follows: "The Council characterizes religious consecration by saying that it brings about a more profound interior implanting ("*intimius consecratur*", "*intime radicatur*") and a richer exterior expression ("*plenius exprimit*") of baptismal consecration. The religious is one who, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, wishes to intensify to the maximum the following of Christ according to the Gospel in search of love".<sup>3</sup>

We note the double expression of intensity used to describe the salesian's commitment to realize the grace of his baptism through the profession of the counsels: *fullness* and *radicality*. In the wonderfully synthetic formula of "Perfectae caritatis", it is a case of "the pursuit of perfect charity by means of the evangelical counsels"<sup>4</sup> through a deep and renewed intention of adhering to Christ and his Gospel: a radical living of the Gospel, following Christ as closely as possible, and this through love and so as to love him ever better. John Paul II explains it very well: "Upon the sacramental basis of Baptism in which

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 109

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also ET 7; RD 7

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 110

<sup>4</sup> PC 1

it is rooted, religious profession is a new 'burial in the death of Christ': new, because it is made with awareness and by choice; new, because of love and vocation; new, by reason of unceasing conversion. This 'burial in death' causes the person 'buried with Christ' to 'walk like Christ in newness of life'.<sup>5</sup>

## Christological dimension of the profession of the counsels

After this deep reflection on the baptismal roots of religious profession, the second paragraph concentrates on the most characteristic element, belonging to all christian tradition, of the practice of the counsels: the "*sequela Christi*", i.e. the commitment to follow Christ in the same form of life so as to dedicate oneself totally to the service of the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

The Constitutions quote literally from the decree "*Perfectae caritatis*" which is linked with the text of the Constitution "*Lumen gentium*": "The counsels, when willingly embraced in accordance with each one's personal vocation, contribute in no small degree to the purification of the heart and to spiritual freedom: they continually stimulate one to ardour in the life of love; and above all they have the power to conform the christian man more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also".<sup>7</sup> We can glean from this the deep

<sup>5</sup> RD 7. Here is found the essential nucleus of a reply to the objection made by some regarding the use of comparatives in connection with the religious life made by the Council and taken up by the Salesian Constitutions ("fuller", "more radical" etc.). Based on the baptismal consecration and therefore on the universal vocation to holiness, consecrated life excels because of its purpose of a radically evangelical "*sequela Christi*"; religious consecration does not impart a new character different from that of the grace of baptism, but gives a new impetus of love which leads to a more determined will to follow the way of holiness. This is a true gift of the Spirit which justifies the expression "*special consecration*" used by the Council (cf. PC 5)

<sup>6</sup> That this is the central element of the article is also indicated by the title ("*Following Christ*"), and by the biblical quotation at the head of the whole chapter

<sup>7</sup> LG 46

purpose of one who accepts the divine call: he wants to follow Jesus, modelling his own existence on His, reproducing in himself (albeit in an imperfect and limited way) Christ's way of life and his fundamental attitude in the service of the Father.

Obedience, poverty and virginity have really no sense apart from Jesus Christ, his life and his word. Coming into this world to bring salvation to it, he chose for himself a kind of life and a concrete way of realizing it even as a human being; he inaugurated an original style of life which is the fullest and total affirmation of the values of the Kingdom. Obedience, poverty and virginity were in Christ not merely edifying examples but three fundamental dimensions of his earthly existence, the expression of the giving of himself to his Father and to mankind.

Religious life intends to *live and present once again, in a form perennially new in the Church, Christ's manner of living*, his fundamental attitudes.

All this takes on a special significance for the salesian who, by accepting the divine call, has followed Christ the "Apostle of the Father" (C 11), and has committed himself "to work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3). Like Christ the Apostle, the salesian wants to live in virginity, poverty and obedience, with full and loving availability so as to become an instrument of salvation for his fellow men.

But it is in the *sharing of the Paschal mystery* that the "sequela Christi" attains its fullness. If for every christian, baptism is immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6,4-5), for the religious conformity to Christ crucified and risen again is the constant and supreme norm of his life as a disciple. The Cross reveals the totality of God's love: it reveals the love of the Father who gives his Son to the world, and at the same time reveals the Son's loving response. On the Cross the Son is the true "religious of the Father", totally obedient to his will, who has no longer anything of his own because he has loved "with all his heart, with all his mind, and with all his strength".

The text of the Constitutions well illustrates this intimate participation in Christ's paschal mystery, which takes place in the profession of the counsels. In the Cross the salesian finds the deepest reason for his life: by renouncing the old man he realizes his union with Christ



crucified, and reaches the totality of love; from the Cross stems the new life of the risen Christ, life according to the Spirit with his fruits of grace and salvation.<sup>8</sup>

To conclude these reflections we cannot fail to quote the reference made by our Founder to the Divine Saviour as the supreme model of our life according to the counsels. We shall see this in detail when we deal with the individual vows. Here it will be sufficient to cite some of Don Bosco's expressions from a circular of 1867 concerning the dispositions needed for entry into the Society: "It would be wrong to enter (the Society) to enjoy a tranquil life, complete one's education, or free oneself of parental or other authority. This would hardly be a response to Christ's call. Such a person would be seeking temporal advantages, not his spiritual good. Our Saviour praised the Apostles and promised them an eternal Kingdom not because they had abandoned the world, but because they had abandoned it in order to follow him through thick and thin; this indeed they did, wearing themselves out with work, penance and suffering, and finally undergoing martyrdom for the faith".<sup>9</sup>

### Theological dimension of the profession of the counsels

The article's third paragraph gives explicit emphasis to the theological dimension of the profession of the evangelical counsels: *through Christ and in Christ we are led to the Father*, whom we want to love above all else. This is an overt reference to the statement of "Lumen gentium": "By vows or other sacred ties of a similar nature the christian ... dedicates himself wholly to God, his supreme love, to whom he makes himself over in a new and special way to serve and honour him".<sup>10</sup> The life of those who embrace the evangelical counsels

<sup>8</sup> Participation in Christ's humbling of himself and in his life in the Spirit is clearly indicated by PC 5; cf. also RD 7

<sup>9</sup> BM VIII, 354-356

<sup>10</sup> LG 44

becomes a particular "confession" of God's existence, of his saving presence, of his rich love and mercy. It has been said that religious are "*practitioners of God*", in the sense that they give themselves full-time and in complete availability to the interests of God and his Kingdom; conquered as they are by God's love, their lives are a revelation of the essential nature of communion with him as a constituent relationship of man's ultimate truth; they are in other words "men of the Absolute".

This is true not only of those consecrated persons on whom the Spirit has bestowed the sublime gift of dedicating themselves totally to the contemplation of God, but also of those religious more directly involved in works of charity and the apostolate. As Paul VI wrote: "When your vocation destines you for other tasks in the service of men — pastoral life, missions, teaching, works of charity and so on — is it not above all the intensity of your union with the Lord that will make them fruitful?"<sup>11</sup>

All this we gather from the invitation of the Constitutions to adhere to God whom we love above all else. And we seem to hear in it an echo of the simple words of our Father Don Bosco inculcating in his boys the way of holiness by loving and serving God above everything else.<sup>12</sup> By the witness of his consecrated life the salesian will educate young people to discover God, and to love and serve him, an idea which will be taken up at greater depth by art. 62.

The article concludes with a synthetic expression summarizing the preceding doctrine: life according to the counsels is a "*life based entirely on gospel values*", i.e. an evangelical path to holiness which the Church has recognized by approving the Constitutions and proclaiming the Founder a Saint (cf. C 1 and 192). At the end of the complete description of the salesian project we shall be able to assert that "the Gospel is our supreme Rule" (cf. C 196).

<sup>11</sup> ET 10; cf. PC 5

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Don Bosco's expressions about loving and serving God in the "*Companion of Youth*" (OE II, p. 185 ff); cf. also what Don Bosco wrote in the preface to his *Life of Dominic Savio*: "May God give you and all the readers of this book good health and the grace to profit by what I have written. May the Blessed Virgin, to whom Dominic was so devoted, keep us all united in one heart and soul to love and serve our Creator, for he alone deserves to be loved above all things and served all the days of our life" (OE XI, p. 160).

*God our Father, we thank you  
for having called us from the day of our baptism  
to be your sons  
and collaborators in your work of salvation.*

*Through our religious profession  
you have increased in us our baptismal grace,  
by calling us to follow your Son more closely  
in the way of the evangelical counsels.*

*We ask you, Father, to bestow on us  
an abundance of your Spirit,  
that we may be fully conformed to Christ Jesus  
in unceasing participation in his paschal mystery  
as a pure offering pleasing to you.*

*Grant that we may cleave totally to you,  
loving and serving you above all else,  
that we may become a living prophecy  
of your saving presence among men  
and especially among the young.*

*We ask you this through Christ your Son, our Lord.*

## ART. 61 FRATERNAL AND APOSTOLIC LOVE

Don Bosco frequently points out how the sincere practice of the vows strengthens the bonds of brotherly love and makes our apostolic work coherent.

The profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

The evangelical counsels, by fostering purification of the heart and spiritual freedom,<sup>2</sup> render our pastoral charity more concerned and productive: the obedient, poor and chaste salesian is quick to love and serve those to whom the Lord sends him, especially poor youth.

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 15

<sup>2</sup> cf. IG 46

As is shown by the title itself, the purpose of this article is to emphasize the bond which exists in our life between the practice of the evangelical counsels and the apostolic mission lived in the fraternal communion: the salesian, faithfully following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ, is able to live in his community as in a true family and dedicate himself to his mission with ever new enthusiasm.

### A clear indication from Don Bosco

The article begins by recalling Don Bosco's teaching, which provides a guarantee of fidelity to the plan of evangelical life inspired by God for the salvation of youth.

Reference has already been made in the introduction to chapter VI to the significance of the religious vows in the apostolic designs of the Salesian Society: they are a bond which firmly unites the members in the love of Christ and brotherly affection, and renders them fully available for the fulfilment of the mission.

Don Bosco was particularly sensitive to the value of communion, which is consolidated by the practice of the religious vows. We recall

the first article of chap. II of the Constitutions of 1875, taken up in art. 50 of the present text which points out the fundamental role of the vows for the growth of fraternal charity, to the point of forming "*one heart and one soul to love and serve God*". Don Bosco said the same thing at greater length in his Introduction to the Constitutions: "Our Lord takes great pleasure in seeing brethren dwelling in his house '*in unum*', that is, united in heart and mind, serving God and helping one another in charity. This is the praise given to the early christians by St Luke, that they so loved one another that it seemed that they had but one heart and soul".<sup>1</sup>

As far as the linkage between the evangelical counsels and the apostolic mission is concerned, we know of Don Bosco's insistence on promoting God's glory and saving souls. It is interesting to read again another extract from our Father's Introduction to the Constitutions: "Our vows may be considered as so many spiritual cords by which we consecrate ourselves to God, and place our will, our goods, and our spiritual and moral faculties in the power of the superior, so that we may all form but one heart and one soul in order to promote, according to our Constitutions, the greater glory of God: precisely as the Church invites us when in prayer she says: "*That the faith in their minds and the piety of their actions may be one*".<sup>2</sup>

### **The evangelical counsels reinforce brotherly communion**

In and for the Church religious profession has always been an outstanding sign of love: a sign of the love of God who reserves a person for himself and sets that person aside for a mission, and a sign of the love of the disciple who responds with generosity to the divine call.

<sup>1</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Brotherly charity; cf. Appendix Constitutions 1984, p. 236

<sup>2</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, the vows; cf. Appendix Constitutions 1984, p. 228

Now this sign of love is showered in all its richness on the Church itself, and contributes like leaven to building it up as a community of love. This is the sense in which must be understood the expression of Vatican II: "The evangelical counsels unite those who practise them to the Church and her mystery in a special way".<sup>3</sup> they arise from within God's loving design for his Church and help it to grow in charity and in its mission.

But the article, with its quotation from the decree "*Perfectae caritatis*", emphasizes the contribution made by the practice of the vows to the religious community by laying the sure foundation for a peaceful common life and brotherly communion "*as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord*".<sup>4</sup> The faithful observance of the evangelical counsels not only removes obstacles in the way of christian cohabitation (selfishness, excessive attachment to worldly goods, exclusive love of creatures), but more especially and from a positive standpoint releases energy for a richer and more complete life of communion: consecrated celibacy makes it possible for us to give ourselves to our brothers in the Lord with greater freedom and concern; poverty leads us to share everything, both material and spiritual goods, in a family spirit; common obedience to the Father's will helps us to adopt an attitude of brotherly attention and submission, according to the Apostle's advice: "be subject to one another" (Eph 5,21).

Speaking especially of our salesian communities, the SGC expressed this reality as follows: "Our task requires 'teams' which are well knit together and coherent in their method of action; it requires also a particularly cordial family spirit. All this is sustained by the evangelical virtues of the religious life".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LG 44

<sup>4</sup> PC 15

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 123

## The evangelical counsels make us more painstaking in our apostolic activity

The article's last paragraph is a synthetic statement of the influence exerted by the practice of the evangelical counsels on the mission; the vows, lived in a spirit of love, can not only unite the members among themselves but are a prerequisite for an apostolically efficacious service.

Here too should be remembered the liberating effect of evangelical life according to the counsels. Substantially the article carries the content of the text of the Constitution "Lumen gentium" where it states that "the counsels, when willingly embraced in accordance with each one's personal vocation, contribute in no small degree to the purification of the heart and to spiritual freedom", and so "they continually stimulate one to ardour in the life of love".<sup>6</sup> External freedom, which the counsels foster, gives us greater full-time availability for the effective service of the young with all our resources; and internal freedom directs in their direction all our affective capabilities, enabling us to love them with the kind of affection and dedication desired by Don Bosco, and in line with the requirements for a truly complete education.

The Acts of the SGC provide an authoritative explanation of this *apostolic dimension of our vows*: "The evangelical values of the religious life favour our saving work for youth and for the working classes, and the spirit of zeal and affectionate kindness with which we must fulfil it. They allow us to realize the 'cetera tolle' which conditions the fullness of the 'da mihi animas'; in fact they render us available both in our exterior life and in our deeper emotional response. The salesian renounces having children of his own through marriage in order to love the young people with whom he works. He renounces the possession of goods to put both himself and the goods he receives at the service of the poor; he renounces a life at his own choice to be ready to go wherever service is most necessary".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> LG 46

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 123

The history of our Society clearly shows how much a frugal and austere life, chaste and generous self-dedication, and the convinced family solidity of generations of Salesians at the school of Don Bosco, have made it possible to start up works and initiatives and carry out other tasks in conditions which would seem at first sight quite impossible. It is still true at the present day that the unconditional dedication stemming from the evangelical counsels is without any doubt the secret of a high apostolic return.

*Lord Jesus,  
you have gathered us together into a family,  
united by the bond of charity  
and sustained by the evangelical life  
of obedience, poverty and chastity,  
after your own example and that of our Founder Don Bosco.*

*Increase the generosity of our daily self-donation,  
and help us to live our holy vows  
in the brotherhood of our religious family,  
as a way of pure love.*

*Grant that by following with joyful enthusiasm  
the path of the evangelical counsels,  
we may be freed from everything opposed to charity,  
and be ready to love those to whom you send us,  
especially young people who are poor.*



## ART. 62 A PARTICULAR SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE

The practice of the counsels, lived in the spirit of the beatitudes, makes our proclamation of the Gospel more convincing.

In a world tempted by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possessions and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely, and that the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour.

Our way of life also affects our manner of dressing, which is meant to be an external sign of this witness and service. The clerics follow the dispositions of the particular Churches in the countries in which they reside,<sup>1</sup> and the lay members adopt the simple style which Don Bosco recommended.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 669

<sup>2</sup> cf. C 1875, XV, 1-3

After presenting the evangelical counsels in their fundamental relationship to Christ (C 60), and indicating their value with respect to fraternal and apostolic love (C 61), the Constitutions go on to devote two articles to the witness given by those who follow this way of holiness.<sup>1</sup>

### Evangelical testimony of the counsels in the salesian mission

If it is to be efficacious, every apostolic mission, and particularly the proclamation of the Word, needs to be "confirmed by the signs that accompany it" (Mk 16,17-20). The most eloquent sign is the witness of the life of the one who bears the message: thus it was for the prophets, for Jesus himself and for his Apostles.

<sup>1</sup> The title of the article draws its inspiration from the Apostolic Letter "*Redemptionis donum*" of John Paul II, nn. 14, 16

Now the practice of the counsels, by which we are conformed to the life of Christ, gives to this witness particular force, because it obliges us to live those evangelical values which we teach to our youngsters.<sup>2</sup>

This is the basic theme developed in art. 62: one who testifies to the Gospel by his own way of life is able to proclaim it in a more convincing way. The religious vows, which impose on us the radical living of the spirit of the beatitudes, make our existence accord with the task and demands of evangelization.

This is all the more important at a time in history when young people are extremely sensitive to any lack of consistency between the life of an educator and what he says. This was a point made by Paul VI: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses".<sup>3</sup> And referring specifically to religious, the same Pope wrote: "Religious have a special importance in regard to that form of witness which is a primary element of evangelization. This silent witness of poverty, of detachment from the things of this world, of chastity, pure innocence of life and voluntary obedience, as well as offering a challenge to the world and to the Church herself, constitutes an excellent form of preaching which can influence even non-Christians who are of good will and appreciative of certain spiritual values".<sup>4</sup>

This too was the conviction of Don Bosco, who often recommended "good example" as an efficacious means of drawing other people to the Lord. "No sermon is more powerful than good example", he wrote in the first Regulations for the Oratory.<sup>5</sup> And he reminded salesian educators: "Never try to tell others to practise virtue or carry out a duty unless you first set the example".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 125

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, *Address to the members of the "Council of the Laity"*, quoted in EN 41

<sup>4</sup> EN 69

<sup>5</sup> BM IV, 557

<sup>6</sup> BM X, 443

## A witness for the young in a world tempted by atheism and materialism

The Rule points to two main situations in which people, and especially young people, find themselves at the present day and which call for the witness of the salesian.

On the one hand they are suffering the effects of being in a world which is tempted to atheism: a practical atheism indifferent to religious values, one which just ignores God rather than explicitly denying him. Our life in accordance with the Gospel testifies to God, to his presence and his Love, because the way in which we live and stay with young people in great need would make no sense but for him, the one we have freely chosen as the supreme Love, the highest Good and perfect Teacher.

And on the other hand, in a world which exalts materialism in so many ways, the young are tempted to look for solutions apart from God (and sometimes in place of him) for the three fundamental problems they meet with in their process of growth: the need for love and sexual activity, the urge to obtain and possess what is needed for their existence, and finally the freedom to manage their own life, with its needs for personal autonomy and self-assertion and within the limitations imposed by social cohabitation. The problems are difficult, and on their solution depends the individual's fulfilment or whether he goes astray.

The salesian educator, by his chaste, poor and obedient life, testifies to the christian sense of the above-mentioned values: sexuality is ordained for personal relationships inspired by a true love; money is destined for a function of service; freedom is given not for the domination or opposing of others but for building with them. The SGC declared: "The religious holds these values highly and by his consecrated life he challenges every deviation from them (eroticism, unjust amassing of wealth, and oppressive power); he shows their limitations and proclaims their downfall in the Paschal mystery of the liberating Christ".<sup>7</sup> There is therefore a deep relationship between the work of education

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 125

and life according to the evangelical counsels, and it is important that we be aware of the fact.

## Witness of the manner of dress

The last paragraph dwells on a particular external sign of our life as religious apostles: the way we dress.

The text draws attention in particular to the significance of religious dress for the public. It is an external sign, and one which links a person with the designs of God, who has chosen him and set him aside for Himself.<sup>8</sup> Without claiming that the habit or manner of dress is of absolute importance, it should be kept in mind that even by what we are exteriorly we can proclaim the love of God and make known what he is doing in the world. This is all the more important in a world in which the signs of God are becoming ever more hidden.

As far as the salesian is concerned, the text reflects what has been our constant tradition: Don Bosco did not want his sons to have a distinctive mode of dress, a habit of a uniform kind throughout the Congregation; he spoke of a simple but dignified way of dressing, suitable for religious dedicated to a work of education among youth.<sup>9</sup> Certainly we must not undervalue what our responsibility as educators calls for, even in the way we dress.

<sup>8</sup> The text expresses the substance of an article that the GC22 wanted to place in the General Regulations. The CRIS asked that in harmony with the dispositions of the new Code of Canon Law the theme be dealt with in the Constitutions. Can. 669, referred to in the note to the constitutional article, is based on the thought of Vatican II, which said: "The religious habit, as a symbol of consecration, must be simple and modest, at once poor and becoming. In addition it must be in keeping with the requirements of health and it must be suited to the times and place and to the needs of the apostolate" (PC 17)

<sup>9</sup> In the Constitutions of 1875, Don Bosco dealt with the habit in a short chapter (XV) of three articles: in the first he says that the Society does not have a uniform habit, but that the dress of the members will be in accordance with the usage of the different countries; the other two refer specifically to the dress of clerics and coadjutors. The conclusion should be noted: "*But everyone alike shall strive to avoid all the new fashions of seculars*" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 199)

The text goes on to specify that the clerics,<sup>10</sup> in accordance with the example and teaching of Don Bosco, will follow the dispositions made for the secular clergy. The relevant norms (as regards both the kind of dress and the circumstances in which it may be worn) vary from one country to another, and are for the particular Churches to decide; clerical salesians will be faithful to them, giving in this way a further indication of their love for the Church.

*God our Father,  
Christ your Son has made us signs of himself  
in a world which adores creatures  
rather than you, the one God, living and true.*

*Grant that by living our vocation in complete fidelity  
we may become living witnesses among youth  
to the Beatitudes of the Gospel,  
and that all we say and do  
may manifest to them your love  
and the supreme sense of existence in Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

<sup>10</sup> The word "clerics" is used here in the general sense of art. 4 of the Constitutions within our Society

## ART. 63 WITNESS OF THE WORLD TO COME

The offering of his own freedom through obedience, the spirit of evangelical poverty and the love which becomes a gift in chastity, make the salesian a sign of the power of the resurrection.

The evangelical counsels, fashioning his heart entirely for the Kingdom, help him to discern and welcome God's action in history; in the simplicity and hard work of daily life they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young "new heavens and a new earth",<sup>1</sup> awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. Rev 21,1

<sup>2</sup> cf. Rom 12,12

The theme of the witness which the salesian gives by living the spirit of the beatitudes in the practice of the evangelical counsels is here considered in its paschal and eschatological dimension: he testifies to the Kingdom of God, already in operation through the Passover of Christ, which continues to grow until it reaches its definitive fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Art. 63 gathers together and points out the aspects of the sign and anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven which are present in the profession of the evangelical counsels.

The article takes its rise from the doctrine of Vatican II which, in speaking of the character of the sign proper to religious profession, says: "For the People of God has here no lasting city but seeks the city which is to come; and the religious state of life, in bestowing greater freedom from the cares of earthly existence on those who follow it, simultaneously reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and foretelling our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LG 44

For us Salesians the article reflects the pedagogical insistence with which Don Bosco spoke of Paradise to the confreres and boys: "Always remember, my sons," he wrote in the *Companion of Youth*, "that you have all been created for Paradise";<sup>2</sup> "Bread, work and heaven", he promised the salesians;<sup>3</sup> "A piece of Paradise will make up for everything!", he used to repeat when in difficulties.<sup>4</sup> In the dream of the diamonds, "Reward" (on the back of the garment representing the physiognomy of the Congregation) is associated with the diamonds of the three vows and with that of "Fasting". On the rays were written: "If the greatness of the reward pleases you, do not be deterred by the amount of work involved. He who suffers with Me will rejoice with Me. What we suffer on earth is only for a moment, while the joys of my friends are eternal in heaven".<sup>5</sup> It can truly be said that the continual awareness of heaven was one of the central principles that added thrust to Don Bosco's distinctive spirituality and Pedagogy.<sup>6</sup>

These preliminary remarks will help us to understand better the ideas expressed in this article of the Constitutions.

### **The salesian is a sign for the young of the power of Christ's resurrection**

The text opens with a reaffirmation of the paschal value of consecrated life in the profession of the counsels. The offering of the salesian who dedicates to the Father his own freedom, his possessions and all his love, is joined with the offering of Christ and the mystery of his death and resurrection; it testifies to the world that Christ's work of salvation is alive and working even now among men. In this way the salesian becomes a witness to the redeeming force of Christ's paschal mystery, a sign of the power ("*dynamis*") of the resurrection, which is

<sup>2</sup> D. BOSCO, *Companion of Youth*, Part I (OE II, p. 190)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM XII, 443; MB XVII, 251; MB XVIII, 419

<sup>4</sup> BM VIII, 200

<sup>5</sup> MB XV, 184

<sup>6</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian in the dream of the diamonds*, ASC 300 (1981), p. 25

able to transform the human heart. As Paul VI wrote to religious: "Today more than ever, the world needs to see in you men and women who have believed in the Word of the Lord, in his resurrection and in eternal life, even to the point of dedicating their lives to witnessing to the reality of that love, which is offered to all men".<sup>7</sup>

### **By his life the salesian proclaims to the young "new heavens and a new earth"**

The second paragraph delves more deeply into these truths. The two characteristic attitudes of the christian are emphasized, which should shine in the religious with a brighter living light.

On the one hand he testifies to a fact that has already happened: the Lord has come! The Lord is present! Christ's Passover has inaugurated the new and final epoch, and the messianic benefits are already given to men.

On the other hand the life of the christian is an act of hope in the coming of the Lord once again, the hope of the definitive fulfilment of Christ's Kingdom in the "new heavens and a new earth", which God is preparing for his children. It is expressed in the constant prayer of the Spirit and the Betrothed: "Maranathâ! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22,20).

The salesian, as is well expressed in the text, bears witness to this double reality. He *testifies in the first place to the fact that the Lord is alive and is present in history*, and that as the Council says, "heavenly goods are already present in this age" in a way that is real though imperfect.<sup>8</sup> St Teresa of Lisieux once said: "In heaven I shall certainly see God, but as for being with him, that I have achieved already on this earth". Life according to the counsels, conformed to the kind of

<sup>7</sup> ET 53

<sup>8</sup> Cf. IG 44 for the witness of religious; LG 48 for the eschatological nature of the Church



life embraced by the Son of God for the fulfilment of the Father's will, little by little shapes the heart of the salesian to that of Christ, which beats only for the Kingdom. In this way he learns to "discern and accept God's action in history" and is able to point it out to the young.

With this obligation there is linked another, that of the *prophetic task of proclaiming the coming of the Lord*, the Kingdom to be fulfilled, the "new heavens and a new earth" which will be the definitive condition of humanity. Here the evangelical counsels have an evident function. Virginity is eternal life already begun: "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven" (Mk 12,25). The same is true of poverty: "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mk 10,21); and the same for obedience: "Father, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6,10).

The text of the Rule emphasizes the *message of hope* that the salesian must proclaim by his life, after the manner of a prophet. It has a special importance when linked with his mission as an educator of youth, and therefore able to embed the roots of the future of the young generations in the sure horizons of hope. This hope does not consist in passive waiting, but carries obligations and is the permanent source of true happiness. We have as an indication the words of the Apostle used in the liturgy on the feast of our Father, Don Bosco: "Be always joyful; the Lord is near!" (Phil 4,4-5).

*God, my Father, on the day of my profession  
you accepted the humble offering  
of my freedom and my love,  
uniting it to the redemptive sacrifice of your Son;  
you transform my poverty by the power of your Spirit,  
and make my life a living sign of the resurrection.*

*Conform my heart to that of your Son,  
that henceforth it may beat only for the Kingdom.*

*Help me to discern the signs of your presence  
and of your activity among men,*

*so that I may be, like Don Bosco,  
the bearer of joyful and active hope,  
able to bear witness at every moment  
that after the sufferings of this present life,  
"new heavens and a new earth" are awaiting us,  
in which justice will be found.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## OUR OBEDIENCE

*"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb 5,8-9).*

There are other biblical texts found in the Constitutions in connection with obedience, and all of them relate to the obedient attitude of Christ: Phil 2,8; Mt 26,42; Jn 12,24 (C 71). Christ, with his motives and style of submission to the Father, are at the centre of all of them. Heb 5,8-9 powerfully reinforces this christological dimension of religious obedience by adding the important motive: "*Christus oboediens*" because "*Christus patiens*".

The whole passage Heb 4,14-5,10 (which provides the context for the quotation) depicts Jesus Christ as the merciful high priest, deeply solid with those in travail. This he has become through a dramatic series of events: he accepted with complete availability the Father's plan of salvation; in fidelity to it, although he was his Son, he did not hesitate to accept the consequences to the fullest extent: death on the cross. But God raised him to life again as the bringer of eternal salvation to all who courageously follow his path of obedience.

And Jesus is not only a model. In accordance with the wise saying that 'experience teaches' ("*epathen - emathen*"), through what he suffered for us in obedience to the Father, he learned in his own flesh the hard price of our obedience. He learned the sense of obedience by courageously suffering the pains that accompanied it.

We therefore obey God in Christ because of the happy outcome of his obedience, but also in the awareness that he is solid with us. Not only is he waiting for us at the goal, but he is at our side on the way. Not only is he our model, but he is our priest and intercessor that we might learn to obey. This communion with the obedience of Christ and the saving significance he has given to it become the principal reasons for the salesian obedience which the Constitutions present to us (C 64-71).

\* \* \*

## ART. 64 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR OBEDIENCE

Our Saviour assured us that he came on earth to do not his own will but that of his Father in heaven.<sup>1</sup>

By professing obedience we offer our will to God and by carrying out the mission entrusted to us we relive in the Church and in the Congregation Christ's own obedience.

Docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us in the events of each day, we take the Gospel as our supreme rule of life,<sup>2</sup> the Constitutions as a sure path to follow, and the superiors and the community as day by day interpreters of God's will.

<sup>1</sup>. cf. C 1875, III, 1

<sup>2</sup>. cf. PC 2

The purpose of this article, which introduces the section on salesian obedience, is to indicate the gospel foundation for obedience and hence to reveal its deepest sense. The text is based entirely on the thought of our Founder and on the doctrine of the Council, of which the SGC made a deep analysis.<sup>1</sup> We may dwell especially on three lines of thought developed in the article.

### Jesus Christ obedient to the Father

The obedience of the religious has its foundation in the obedience of Jesus Christ, and is one of the aspects involved in following him. When the Council wanted to indicate within the People of God those who followed the way of the evangelical counsels, it defined them as "men and women who pursue more closely the Saviour's self-emptying and show it forth more clearly ... so as to conform themselves more fully to the obedient Christ".<sup>2</sup> In its turn the decree "Perfectae

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Salesian obedience today*, SGC, 624 ff.

<sup>2</sup> LG 42

caritatis" emphasizes that the obedience of religious is in imitation of "the example of Jesus Christ, who came to do his Father's will (cf. Jn 4,34; 5,30; Heb 10,7; Ps 39,9) and, 'taking the form of a servant' (Phil 2,7), learned obedience through what he suffered (cf. Heb 10,8)".<sup>3</sup>

Hence we cannot understand the obedience of the salesian, unless we are deeply aware of the mystery of the obedient Christ. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "Jesus' obedience to his Father sums up his life and the mystery of his death and resurrection. It reveals at one and the same time his identity of Son and Servant, and shows him united in an ineffable and absolutely unique way to the Father and hence his total submission to him".<sup>4</sup> And so it is easy to conclude: "Our obedience draws its real origin from our baptismal incorporation in Christ and in the love uniting him to the Father".<sup>5</sup> This fundamental concept cannot be overemphasized: the obedient Jesus is the living source and model of our own obedience; without faith in Christ religious obedience makes no sense!

In addition to the scriptural text placed at the head of the section (Heb 5,8-9), the present article asserts this fundamental characteristic of salesian obedience by quoting the phrase which Don Bosco had included in the first of the constitutional articles on the vow of obedience: "Our Divine Redeemer has assured us that he came down on earth not in order to do his own will but that of his heavenly Father".<sup>6</sup> This expression of our Founder brings to mind the gospel statement in which Jesus declares his own attitude as the Son and perfect servant of the Father: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4,34).

This reference to the obedient Christ will be taken up again in the last article of the section, where obedience is considered in its culminating moment, i.e. in the sharing in the Lord's paschal mystery.

<sup>3</sup> PC 14

<sup>4</sup> SGC, 627

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 93)

## We relive Christ's obedience in the fulfilment of the mission

The second paragraph goes more deeply into the significance of our obedience: "By professing obedience we offer our will to God". Once again the text calls explicitly on the decree "Perfectae caritatis",<sup>7</sup> which declares that this is an intensely evangelical use of liberty. To renounce for reasons of faith the control of one's own life and to filially submit to the will of God the Father, is the obedience of every christian. Our obedience as religious consists in living this mystery in an all-embracing way ("we offer our will to God") within a community project ("we relive in the Church and in the Congregation Christ's own obedience").

The text asserts the ecclesial and communal character of our obedience: Christ who is always alive continues to obey the Father through the Church and his baptized members; for this reason it has been said that "a son of the Church is a son of obedience".<sup>8</sup> Within the Church obedience to Christ is relived in the humble service rendered by our Congregation in the plan of salvation.

Special emphasis must be laid on the close *linkage between obedience and the mission the Church entrusts to us*. The text of the Rule is at pains to say that we relive the obedience of Christ "by carrying out the mission entrusted to us". For Jesus "obedience unto death, even to the death of the cross" was for the purpose of fulfilling the redeeming mission for which he came into this world ("*for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven*", we say in the Credo). For us too the profession of obedience, which makes us adhere totally to the will of the Father, gives us a place in his plan of salvation and enables us to work efficaciously in a specific apostolic project: obedience to God makes us fully available for the service of our brothers in Christ. This makes it clear how obedience is at the centre of our vocation as apostles, and is directed to our mission for the salvation of youth.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. PC 14

<sup>8</sup> Cardinal H. De Lubac

Don Bosco attached great importance to the obedience of individual members in pursuance of the Society's mission. We remember his dream of the ribbon around the forehead<sup>9</sup> and that of the diamonds.<sup>10</sup> On many occasions our Founder stressed the crucial importance of obedience: "A steady obedience is the life of a religious congregation, its bond of unity", he said.<sup>11</sup> Worthy of quotation in particular is the conference he gave to the salesians on 11 March 1869, immediately after the Congregation had been approved by the Apostolic See. After recalling that until then the Society, lacking ecclesiastical approval, had been to some extent suspended in midair, he continued: "But now, my dear sons, things are no longer the same. Our Congregation is approved; we are mutually bound to each other: I to you, you to me, and all of us to God ... We are no longer private individuals but a Society, a visible body". And then he went on to develop the pauline image of a body, emphasizing the importance of obedience for the life of the Society: "*This is, so to speak, the hinge on which our whole Society turns. Without obedience there would be chaos. If, instead, obedience reigns, we shall form but one body and soul to love and serve the Lord*".<sup>12</sup>

### Means by which the will of the Father is made known

The last paragraph of art. 64 explains more fully the way in which obedience is exercised "in the Church and in the Congregation". The difficulty, in fact, is not always that of heartfelt obedience to the will of the Father, but rather of knowing what precisely his will is, by what signs it can be discovered, and what instruments exist for its interpretation. Don Bosco tells us: "We make the vow of obedience, precisely in order that we may be sure that we are doing in everything the holy will of God".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> BM II, 232-233

<sup>10</sup> MB XV, 183; cf. *Dream of the diamonds*, ASC 300 (1981)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BM XII, 332

<sup>12</sup> BM IX, 267-269

<sup>13</sup> *Costituzioni* 1875, III, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 93)

What then are the signs and instruments for a sure adherence to God's will? The article provides a response by indicating the means by which the will of the Father is made manifest. To understand it better we may turn to the SGC, on whose study and observations the text is based.<sup>14</sup>

Among the many signs which manifest God's will (say the Acts of the SGC), of great importance are the happenings and concrete situations of the present moment ("God speaks through history"), whether they be of general implication like the "signs of the times", or of particular import like the needs, emergencies, demands and problems of the young, of each moment, place, community and individual.

These signs however cannot always be interpreted with ease and clarity. To discover their deeper meaning we go in the first place to the *GOSPEL*, where we find displayed the perfect obedience of Jesus. This is something evidently valid for all christians but the Council thought it well to recall that 'a fortiori' it is the "supreme rule" for all religious.<sup>15</sup>

The *CONSTITUTIONS* are another instrument which is specifically ours: they constitute our gospel viewpoint for understanding realities in depth. The fact that they have been approved by the Apostolic See is a guarantee for us that they are a practical and safe road to sanctity for us to follow (cf. C 192), and at the same time they unite us in a spirit of obedience to the Church.

The Gospel and the Constitutions are objectively certain instruments which ensure fidelity to the Congregation's spirit and mission. To set them in a specific historical context and apply them to concrete realities, the *SUPERIORS AND THE COMMUNITY* have a specific role to play as "day by day interpreters of God's will". Obedience to God through a man who represents God is a participation in the radical obedience of Christ, who submitted himself to men in his incarnation and redeeming mission. This aspect of obedience to

<sup>14</sup> Cf. SGC, 630

<sup>15</sup> Cf. PC 2



the Superior will be taken up at greater length in the articles which follow. Suffice it to recall that the aspect which distinguishes "religious" obedience from the common christian virtue of obedience is precisely that of submission of the will to the lawful Superior: this is the commitment we made through the formula of profession (cf. C 24).

The mention of the community as a place in which God's will is made manifest, deserves special comment. It is clear that here the "community" includes the Superior as father and guide, but what is being emphasized is that in the community, be it local, provincial or world, each member has a providential indication of the Father's will. This aspect too will be taken up again when communal obedience is dealt with (C 66).

*God, our Father, we thank you  
for having called us to relive  
in the Church and in the Salesian Society  
the mystery of your Son,  
who became for us an obedient servant  
"even to the death of the cross".*

*With the spirit and dedication of Don Bosco  
we offer you our freedom as sons,  
uniting it completely to your loving designs  
in fulfilling the mission of salvation  
which you have entrusted to us.*

*Send us, Father, your Spirit of truth  
and enable us to read the signs of your will,  
which you continue to show us  
in the Gospel of Jesus,  
in our Constitutions,  
in the dispositions of our Superiors  
and in every circumstance of our life.*

*Make us always ready to respond to you  
in loving generosity and fidelity.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 65 SALESIAN STYLE OF OBEDIENCE AND AUTHORITY

In salesian tradition obedience and authority are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust.

The superior directs, guides and encourages, making discreet use of his authority. All the confreres collaborate by obeying readily and sincerely, "with cheerfulness and humility".<sup>1</sup>

The service of authority and the willingness to obey are the principles of cohesion in the Congregation, and guarantee its permanence; for the salesian they are the path to holiness and the source of energy in his work, of joy and of peace.

<sup>1</sup> C 1875, III, 2

After describing obedience in its gospel source and with relation to the divine model, Jesus Christ, who came to do the will of his Father, the Constitutions go on to present the particular way in which the salesian obeys: art. 65 deals, in fact, with the "salesian style of obedience and authority".

We may note at once that here, as in other articles of the section, *obedience and authority are strictly united with each other*. This emphasizes not only that the manner of obeying is linked with that of commanding, but more especially that the one who exercises authority and his brother, who has freely chosen to submit his will to that authority, are both servants of one and the same apostolic project, linked by the same Rule and united in the genuine search for the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

The guidelines given in this article come directly from the teaching and example of Don Bosco, which have been passed on to his sons and become part of our family heritage and a basic element of our tradi-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. what Don Bosco said in the conference of 3 February 1876 concerning the link between the superior and the Rule (BM XII, 62). This will be taken up at greater length in the following article dealing with communal obedience

tion (note in this connection the reference to tradition in the introductory words of the article).

Already in the commentary on art. 64, attention was drawn to the importance Don Bosco gave to obedience in his Society's apostolic project: the salesian's obedience is directed to the fulfilment of the mission, and is therefore the obedience of an apostle who finds his fulfilment in the unconditional donation he makes of himself for the service of those to whom the Lord sends him. The parallel task of salesian authority is primarily that of animating the community and guiding it in the development of this service.

But after stating the fundamental apostolic character of salesian obedience and authority, the article goes on to describe the way in which these are carried out.

What does Don Bosco teach us in this connection?

We all know the principle of total availability that Don Bosco wanted to be realized in obedience. He wanted his sons to "see in the will of the superior the will of God";<sup>2</sup> "let us ever bear in mind that the superior is God's representative, and that in obeying him we obey God himself".<sup>3</sup> He wanted his salesians to be "like a handkerchief" in the hands of the superior,<sup>4</sup> i.e. he wanted them to be completely available and ready to do anything when necessary.

But this need for total availability is linked with another principle on which Don Bosco founded his community, the value of christian brotherhood; in Don Bosco's mind the soul which gave life to this hierarchically structured body had to be charity.<sup>5</sup> This is a duty of everyone in relationships which bind the members to one another, but it is particularly necessary in the one who must be the father of his subjects;<sup>6</sup> charity should be his word of command;<sup>7</sup> he must make himself loved rather than feared.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM IX, 269

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM IX, 270

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM III, 385; cf. also BM IV, 294; VI, 8; XIII, 150

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BM IX, 269

<sup>6</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 2 (cf. E. MOTTO, p. 93)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BM XIII, 554

<sup>8</sup> Cf. BM VII, 317

And so, while Don Bosco wanted obedience to be expressed in full and complete availability, he was deeply human about the exercise of authority, because he wanted obedience to be practised through love and not constraint, with joy and not unwillingly.<sup>9</sup> He knew how to make use of the particular talents of individuals and wanted "each one to work according to his strength and capabilities";<sup>10</sup> a responsible adult obedience was what he was looking for.

To put it briefly Don Bosco exercised authority and asked for obedience *as these would be exercised in a family*.

This reference to Don Bosco's practice helps to a better understanding of the present article, which presents in three paragraphs some features of the salesian style of commanding and obeying with the positive results that derive from it.

### **Obedience and authority lived in charity and the family spirit**

The family spirit and charity provide the atmosphere which among us surrounds both obedience and authority.

We have already said when dealing with the salesian spirit (cf. C 16) and the fraternal community (cf. C 49, 51) that the family spirit is an idea which is central to Don Bosco's way of doing things. To it he often makes reference in his words and writings and draws on it in giving life to his work and controlling it. He wanted the community to be a healthy, well-ordered and harmonious family; love should reign in it and inspire its life, work and mutual relationships; in it the superior should be present as a friend, brother and father (cf. C 55).

As was said earlier, Don Rinaldi's words on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the approval of the Constitutions are significant: "Rather than a Society, Don Bosco wanted to form a family, based almost exclusively on the gentle, affable and watchful fatherliness of the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM XII, 62

<sup>10</sup> BM IX, 269

superior, and on the filial and fraternal affection of his subjects".<sup>11</sup> We understand what Don Bosco wrote to a salesian to whom he was entrusting the direction of a house: "*Go in the Lord's name, not as a superior but as a friend, a brother and father. Let your way of commanding be governed by charity, concerned to do good to all and harm to none*".<sup>12</sup> To Don Rua, rector at Mirabello, he had given as a norm: "Strive to make people love you rather than fear you. When commanding or correcting, always make those concerned understand that you are prompted by a desire to do them good and not your own whim".<sup>13</sup>

The article points to this family style of charity as characteristic of the salesian spirit, and says that it "*inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust*"; i.e. a spirit which unites the confreres with each other and with the superiors in the greatest possible atmosphere of mutual confidence, of trust and fellow-feeling, of peaceful and constructive discussion, precisely as would happen in a family where the members esteem and love each other.

We note the explicit reference to the reciprocal nature of relationships: confidence of the salesian in his superior and the latter's trust in the confreres: "mutual trust", to use the expression of art. 16. Esteem and trust on one side only are insufficient. A successful outcome depends on the coalescence of positive efforts on both sides: each must strive to contribute his own full confidence and to deserve that of his brother.

Let us not forget that the practical solution to many problems concerning authority and obedience can be found in a determination to foster this atmosphere, which is so characteristic of our family.

<sup>11</sup> D. RINALDI, *Letter for 50th anniversary of approval of Constitutions*, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 179

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Fr Pietro Perrot, *Collected letters*, III, p. 360; cf. also letter to Fr Domenico Tomatis, *Collected letters*, IV, p. 337

<sup>13</sup> BM VII, 317

## The salesian manner of commanding and obeying

The expression we find in the Rule when depicting the salesian superior, that he "makes discreet use of his authority", may seem surprising at first sight.

The intention is certainly not to take from the precise task of the superior of guiding the community and confreres with an authentic power of government, but rather to emphasize that among us the use of formal orders is kept to the minimum, and government is customarily exercised through animation. Art. 55 described the salesian superior as a "brother among brothers", who acts as a "father, teacher and spiritual guide". The present article confirms that he follows this line of action: he "*directs*" as the teacher of spiritual doctrine; he "*guides*" as the one bearing primary responsibility, full of zeal and pastoral prudence; he "*encourages*" as an affectionate father and brother. In such conditions it is evident that frequent recourse to authoritative interventions becomes unnecessary: when the confreres are enlightened and guided they proceed with responsibility and a spirit of initiative in the realization of the common project.

Clearly the article does not exhaust the presentation of the characteristics of salesian authority; it needs to be completed by what is said elsewhere in the Constitutions and Regulations.<sup>14</sup>

The salesian characteristics of obedience are described with expressions dear to Don Bosco, taken in part from one of the articles of the Constitutions written by our Father: "Let everyone be obedient to his superior, and consider him in everything as a loving father, obeying him without any sort of reservation, promptly, cheerfully and with humility".<sup>15</sup>

It will be worth our while to draw attention to the three qualities of salesian obedience:

— *A sincere obedience*: the adverb "sincerely" translates the expression "without any sort of reservation"; it recalls the generous and

<sup>14</sup> Cf. in particular, C 55, R 121-124, 173-176

<sup>15</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 93)

unconditional availability, and at the same time the sincerity and depth of the salesian's response to God who calls him through the mediation of the superior.

— *A ready obedience*: it requires no stretch of the imagination to see that "readily" implies not only the material promptness of the response but also that spirit of collaboration full of initiative which is expressed so well by Fr Caviglia in one of his conferences on the salesian spirit: "We have a spirit that can be summed up in the salesian motto 'I'll do it'. I don't know how many days indulgence are attached to it, but it is certainly the greatest triumph for the Congregation which has grown on the strength of the sacrifices associated with that 'I'll do it.'" <sup>16</sup>

— *A cheerful obedience*: the expression "with cheerfulness" does not necessarily mean that one must obey on every occasion with a broad smile (all the better if that happens!); it is equivalent to "willingly", and it recalls the quotation from St Paul used by Don Bosco in his Introduction to the Constitutions: "Obey promptly and willingly... True obedience... consists in doing *cheerfully* whatever is commanded... for as St Paul affirms: "God loves a cheerful giver". In an address to the confreres of Varazze on the Strenna of 1872 Don Bosco spoke of "true obedience", i.e. he said, "the kind which makes us cheerfully accept our orders, taking them all as something good, commanded by the Lord". <sup>17</sup>

## The results of this obedience

The final paragraph of the article is an encouragement to maintain the salesian spirit in the service of authority and in obedience because of the subsequent results, which concern both the whole Society and each member.

<sup>16</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, Turin 1985, p. 57

<sup>17</sup> BM X, 443

— *Cohesion of the Congregation and a guarantee of continuity*: these two fruits of salesian obedience are given prominence by Don Bosco himself in the above-mentioned conference to the confreres on 11 March 1869. As we have said, Don Bosco applied to the Congregation the idea of a body, with its single head and members which have complementary functions: "If this body, which is our Society, is animated by charity and guided by obedience, our Society will prove its worth and will have the energy to perform great deeds for God's glory, for the good of our neighbour and for the welfare of its members".<sup>18</sup>

— For each member of the Society, obedience is the "*path to holiness*": it makes him adhere to God's will and puts him in the right position for the realization of the mission which the Lord has entrusted to him in Don Bosco's family; in this, said art. 2, "we find our own way to holiness". Obedience is also "*the source of energy in his work*", because it gives free reign to the action in him of God's grace, and also gives him the certainty that he is where God wants him to be. Finally it is the "*source of joy and of peace*". Don Bosco promised this almost in the form of a solemn pronouncement: "If you practise obedience in this way, I can guarantee in the name of God that you will lead a peaceful and happy life in our Society".<sup>19</sup>

*Lord our God, we thank you  
for having called us to work in your service  
and for the salvation of the young,  
in a family guided by the spirit of charity,  
in a climate of mutual esteem,  
confidence and tranquillity,  
as Don Bosco desired.*

<sup>18</sup> BM IX, 270

<sup>19</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions, Obedience*; cf. Appendix Constitutions 1984, p. 220



*Enable superiors and brothers to live together  
in a mutual service of love,  
animated by your Holy Spirit.*

*Grant that the service of guidance and animation  
rendered by our superiors,  
and our ready, sincere and cheerful obedience,  
may be for the Congregation a guarantee of continuity,  
and for every salesian the path to holiness,  
the source of energy in work, and of joy and peace.*

## ART. 66 SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN OBEDIENCE

In the community, in view of the mission entrusted to us, we all obey even though we have different tasks to perform.

In listening to the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist, we express and renew our common dedication to the divine will.

In matters of importance we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility.

The superior exercises his authority by listening to the confreres, encouraging all to make their contribution and promoting a union of wills in faith and charity. He concludes this phase of searching in common by making appropriate decisions. These will normally emerge from a convergence of the views expressed.

We all then set to work to carry out these decisions by our sincere collaboration, even when our own views have not prevailed.

Obedience, founded on the Gospel and lived in the salesian style, is called for from both the individual confrere and the community. The present art. 66 of the Constitutions deals specifically with the *communal dimension* of obedience, and develops some of the more important aspects which characterize it. This point was the object of particular study on the part of the SGC and the GC21.<sup>1</sup>

### The obedient community

A first and fundamental statement is made in the opening paragraph: *the community as such is the subject of obedience, i.e. it is an obedient community*. God has designs on it; to it the mission is primarily entrusted (cf. C 44). Hence the community has a precise

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 632-637; GC21, 391-392

obligation to seek the divine will and fulfil it, and this as regards both the entire Congregation for the totality of the mission, and the provincial and local communities at their own level.

The text points out a particular aspect: the community is obedient because *in it we all obey*, even though we have different tasks to perform. Not only the confreres who are not in positions of authority, but also the superiors (in a form, indeed, which is more delicate and demanding) must have a constant attitude of obedience; each one according to his own role shares the responsibility for putting into effect the plan that God has decided on for us, and has entrusted to us for the salvation of youth. In connection with obedience on the part of superiors, we may recall the words of Don Bosco who, after declaring: "Among us let the superior be our all", immediately went on to add: "The Rector Major has the Rule as his guide; let him never stray from it, otherwise instead of a single focal point there will be two: the Rule and his own will. Instead, the Rule should almost be embodied in the Rector Major; the Rule and the Rector Major should be one and the same".<sup>2</sup>

### Supernatural sources of shared responsibility

After this fundamental assertion in the first paragraph, the article next presents the typical religious context in which the community exercises its responsibility in seeking God's will.

It points out that our method for seeking together the way to fulfil the Father's plan (as will be explained in the third paragraph) differs from the logical process in use in human assemblies and has its roots in listening to the Word of God and participation together at the Lord's table.

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 62. A comment on obedience "in a spirit of communion" can be found in SGC, 632

Explicit reference is made to two articles which are developed more fully in the chapter on prayer (cf. C 87, 88), to indicate the manner in which the community gives visible expression to and fosters its daily reality as an "obedient community".

Listening together in faith to God's Word means that we want to be "informed" by it so as to put ourselves at its service: "For us the Word is ... light to see God's will ... and strength to live out our vocation faithfully" (C 87). It could be said from this point of view that the community is called to imitate Mary's obedience, prolonging it in its own life and activity. "Be it done unto me according to thy Word".

But the act of submission to God par excellence, the most dynamic proclamation of our common dedication to the divine will, is the celebration of the Eucharist. "There the community celebrates the paschal mystery" (C 88): in a spirit of priestly offering it unites itself with Christ's perfect obedience "even on the death on the cross". This is our vital support in reliving our obedience in our daily concrete situations and accepting the daily and sometimes crucifying demands they make on us.

### **The three stages of communal obedience**

In the third, fourth and fifth paragraphs, the article describes the stages in the communal process of seeking the Father's will together and fulfilling it responsibly.

We may note first of all the opening phrase: "*in matters of importance*". This formula presupposes that in the daily life of the community the members, each at his appointed task, carry out their work competently and with love, in the knowledge that what they are doing corresponds to the Father's desire. Communal search for the Lord's will becomes important when it is a question of laying down the main lines the community will follow in carrying out the communal plan, and when new circumstances arise which cause serious problems for the community as such or for one of its members, or which concern the work it is doing, with the result that God's will is not immediately

evident and needs to be clarified. It is then that the members must together show themselves "docile to the Spirit and attentive to the signs he gives us" (C 64).

Communal obedience is attained through *three stages or phases which are closely linked with each other*.

— The first stage is that of *RESEARCH*, an important phase in which the members try to discover together the signs of the will of God, who is speaking to the community. The particular instrument for such research is *communal dialogue* in which all the members, moved by a constructive spirit and in a fraternal atmosphere, give frankly and patiently their competent contribution for the benefit of the community and its members. It is important that each one should be really and disinterestedly seeking the will of God, and not seeking to impose his own ideas.

In this phase animation is the specific responsibility of the superior. The text says that he listens to the confreres, "encouraging all to make their contribution and promoting a union of wills in faith and charity". He must serve the community by helping it to express itself in meaningful dialogue, but at the same time guiding it so that in the process of research communion and unity are maintained, which are essential to its life.

— The second stage is that of *DECISION*. This "will normally emerge from a convergence of the views expressed", say the Constitutions. Note the word "normally"; in fact, if all the elements of brotherly communion are effectively present (the same spirit, the same concern for the common good, the same pastoral zeal for attaining apostolic efficacy), the normal result will be that any divergence of views present at the beginning will be slowly resolved. In this movement towards unity, as we have said, the superior has his part to play: he must guide his confreres, prompt an outlook of faith among them,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica testificatio*, Paul VI wrote: "It is the duty of everyone, but especially of superiors and those who exercise responsibility among their brothers or sisters, to awaken in the community the certainties of faith which must be their guide" (ET 25)

and try as far as possible to reconcile opposing views, in which case his final word will set a natural seal on the convergence of ideas.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless he will intervene when necessary in virtue of his authority, and make decisions for the good of the community and its mission, taking into account as far as possible the opinions of everyone, but without being obliged to follow the majority. On this point the text is clearly based on the decree "Prefectae caritatis": "Superiors therefore ought to listen to their subjects willingly and ought to promote cooperation between them for the good of the institute and of the Church, retaining however their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done".<sup>5</sup>

— Finally there is the third stage, that of *EXECUTION*. Here in a quite special way comes in the concept of loyal shared responsibility in obedience. In the Acts of the SGC we read: "It is at the moment of execution that obedience is translated into action, and brings to light the riches of personal initiative and the generosity of sacrifice. The whole community or the individual concerned, will unite freely, responsibly and actively with the Father by deeds, i.e. by carrying out what has been decided. This should be done always as an act of faith, but especially in cases where the decision does not accord with their own opinion. They should do it freely and willingly, with loyalty and responsibility. They will take what steps are necessary within the limits imposed by the directives given, cooperating fully and cordially as loving members of a family even when the work is very varied. While community decisions need to be taken only occasionally, their practical execution will involve in each one the daily virtue of obedience".<sup>6</sup>

Art. 123 of the Constitutions, in setting out the principles and criteria which must guide the life and activity of the community, specifically includes "the responsible and effective participation of all the members", applied practically in terms of planning, organizing and evaluating. This is the way in which the obedient community is careful to fulfil the Lord's will for the realization of the mission.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, 635

<sup>5</sup> PC 14; cf. also ET 25

<sup>6</sup> SGC, 637

*God, our Father  
in listening to your Word,  
and in our communion in the one eucharistic Bread,  
you give us the true sources of cohesion with each other.  
Grant that we may learn to seek together  
what you would have us do.*

*Help us to accept with faith  
the decisions of our superiors,  
and to fulfil them with love,  
so that our life of obedience  
may be the instrument of our own salvation  
and of those you have entrusted to our care.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 67 PERSONAL OBEDIENCE AND FREEDOM

The salesian is expected to obey in freedom of spirit and with an awareness of his personal responsibility, pledging his "powers of intellect and will, and his gifts of nature and of grace".<sup>1</sup>

He obeys with faith and sees in the superior an aid and a sign which God uses to manifest his will.

Obedience like this "leads to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PC 14

<sup>2</sup> PC 14

This and the two following articles are dedicated to a description of the commitments and characteristics of *personal obedience*; they should be read and considered in the light of the guidelines already indicated when dealing with the evangelical significance and the salesian style of obedience.

This article puts forward some fundamental attitudes which give to obedience the availability and promptness desirable in a salesian. Two requirements are easily discernible in the text: the salesian obeys with adult responsibility, and with the faith of a convinced believer.

### The obedience of men who are free and responsible

The first part of the article is taken literally from the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which addresses the following exhortation to religious and their superiors: "Religious should be humbly submissive to their superiors, in a spirit of faith and of love for God's will, and in accordance with their rules and constitutions. They should bring their powers of intellect and will and their gifts of nature and grace to bear on the execution of commands... Superiors should govern their subjects in the realization that they are sons of God and with respect



for them as human persons, fostering in them a spirit of voluntary subjection... They should train their subjects to cooperate with them by applying themselves to their ordinary duties and to new undertakings with an active and responsible obedience".<sup>1</sup>

The text of the Council makes it clear that great qualities and human virtues enter into obedience and are developed by it.

The first quality is *freedom*. Contrary to a current opinion which sees obedience as a virtue of children, it must be said that religious obedience is really an *adult virtue*, incompatible with a juvenile psychology. Obedience is an act of personal autonomy which consists in the interior assent to a decision accepted for the realization of one's life in Christ.<sup>2</sup> The salesian obeys therefore "in freedom of spirit", i.e. as a free person who knows the reasons for his obedience. John Paul II writes: "Remember, dear Brothers and Sisters, that the obedience to which you committed yourselves ... is a particular *expression of interior freedom*, just as the definitive expression of Christ's freedom was his obedience 'unto death': I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10,17-18)".<sup>3</sup>

The second human quality is the *sense of responsibility rich in initiative*. Effectively it is a case of a further form of the exercise of freedom, which accepts the mandate received, shares the responsibility for it with brothers, and transforms it into a personal commitment, dedicating oneself to it with all one's energy and rejecting any passive or mechanical attitude.

If it is true that initiative requires obedience, it is equally true that obedience is strengthened by initiative. This is an aspect of the salesian spirit, according to what is expressed in art. 19. Don Albera observed: "To the submission due to the superior must be added the

<sup>1</sup> PC 14

<sup>2</sup> The Acts of the SGC state: "Obedience will no longer be a childish act, but a mature disposition: it will not be a renunciation of the will and the personality but rather a resolute will to carry out God's will in preference to one's own desires. This is the way for men to become truly free" (SGC, 639)

<sup>3</sup> RD 13

spirit of personal initiative; it is precisely from this spirit that our Society derives that genial modern aspect which makes it possible for us to do the good called for by the needs of times and places".<sup>4</sup> Fr Caviglia too speaking of the style of obedience to which Don Bosco wanted to educate his sons, notes with keen discernment that "he did indeed have in mind a religious Congregation with three simple vows, but he wanted it to be made up, and so to speak 'materialized', by men who were awake to reality and able to think for themselves. The kind of work that has been done and remains to be done in his institutes is of such a kind and quantity that it could not be thought of without a certain freedom being granted to the individual, and is quite irreconcilable with a form of life which, although meritorious in God's sight under other conditions, in this particular situation would become a hindrance and an obstacle to the work".<sup>5</sup>

### Obedience rooted in faith

The supernatural quality of obedience which includes the others and which strengthens the human qualities, making them more dynamic, is evidently *faith*. All the articles of this section either say this or implicitly take it for granted. Anyone who wanted to base his obedience only on human reasoning would not succeed in obeying freely and with conviction for very long. The love, in fact, which prompts him to seek ardently for the will of God and to fulfil it wholeheartedly, following the path traced out by Jesus, is born of faith, which leads him to discover and taste the presence of the Spirit and the joy of entrusting his life completely to the Father.

In reality, says the Rule, faith enables us to look beyond the limitations and human defects of the superior, and see in him "an aid and a sign which God uses to manifest his will".

<sup>4</sup> D. ALBERA, Circular on vocations 15.5.1921, ASC 4, p. 201 (*Circular letters*, p. 499)

<sup>5</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco - Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934 (2nd edtn.), p. 168-169

This faith, the animating element in obedience, is rich in humility, after the example of Jesus Christ, the obedient servant, meek and humble of heart, and of Mary the humble handmaid of the Lord. It is not out of place to recall that humility and obedience always go together.<sup>6</sup>

### **In this way the salesian grows in holiness**

The article's concluding paragraph takes up once again the text of the decree "Perfectae caritatis", already quoted at the beginning, and emphasizes the part played by obedience in leading a person to maturity, from both a human and christian point of view. The decree says: "In this way, far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience *leads it to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God*".<sup>7</sup> The Constitution "Lumen gentium" too speaks of a "freedom fortified by obedience".<sup>8</sup>

Obedience opens the door to an ever more complete freedom, because it discloses the ways of the Spirit who is perfect freedom. Led by the Spirit, the salesian matures in this way in his humanity and his stature as a son of God, being conformed ever more to Christ the Lord. We may recall the words written on the rays of the diamond of obedience: "The foundation of the whole edifice and the compendium of sanctity".<sup>9</sup> By guiding us towards holiness, obedience leads us to the most complete realization of our personality and to a true and enduring happiness.

<sup>6</sup> We read in the Memorie Biografiche (it has been omitted in the English edition): "The edifice of my sanctification must have humility for its foundation, obedience for its walls, and prayer for its roof" (MB X, 1286)

<sup>7</sup> PC 14

<sup>8</sup> LG 43; cf. ET 27

<sup>9</sup> MB XV, 184

*Lord our God,  
grant that our obedience  
may be always an act of intelligence,  
of freedom and responsibility,  
and at the same time an act of living faith,  
which enables us to see in the superior  
a sign and an aid which you offer us  
so that we may know your will.*

*Through the humble homage of our obedient heart  
may we follow your ways  
and so reach the perfect liberty of sons,  
conformed to the image of your Son,  
the perfect Man and our Saviour,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

## ART. 68 REQUIREMENTS OF THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

By vowing obedience the salesian pledges himself to obey lawful superiors in matters concerning the observance of the Constitutions.<sup>1</sup>

When an order is given expressly by force of the vow of obedience, the obligation to obey is a grave one. Only major superiors and rectors can command in this way, but they should do so rarely, in writing or before two witnesses, and only when some serious reason requires it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 601

<sup>2</sup> cf. CIC, can. 49 ff.

This article expresses the obligations of obedience which the salesian undertakes by vow before God on the day of his profession, and includes the juridical aspects. The content is taken from its traditional expression in our earlier Constitutions and from the indications of the Code of Canon Law.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen that the article speaks of the obligations of the religious who is called to obey, and also of the duties of the superior who has the task of commanding (and who must be submissive in his turn to a higher superior and to the Rule).

### The life of the salesian a sign of obedience

The first paragraph is a precise statement of what the salesian obliges himself to by vow. It is true that the whole of his consecrated

<sup>1</sup> In the texts of the Constitutions written by our Founder the canonical details concerning the precept of obedience are found from the first draft of 1858 to the second printed text of 1873. They are not found in the approved edition of 1874 (cf. E. MOTTO, p. 92-95); they then appear again in subsequent editions. cf. in particular art. 41 and 42 of the Constitutions of 1966, the substance of which is reproduced in this article of the present Constitutions

life as an apostle is lived under the sign of obedience in imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. C 64), but the vow he makes to God expressly concerns the submission of his will to "lawful superiors in matters concerning the observance of the Constitutions."<sup>2</sup>

Obedience to God on the part of the religious, as was said in the preceding article, passes through the mediation of a brother in the community who has been chosen to exercise the ministry of authority. It is also strictly linked with the Institute's apostolic project expressed in the Constitutions, approved by the Church as an evangelical way and means for realizing the mission desired by the Holy Spirit. By making the vow of obedience, the salesian obliges himself to seek the will of God in the Society's apostolic plan, by freely submitting himself to the guidance of a superior whom he recognizes as God's representative (C 67).<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that the application of the vow is of wide extent: it covers the whole of the salesian's consecrated life for the fulfilment of the mission received from the Lord and described in the Rule. This is precisely what each member promised God at his profession: "I make the vow to live obedient, poor and chaste, *according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions*" (C 24).

### Occasions when the salesian is called to assume Christ's obedience more explicitly

After expressing this overall view of the commitment made at profession, the article goes on in the second paragraph to specify the occasions when the vow of obedience becomes gravely binding before

<sup>2</sup> Can. 601 of the CIC expresses the object of the vow of obedience as follows: "The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in the spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ, who was obedient even unto death, obliges submission of one's will to *lawful superiors, who act in the place of God when they give commands that are in accordance with each institute's own constitutions*"

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 14

God, the Church and the Congregation. It is required, says the text, that the precept be a formal one, i.e. "*given expressly by force of the vow*". The external conditions indicated ("in writing or before two witnesses") manifest more clearly the superior's intention to command. There is a proper concern in this matter for juridical clarity so as to foster tranquillity of conscience, a point which is made in the Code<sup>4</sup> itself and follows also from what Don Bosco had written in one of the first editions of the Constitutions: "The observance of this vow does not oblige under pain of sin except in those things which are against the commandments of God and our holy Mother the Church or the dispositions made by superiors with the express obligation of obedience".<sup>5</sup>

Referring to superiors, the text indicates those who are the "lawful superiors" who can bind "by force of the vow". They are the "major superiors" (i.e. the Rector Major and his Vicar, the Provincials and their Vicars), and the Rectors of the individual communities.

This brings us back once again to the delicate point (already mentioned in art. 65) of the discretion and prudence needed by superiors in having recourse to formal precepts of obedience: "they should do so rarely, and only when some serious reason requires it". The text emphasizes that the salesian, having offered his will to God so as to "relive the obedience of Christ", does not normally need formal commands: his own internal enthusiasm leads him to seek always and everywhere what is pleasing to God.

The perfection of salesian obedience, according to Don Rinaldi, is that "the superior has no need to command",<sup>6</sup> but that each member generously lends himself for the benefit of the community and of young of people.

Above all the canonical specifications given in the article there remains the fundamental fact, so well expressed in the preceding ar-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 49 ff. Some conditions are expressed for the validity of a "decree" or "precept" given to a single person

<sup>5</sup> *Costituzioni* 1860, III, 3 (cf. F. MOTTO p. 94)

<sup>6</sup> D. RINALDI, Letter for 50th anniversary of approval of Constitutions, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 179

titles: by professing obedience the salesian freely and joyfully *obliges himself* (cf. C 65, 67) and makes himself available to seek and carry out God's will in everything, in imitation of Jesus and for the salvation of youth.

*God our Father,  
you have led us in your Spirit  
to offer our freedom for your service  
by the vow of holy obedience.  
Help us to live it as a sacrifice pleasing to you  
in humble submission to our brothers  
who are your representatives among us,  
and in the faithful observance of our Constitutions  
for the good of the community and of our young people.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.*



## ART. 69 PERSONAL GIFTS AND OBEDIENCE

Each one places his abilities and talents at the service of the common mission.

The superior, with the help of the community, has a special responsibility for the discernment of these gifts, and for promoting their development and right use.

If the concrete demands of charity and of the apostolate require the sacrifice of personal wishes or plans which are in themselves lawful, the confrere accepts with faith whatever obedience asks of him, while still retaining the right of recourse to a higher authority.

Before taking on tasks or offices other than those assigned to him in the community, he seeks authorization from the lawful superior.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 671

This third article concerning the individual who obeys touches on the problem of harmonizing the exercise of personal talents with the commitments proper to obedience.

In the development of this theme there is a clearly discernible double line of reflection in faith: personal abilities and talents are a great enrichment for the service of the mission, but special needs or circumstances may require them to be sacrificed for the good of the community or of youth.

### Obedience in the exercise of personal talents

The first two paragraphs point to the fact that salesian obedience, inserted in the redeeming obedience of Christ, although implying an effective renunciation, should not be identified with the sacrifice of personal abilities.

*"Each one places his abilities and talents at the service of the common mission"*, says the Rule. In the normal development of the vocation, obedience is not opposed to each one's God-given talents,

but rather accepts them, exploits them and sanctifies them "for the service of the common mission". We must not forget what was said in art. 22, i.e. that each one receives from God personal gifts so as to respond to his vocation, so that in fact these gifts (of nature and grace) represent one of the signs of the Lord's call to serve him in the Salesian Society.

If we look back at our history we see how Don Bosco was able to put to good use the talents of each confrere, so as to form a united body and give life, with God's help, to enterprises on a scale which to us at the present day seems gigantic. Referring in particular to the care superiors should show for the confreres, he wrote in the Introduction to the Constitutions, speaking of the 'rendiconto': "The members open their hearts... and the superiors get to know (their) moral and physical strength, and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited".<sup>1</sup>

The text dwells precisely on the responsibility of the superior, "helped by the community", for the *"discernment of these gifts and for promoting their development and right use"*.

It should be made clear in the first place that the "gifts" spoken of are not only attitudes and natural abilities, but also the "special gifts" of the Spirit which he distributes for the common good and for a richer and more fruitful apostolic service: in other words it is a case of the real personal "charismata" of which the Apostle Paul speaks, which are given for the benefit of all.

This said, the superior's responsibility and that of the community itself is based on a principle of an ecclesial nature, but also on psychological considerations. In the first place it must not be forgotten that from a human standpoint the salesian is an educator who must find himself at home among the young and make a competent contribution to the overall apostolic work. It is clear that the efficacy of his influence and efforts call for the use of his best resources.

<sup>1</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Rendiconto and its importance, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 241

But it is especially in the light of Scripture and the Church's teaching<sup>2</sup> that one can understand the duty of the superior to bring to light these personal charisms, recognize them with gratitude, foster their development, and control their proper use. The text must be interpreted in its genuine significance: it expresses the concern that these charisms be regulated for the common good, and that they be exploited in the authentic sense of a service to the community.

In this context is inserted art. 173 of the General Regulations which, in speaking of the duties of the rector, translates the principles of the Constitutions into practical directives: "He must see that the confreres practise co-responsibility and collaboration in the family spirit desired by Don Bosco. He should respect areas of responsibility, fostering in an atmosphere of healthy freedom the employment of natural gifts and personal talents for attaining the common end".

A final observation: as has been said already, the Rule points to the responsibility of the entire community in discerning and exploiting these charisms; it must help the superior to fulfil his role. This is a task which forms part of the process of the communal seeking of God's will, which becomes manifest also through the particular endowments given to individual confreres. We need to look again, from the standpoint of obedience, at the requirements of brotherly sharing and responsible participation characteristic of the apostolic community, to which the carrying out of the mission is primarily entrusted (cf. C 44, 51, 66, 123).

## Obedience may call for the sacrifice of personal plans

After considering the obedience of the religious in the more usual conditions, the text next presents the doctrine of christian obedience in its more upsetting aspect. The same words of Scripture (and for us the words and example of Don Bosco) which justify the exploitation

<sup>2</sup> On gifts of the Spirit or charismata, cf. in particular Rom 12,6 ff. and 1 Cor 12. In the documents of Vat. II cf. LG 4, 7, 12, 30; cf. also ET 28; MR 12

of personal gifts (i.e. the apostolic service carried out by a community), can at times also justify their sacrifice. Personal talents and plans are not something absolute. For a christian, and still more for a religious, the only thing that is absolute is God's design and will; and for us that will is made manifest, says the Rule, through "the concrete demands of charity and of the apostolate".

It is easy to understand therefore the delicacy of the superior's task when he must impose a renunciation for the good of the community and its mission. The Acts of the SGC speak of "open and patient dialogue", which must accompany the superior's discernment.<sup>3</sup>

On his part too the confrere must carry out a process of discernment to discover God's design in his regard. If the order of the superior does not seem to him to be in conformity with the Lord's will, the Rule, in harmony with the dispositions of the Church, gives him "the right of recourse to a higher authority".

But what the text is really emphasizing is that beneath obedience (if it is genuine) there must always remain in the religious the willingness for renunciation. No religious, salesian or not, should be surprised if in some circumstances obedience proves painful. He has offered his will to God, reliving the obedience of Christ. His point of reference therefore is Jesus, who renounced the seeking of the glory due to him, i.e. the road of personal realization, to unite himself fully with the Father's will: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me... If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all: my glory is conferred by the Father" (Jn 4,34; 8,54). He did not hide from his disciples that this was the road they would have to travel: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16,24).

Obedience to God's designs may conflict with one's personal desires; it may prevent the realization of some aspirations or personal projects which are in themselves lawful; in some circumstances it may seem at variance with what we call human "rights". In the realization

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 640-641; cf. also the reflections of Paul VI on "Conscience and obedience" in ET 28

of God's plan, obedience may sometimes seem to be even a defeat, like that of the cross! The moment of renunciation (and of apparent defeat) is the moment of truth for the one who obeys. Our Father Don Bosco says to us: "We must each of us be willing to sacrifice our own will, even at heavy cost".<sup>4</sup>

In its final paragraph the article goes directly to the Code of Canon Law<sup>5</sup> for a practical norm regarding the application of the principles that have been set out: the acceptance of eventual tasks or offices, arising from projects extraneous to the community's plan, should be submitted to the lawful superior whose task it is to appraise (with the help of the community) the service rendered by such tasks in the light of the community's educational and apostolic mission.

It should be emphasized once again that obedience forms part of a communal project, and that all the gifts the Lord has bestowed on us for the realization of our vocation are at the service of the common mission (cf. C 44).

*God our Father, give us that clarity of vision  
that will enable us to see in our superiors  
and in their directives  
an indication of your loving designs.  
Help us to grow in availability,  
to sacrifice, in accordance with your will,  
our desires and personal interests,  
so as to become more like your Son  
in the complete giving-of ourselves  
for the salvation of our fellow men.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> BM VII, 35

<sup>5</sup> Can. 671 of the CIC says: "Religious are not to undertake tasks and offices outside their own institute without the permission of the lawful superior"

## ART. 70 THE TALK WITH THE SUPERIOR

Faithful to Don Bosco's recommendation each confrere meets frequently with his superior for a friendly talk.

This is one of the best opportunities for dialogue, both for his own personal advantage and for promoting the good running of the community.

In it he speaks with confidence of his own life and work and, if he so wishes, also of the state of his conscience.

This article deals with a point of great importance in salesian life, which concerns the personal relationship between the confrere and his superior, and is at the same time of great help for the growth of the community. It is of interest that the theme of the *friendly talk* was the object of analysis and reflection in all the recent General Chapters;<sup>1</sup> in particular its place in the context of salesian obedience was given opportune motivation. Although it is one of the best means of fostering community life, it was thought better to deal with it in this section, both to respect a tradition which goes back to Don Bosco,<sup>2</sup> and because the friendly talk is an instrument which contributes efficaciously to the discernment of the will of God.

The article is brief and summarizes two much longer articles of the Constitutions in existence before 1972,<sup>3</sup> but is rich in content. We shall try to pick out its more salient features.

<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered especially that the SGC after gathering observations from the whole Congregation produced a first revised draft of the constitutional article. The GC21 made a further analysis of the theme and introduced a new article in the Regulations expressing the fundamental content of Don Bosco's Introduction to the Constitutions (cf. GC21, 435-436). The GC22 concluded the revision of the text of the Constitutions and Regulations, defining more completely both the purpose and the content of the talk

<sup>2</sup> In the successive drafts of the text of the Constitutions there is always an article on the talk with the superior in the chapter on obedience; cf. F. MOTTO, p. 96

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Constitutions* 1966, art. 47-48

## A typically salesian spiritual help

The article begins with an important statement — "*Faithful to Don Bosco's recommendation*" — which bases the practice of the friendly personal talk on the teaching and practice of the Founder. We know, in fact, that it is a practice on which our Father frequently insisted, to such an extent that we can say that it is one of the characteristic elements of the salesian spirit. For Don Bosco it was one of the "fundamental norms of salesian houses";<sup>4</sup> it was "the key to good order and morality",<sup>5</sup> and hence a duty to which the superior must attend with the greatest diligence.<sup>6</sup>

Already in the first draft of the Constitutions Don Bosco had planned an article on full confidence in the superior, to whom the confrere should open his heart without hiding anything;<sup>7</sup> it is found once again in the text approved by the Apostolic See in 1874, with some important modifications which concentrate the content especially on the "external life". But to reach Don Bosco's genuine thought on this point of salesian life, it is useful to read again what he himself wrote in 1877 for the second edition of the Introduction to the Constitutions in the section headed "The 'rendiconto' and its importance". Beyond the practical details which he gives, those pages are a canticle to total confidence in the superior, describing the true nature of the private talk and the climate in which it should take place.

<sup>4</sup> BM X, 458

<sup>5</sup> BM XI, 331

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BM XI, 323, 331; cf. also BM X, 454; MB X, 1118; BM XII, 44-45

<sup>7</sup> Art. 7 of chap. III of the *Costituzioni 1858* reads: "Let everyone have great confidence in the superior, and have no secret in his heart in his regard. Let him keep his conscience open to him whenever he is asked or whenever he feels the need". In the *Costituzioni 1875* the article (III, 4) is modified as follows: "Let everyone place the fullest confidence in his superior. To that end it will be of great assistance to the associates to give, from time to time, an account of their exterior life to the principal superiors of the Congregation. Let everyone at such times lay open before them with simplicity and readiness the faults committed against the Rule which he may have outwardly committed, and also what progress in the virtues he has made so that he may receive both counsel and comfort and, should they be needed, some suitable admonitions as well" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 96-97)

"Confidence" well describes the salesian atmosphere essential to the conversation, and is stressed in the text of the article; such confidence was in fact emphasized by the name the SGC gave to this encounter between the confrere and his superior: a "fraternal colloquy". This is certainly not the same thing as a simple conversation between friends, because its content concerns the very life and mission of the community. It is the meeting of a brother with one who represents Don Bosco, to whom he gives his confidence for his own good and that of the community. On his side, the superior who receives the confidence of the confrere must be at this time more than any other a "friend, brother and father", as was said earlier (cf. C 55 and 65).

Against this background one can understand the fine definition given by the constitutional text: *"one of the best opportunities for dialogue"*.

### **Purpose and advantages of the fraternal talk**

Don Bosco always assigned to the talk, then called 'rendiconto', a double objective, referring to the two principal advantages that derived from its regular practice. The Constitutions sum up the thought of our Father with a brief but pregnant expression: the salesian likes to meet with his superior *"for his own personal advantage and for promoting the good running of the community"*.

The first objective is the *"personal advantage"* of the individual confrere. In his Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco, after saying in general that the 'rendiconto' contributes "to the peace and happiness of each member", goes on to list its numerous advantages: "(the members) find relief for the troubles they may have; anxieties connected with their duties cease, and the superiors are able to make provision to avoid unpleasantness and discontent. They get to know the moral and physical strength of the confreres and in consequence can give them those tasks for which they seem best suited... Let all be persuaded that if they make it (the 'rendiconto') well, with perfect



openness and humility, they will find in it a great relief of soul, and a powerful aid to progress in virtue...".<sup>8</sup>

The second objective and consequent advantage is "*the good running of the community*". "A reason why sincerity and confidence with superiors is important", writes Don Bosco again, "is that they are thus better enabled to arrange for and provide what is best for the whole Congregation of whose well-being and honour, together with the honour of each member, they have the duty to take care".<sup>9</sup>

The superior is powerfully helped in his task of carrying the primary responsibility by the better knowledge he comes to have of his confreres. The confrere in turn will understand why it is that his 'rendiconto' is a real service which he renders to the superior and to the entire community.

### The content of the talk

This is expressed in the article's third paragraph: "In it he speaks with confidence of his own life and work and, if he so wishes, also of the state of his conscience".

Part of the content is therefore laid down by the Rule and, according to our tradition, concerns the *confrere's life and activity*. The meaning of this is amply explained in an article of the General Regulations, which sums up Don Bosco's arguments in his Introduction to the Constitutions: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust, every confrere should frequently see his rector to let him know the state of his health, how his apostolic activity is proceeding, the difficulties he faces in religious life and fraternal charity, and everything that may contribute to the welfare of the individual members and of the community" (R 49). This means that the talk covers everything that concerns the concrete life of the confrere: personal life, community life, apostolic life.

<sup>8</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, p. 241-244

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, loc. cit.

It is clear too that a sense of responsibility and personal initiative are called for to enrich the dialogue and make it a real instrument of growth.

The Rule then proposes a further item which is left to the freedom of the individual confrere: the "*state of conscience*", an expression which refers to the interior life in the Spirit, and which was explained by art. 46 of the 1966 Constitutions as: "progress in virtue, and doubts and anxieties of conscience." The superior is ordinarily not the confessor but, according to art. 55, among his tasks is certainly that of being a "spiritual guide": he has to help each one to "realize his own personal vocation". Nevertheless the Constitutions wish the liberty of each member to be safeguarded, especially in this field.

### Frequency of the talk

Concerning the frequency of the talk with the superior, the Constitutions previous to the SGC used to say that the salesian should meet his superior "at least once a month", a norm which Don Bosco had already recommended in his Introduction to the Constitutions.<sup>10</sup> The SGC, GC21 and GC22 preferred to leave the matter more to the interior freedom of the confreres. They did not lay down any precise frequency, but preferred to use the simple adverb "*frequently*" in both the Constitutions and the corresponding article of the Regulations already quoted. But it is clear that the text in no way diminishes the importance of a sufficiently regular meeting between the confrere and his superior: it is the responsibility of the confrere and the superior to establish an opportune rhythm so that regularity may be efficaciously realized.

We may note that in this matter the General Chapters thought it well to emphasize the special importance of the talk for the young confreres in the period of initial formation: for them in fact a more

<sup>10</sup> In the Constitutions the phrase "*at least once a month*" is a later addition (text of 1923), but it was already in accepted use, based on Don Bosco's indication in his Introduction to the Constitutions

precise norm has been laid down in art. 79 of the Regulations, where it is said that the meeting should take place "once a month".

We conclude with two further brief reflections.

In the first place, since the talk is a "dialogue", it is clear that its success does not depend only on the confrere; much depends also on the superior, on his human and spiritual personality, on his availability and kindness, and on his competence: art. 49 of the Regulations, already quoted, recalls that this is one of the "principal duties" of the rector.

Secondly, it should be kept in mind that the talk takes place within a fraternal community, where exist forms of communal dialogue which are of great benefit to the life of the individual confrere. But the fact that the talk with the superior is integrated with other forms of dialogue should not be allowed to diminish its importance. This great means needs to be considered under its most authentic aspects, both for the development of the individual and for the creation of that fraternal and apostolic community that is so necessary for the efficacy of the salesian mission.

*God our Father,  
instil in us the spirit of filial confidence,  
and grant that we may express and develop it  
through frequent and cordial colloquy with our superiors,  
as Don Bosco wished;  
so that we may make our constant contribution  
to the building of the community  
on the model of your divine family,  
so as to become efficacious signs among young people  
of your salvation.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 71 OBEDIENCE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

"Substitute acts of penance", Don Bosco tells us, "with acts of obedience".<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes obedience will clash with our own selfish attitudes and desires for independence, or may really test our love. This is the moment to look to Christ, who was obedient even unto death:<sup>2</sup> "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done".<sup>3</sup>

The mystery of his death and resurrection teaches us how fruitful it is for us to obey: the grain of wheat which dies in the obscurity of the earth bears much fruit.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MB XIII, 89; BM XIII, 68

<sup>2</sup> cf. Phil 2,8; cf. MB IV, 233; BM IV, 163

<sup>3</sup> Mt 26,42

<sup>4</sup> cf. Jn 12,24

This last article of the section takes us back again to the first one, and looks at obedience once more in the light of Jesus Christ. In this way the salesian's obedience is presented, beginning with the mystery of the Son of God, who "came on earth to do not his own will but that of his Father in heaven" (C 64), and culminating with the contemplation of the fruitful results of the paschal mystery which is prolonged in us.

In this way the Constitutions offer the salesian the supreme reason for his obedience, even at moments when this may "test his love".

### Obedience and penance

The text is introduced by a phrase of Don Bosco which puts before us the ascetical aspect of obedience: "*Substitute acts of penance with acts of obedience*".<sup>1</sup> Our Founder invites us to see in obedience an

<sup>1</sup> BM XIII, 68

authentic form of "penance", very suitable for our condition as apostles. Earlier art. 18 of the Constitutions included among the characteristic features of our spirit the acceptance of the "daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life" in preference to "unusual penances"; this is now made concrete in a special way in the practice of obedience, which presupposes an attitude of listening and docility to the voice of God, and calls for constant purity of heart, interior detachment and the overcoming of self in accordance with the spirit of the beatitudes.<sup>2</sup>

This is a deeply ascetical process, because it demands the renunciation of the independence and egoism to which we are all naturally inclined and which centre everything on ourselves, so as to make God the centre instead, accepting defeat at his hands in a mysterious combat. Our true ascesis consists in accepting that our life depends on Another, in such a way that all our plans and activity are no longer ours alone but are also and primarily his, the one we recognize as the Lord of our life. Like Jesus, each of us becomes in this way a true "Servant" of the Father, ready to carry out his work of salvation.

Don Bosco does not hesitate to refer us to the obedience of the cross through his example of ecclesial obedience in difficult circumstances, and also through his teaching. In the Introduction to the Constitutions he tells us: "Obedience ought to be after the example of our Saviour who practised it even in things most difficult, even to the death of the cross; and should the glory of God demand as much from us, we ought also to be obedient to the sacrifice of our own lives".<sup>3</sup>

**"Father, thy will be done"**

The central part of art. 71, which we are at present considering, concentrates our attention on Christ crucified. It is the Cross, in fact,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 642

<sup>3</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 229

which fully reveals the mystery of Christ's obedience: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak as the Father taught me" (Jn 8,28). The Cross is the perfect revelation of who Jesus is, the obedient Son who loves "even to the end" (Jn 13,1); at the same time it reveals the boundless love of the Father, who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3,16).

Our obedience must be modelled on this submission of Jesus to the will of his Father, even to the extent of sacrificing his life for the salvation of his fellow men. Paul VI exhorts religious: "Let the Cross be for you, as it was for Christ, proof of the greatest love".<sup>4</sup>

The text quotes the words pronounced by Jesus in Gethsemane: "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done" (Mt 26,42). The Gospel does not hesitate to make it clear that Jesus felt a natural repugnance at what he was about to undergo, but in prayer he entrusted himself completely to the will of the Father. The Saviour's example is a reminder for us too that in the face of the difficulties and repugnance we may feel in certain trials, fervent prayer can help to insert us perfectly in the mystery of the divine will, and thus show forth the reality of our love.

### **Victorious obedience**

But the Rule emphasizes especially that this mystery of obedience is fertile in the highest degree, even though its fruits often remain hidden: the grain which falls into the earth becomes the shoot which brings forth much fruit, and the apparent defeat of the cross results in the glory of the resurrection. Paul VI says again: "Is there not a mysterious relationship between renunciation and joy, between sacrifice and magnanimity, between discipline and spiritual freedom?".<sup>5</sup> Obedience

<sup>4</sup> ET 29

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

in union with that of Jesus makes us experience faith's victory over the powers of evil and associates us with the work of redemption, making us instruments of Christ's love for men.<sup>6</sup>

And this is a wonderful witness that we can give to our young people. In a world inclined to reject anything divine, bemused by the desire for power and concerned only about tangible results (cf. C 64), the obedient salesian's generous self-donation takes on a special importance: for the young it is an invitation to discover in faith the true sense of freedom and to understand that there is no greater self-realization than to give oneself through love.

In conclusion let us turn to Mary, standing at the foot of the Cross. She united herself in silence with the sacrifice of her Son, thus fulfilling the mystery of total docility to the designs of God, which she had expressed from the moment of the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1,38). As she was for Don Bosco, so also for the salesian Mary is the guide and model in fidelity to the mission received from the Father.

*God our Father,  
send us your Spirit  
that we may always believe with a living faith  
that our salesian obedience is a participation  
in the death and resurrection of your Son.*

*Grant that in moments of difficulty  
we may be able to raise our eyes to Christ  
nailed to the Cross for love of us;  
may he teach us how fruitful it is to obey,  
and help us to testify to the young  
that the grain of wheat  
which dies in the obscurity of the earth  
brings forth much fruit.*

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller treatment of the saving value of Christ's obedience in the mystery of our Redemption, cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter "Redemptionis donum", n. 13

## OUR POVERTY

*"Jesus said to him: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'" (Mt 19,21).*

Other biblical quotations are mentioned in the constitutional text: the example of Jesus' choice (2 Cor 8,9; C 72), trust in God and not in material things (Mt 6,25 ff; C 72), the beatitude of poverty (Mt 5,3; C 75). But in particular there is the account of the so-called "rich young man" which provides the motive which heads this section, not least as a mark of respect for the two thousand years of christian tradition which has always linked it with the evangelical counsel of poverty.

The text is a transparent synthesis of all the elements essential to the true gospel significance of poverty: the full realization of life (*"if you would be perfect"*); the radical renunciation of material things (*"go, sell what you possess"*); the destination of goods in charity (*"give to the poor"*); the very happy eschatological consequence of such renunciation (*"you will have treasure in heaven"*); the total subordination of the renunciation to the following of Christ, imitating him and sharing his destiny (*"come, follow me"*). Last but not least, St Matthew tells us that it was a young man who put the question to Christ (19,20). Once again the choice of poverty must be interpreted and lived with reference to the cause of Christ, the messianic Kingdom. But it is also true that such a choice becomes the criterion for evaluating the truth of the same "sequela Christi".

In the context of the gospel account (Mt 19,16-29), we note the emergence of doubts and perplexity, and even refusal (the reaction of the rich young man: 19,22); in other words the choice of poverty is not something obvious and compelling (cf. the question of the disciples: who then can be saved? 19,25). Jesus does not tone down the radical nature of his Gospel, but indicates how it can be sustained by grace by which "all things are possible" (19,26). This grace is evidently already working in the decision of Peter and the others who "have left everything" and have "followed" Jesus. Jesus praises them and blesses them (19,27-29). By doing this he not only gives them a difficult theory, but at the same time provides a courageous and feasible example for its practical expression.

Don Bosco's solicitous reminders that poverty has to be lived with one eye on Christ and the other on poor youngsters (C 72, 73, 79), put a happy seal on the biblical heritage we now have in our hands.



## ART. 72 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR POVERTY

We are aware of the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich he made himself poor so that through his poverty we might become rich.<sup>1</sup>

We are called to a life closely modelled on the Gospel. We choose to follow "the Saviour who was born in poverty, lived deprived of everything and died stripped on the cross".<sup>2</sup>

Like the apostles at our Lord's invitation, we free ourselves from concern and worry about earthly goods<sup>3</sup> and, trusting in the providence of the Father, we dedicate ourselves to the service of the Gospel.

<sup>1</sup> cf. 2 Cor 8,9

<sup>2</sup> C 1875 (Introduction), p. xxiv

<sup>3</sup> cf. Mt 6,25 ff.

Just as, when speaking of the obedient salesian, it was shown first of all that he shares in the mystery of Christ who "redeemed and sanctified men by his obedience",<sup>1</sup> so the voluntary poverty of the salesian is immediately linked with its gospel source, i.e. with the example and teaching of our Saviour and Teacher.

In reality the question: "Why does the salesian choose a life of poverty?" can only have as its first and fundamental answer: because Jesus willed to be poor, because he chose poverty as the constant companion of his existence, because he used poor means for the fulfilment of his mission. Contemplation of the poverty of Christ, and in particular of Christ at Bethlehem and on the Cross, is the only real motive that can explain the mystery of salvation hidden in christian poverty and lead to its loving embrace. Poverty for the Kingdom is possible and can be loved because Jesus practised it and made of it the instrument for revealing the love of God for men.

Art. 72 of the Constitutions develops this thought and associates the example of the Apostles with that of Jesus himself.

<sup>1</sup> PC 1

## Following the perfectly poor Christ

The decree "Perfectae caritatis", wanting to describe the poverty of the religious, begins with the simple but profound expression: "Voluntary poverty, in the footsteps of Christ",<sup>2</sup> and in this way emphasizes the response of faith given freely in Jesus' name. For many people poverty is nothing more than an economic and social situation: it is something that has to be endured, not something deliberately chosen. Religious poverty, on the other hand, is a voluntary choice not made for human motives but solely for the love and imitation of Christ. Commenting on St Peter's words to Jesus: "We have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10,28), St Jerome explains: "The important thing is not '*we have left everything*', because the philosopher Crates did that, and many others have shown disdain for riches. What is important is the reason '*to follow you*', which is that of the Apostles and of believers".

To provide a better explanation of this christian significance of poverty in the life and mission of the salesian, the Constitutions (in the first and second paragraphs of the article we are examining) carry two quotations, one from St Paul and the other from our Founder Don Bosco.

The quotation from St Paul is the same one as is cited by the decree "Perfectae caritatis": "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*" (2 Cor 8,9). Paul highlights the mystery of the abasement of Christ who, although he was God, assumed the very extremes of man's condition of poverty (expressing here in different words the depth of humiliation spoken of in the Letter to the Philippians); but from these amazing depths, from this total impoverishment of the Son of God, is born the possibility for man to be saved, i.e. to be admitted to communion with God, enriched by the same divinity. In the light of this mystery we can see that poverty embraced in Jesus' company is not only the stripping of one's posses-

<sup>2</sup> PC 13

sions but is an enrichment by the saving power of Christ; for us Salesians it becomes the ability, through the total spending of ourselves, to enrich the young with the abundant life that Christ has brought.

The motive of the "sequela Christi" as the foundation of evangelical poverty is further endorsed by the simple expression used by Don Bosco in his Introduction to the Constitutions: we choose to follow the "*Saviour who was born in poverty, lived deprived of all things and died stripped of his clothes on the cross*". The whole life of Christ and his saving mysteries, especially the mystery of the Cross, are present in the sign of being deprived of everything; the same choice is put to the disciple, that of renouncing everything. In the same Introduction to the Constitutions Don Bosco added another significant quotation: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14,33).

The evangelical picture of our choice of poverty, described in the Rule, harks back to Don Bosco's life. In particular we seem to hear the echo of the words said to John by Mamma Margaret, which became his lasting programme: "Follow your vocation without regard to anyone... God comes first. Don't worry about me. Remember this: I was born poor, I have lived poor, and I want to die poor".<sup>3</sup>

### **Imitating the Apostles who left everything for the service of the Gospel**

Concrete models of evangelical poverty for religious in the service of the Kingdom are the Apostles, who heard from the lips of Jesus himself the invitation to leave their possessions and their family itself so as to follow him in the mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4,19-20). The reference to the reply of the twelve who had "left everything" (cf. Mt 19,27) for Jesus, is all the more important for us, because it refers directly

<sup>3</sup> BM I, 221

to the apostolic mission and therefore to the role of voluntary poverty in an efficacious apostolate.

Starting from the witness given by the Apostles, the article emphasizes three attitudes common to all disciples who want to follow in the Master's footsteps, and live in the spirit of the beatitude of poverty that he proclaimed. Such attitudes have been incarnated with different nuances by the Saints; they also form part (as we shall see in the following article) of the spiritual experience of our Founder.

— There is first of all the attitude of *interior freedom as regards worldly goods*, characteristic of one who lives evangelical poverty. Far from despising God's gifts, the religious accepts the invitation of Jesus not to be anxious about earthly possessions (cf. Mt 6,25), and by detachment from them to testify among men to the pre-eminence of the Kingdom of God: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6,33).

— This attitude of freedom and detachment is founded entirely on *trust in the Father's Providence*: religious poverty is an explicit act of faith and a living proclamation that God is our highest and only Good, the Creator and Father who loves us with an infinite love, our greatest Treasure. In the awareness of his condition of innate poverty and hence of his total dependence on God, the poor man entrusts himself completely to love, and in this way evangelical poverty becomes an expression of love. It is worth recalling how deeply rooted was this attitude in Don Bosco. With his active and enterprising holiness he had unlimited trust in Providence and invited his followers to do likewise, as he was convinced that "God's assistance will never be wanting, even by miracles".<sup>4</sup>

— The attitudes of detachment and trusting abandonment to the Father's Providence lead to that *total dedication to the service of the Gospel* which was central to the missionary life of Jesus and the Apostles,

<sup>4</sup> MB XV, 502

and which must be characteristic of us too. Following Jesus, who has shared the lot of the poor and preached to them the good news of freedom (cf. Lk 17-21), we learn to love and serve the poor and bring them the joyful message of God's love.<sup>5</sup>

Mary too is a model for us: as in her case, recognition of our poverty makes us able to give our full collaboration to the salvation plan and to be servants and instruments of Love.

These gospel attitudes, which are at the basis of our choice of evangelical poverty, will be taken up again and further developed in the following articles.

*Lord Jesus,  
from being rich you chose to make yourself poor  
to enrich us with your immense generosity.  
Intercede with the Father for us,  
who have followed you in the way of poverty,  
so that by living our choice with joy  
like your Apostles and our Founder,  
we may entrust ourselves in everything to your Providence,  
and so be free to dedicate ourselves entirely  
to the service of the Gospel.*

<sup>5</sup> On the poverty of Jesus, which we want to imitate, cf. SGC, 586-588

## ART. 73 POVERTY AND THE SALESIAN MISSION

Don Bosco lived his poverty in detachment of heart and generous service of others; his manner was marked by austerity, hard work and much initiative.

Following his example we too live detached from all earthly goods;<sup>1</sup> we participate with a spirit of enterprise in the mission of the Church and in her struggle for justice and peace, especially by educating those in need.

The witness of our poverty, lived in a common sharing of our goods, helps the young to overcome their selfish possessive instinct and opens them to the christian sense of sharing.

<sup>1</sup> cf. C 1875, IV, 7

After solidly basing our religious poverty on Jesus Christ and his Gospel, the Constitutions present the salesian with another source which provides inspiration for his life interwoven with the spirit of poverty. This source is the example and teaching of the Founder, whom God himself has raised up to personify and pass on to his sons an original method of following the poor Christ. The experience of Don Bosco, who accepted a really poor life for himself so as to commit himself completely to the service of the young, is part of the witness of the Church which, in fidelity to its Lord, proclaims the supreme value of the benefits acquired by the death and resurrection of Christ, and at the same time accompanies by its service the path of progress of the human community.

Art. 75 develops what was said briefly in the previous article; it gives a more complete description of the linkage between the life of evangelical poverty and the salesian's mission for the young carried out in the Church: the very title of the article ("poverty and the salesian mission") shows that this is the perspective.

To explain this linkage the text concentrates on "two forms of incarnation of poverty",<sup>1</sup> which were characteristic of Don Bosco and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 600

must distinguish the salesian: *the witness of a poor life and commitment to the service of fellow men*. The features of witness and service, which are here introduced, will be taken up and analysed more fully in the following articles of the Rule, where their various aspects will be developed.

### **Don Bosco: a witness of evangelical poverty for the service of poor youth**

Art. 73 looks at Don Bosco, the model of the salesian (cf. C 21), to reveal his way of living poverty. It highlights synthetically and precisely two attitudes which stand out in him: on the one hand he lived a truly poor life, detached from worldly goods and with great trust in Providence; and on the other he had a practical love of poor people, especially the young ones among them, spending his life in their service by uplifting them materially and morally.

In connection with the Founder's personal practice of poverty, the Rule describes it as a *witness of detachment* marked by "austerity". It is very true that from John's words to the heirs of Don Calosso: "I'd rather be poor ... I'd rather have heaven than all the riches and money in the world",<sup>2</sup> right down to what he said to Don Viglietti on his deathbed: "Please see what there is in the pockets of my clothes ... I want to die in such a way that it can be said: Don Bosco died without a cent in his pocket",<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco's life is marked by a real and tangible poverty that is a source of astonishment to anyone who looks at what he achieved with God's help and that of Mary. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "We find the expression of the characteristic traits of this poverty in an unshakeable trust in divine providence, in austere simplicity, exemplary temperance, and an almost sacred regard for thrift and economy which led him to look upon money as a gift and an instrument for doing good".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> BM I, 162

<sup>3</sup> MB XVIII, 493

<sup>4</sup> SGC, 596

Don Bosco's life style (and he has passed it on to the Congregation as an instrument of the wonders God works for the young) is well summed up in the motto: "*Work and temperance*". With his long experience behind him, Don Bosco could rightly assure the Congregation of a happy future tied to the practice of poverty: "Love poverty... Divine Providence has prepared a happy future for our Congregation... When the desire for ease and comfort grows up among us, our Society will have run its course".<sup>5</sup> "As long as we are poor", he would say, "Providence will never fail us".<sup>6</sup>

But Don Bosco's witness of a poor life is strictly connected with his exceptional *commitment to service for the young*; the Constitutions describe this as being carried out "with hard work and much initiative". Reading the life of the Saint, one has no difficulty in detecting his wealth of initiative in undertaking the most varied and impressive works for youth. Man of God that he was and detached from money, Don Bosco was nevertheless an industrious worker for the Kingdom who knew how to obtain and use worldly goods for the service of his poor boys. But above all he was able to put himself at their service, with his talents and energy, his time and even his very health. Even in this context we can understand his reply to those who wanted him to let up a bit: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".<sup>7</sup>

### **The salesian: a poor person who shares in the Church's mission of witness and service**

The Founder's example becomes a rule of life for each of his sons: like Don Bosco every salesian is called to live detached from worldly goods so as to be more available for the service of the young and the poor. The Constitutions have their starting point in the Rule written

<sup>5</sup> MB XVII, 271-272

<sup>6</sup> BM V, 443; cf. BM XII, 60

<sup>7</sup> MB XVIII, 258; cf. C 1



by the Founder himself, which said: "Let each one keep his heart detached from every earthly thing";<sup>8</sup> but starting from this kind of spiritual attitude, the text goes on to show that the salesian style of a poor life accords with the Church's mission and permits our natural insertion in it to make our contribution.

In the Church's mission, in fact, we find the two aspects of witness and service already referred to. On the one hand the Church is in the world, but not of the world: she proclaims the superiority of the resurrection and the future life, and works to prevent worldly values being given absolute significance. In "*Gaudium et spes*" we read: "Let christians preserve a proper sense of values in their earthly activity, in loyalty to Christ and his Gospel, in order that their lives, individual as well as social, may be inspired by the spirit of the beatitudes, and in particular by the spirit of poverty".<sup>9</sup>

But on the other hand the Church is in the world and solid with it. As the messenger of Him who came to save the whole of man and animated by his love, she shares in the efforts of men of good will for the development and progress of justice and peace: the joyful proclamation of Christ the Saviour is closely tied in with the commitment to bring about a humanity that is more fraternal and consequently better conformed to God's plan.<sup>10</sup>

We Salesians, while testifying to the values of the resurrection by our spirit of detachment *play our part decisively and "with a spirit of enterprise" in this ecclesial mission, especially through our competence*

<sup>8</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, IV, 7 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 105)

<sup>9</sup> GS 72

<sup>10</sup> In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* we read the following enlightening expressions on the connection between announcing the Gospel and human advancement: "There are close links between evangelization and human advancement, i.e. development and liberation. There is a connection in the anthropological order because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but a person subject to social and economic factors. There is also a connection in the theological sphere because the plan of creation cannot be isolated from the plan of redemption which extends to the very practical question of eradicating injustice and establishing justice. There is, finally, a connection in the evangelical order, i.e. the order of charity: for how can the new law be proclaimed unless it promotes a true practical advancement of man in a spirit of justice and peace?" (EN 31)

as educators of the young most in need. This highlights what we may call the "social dimension" of our poverty, which is directly linked with the service of the mission described in chap. IV of the Constitutions (cf. in particular C 26-30 and 31-33). Being made poor with Christ in his Church, we want to enrich our fellow men with the gift we ourselves have received: the inexhaustible and saving love of Christ himself.

### **The witness value of evangelical poverty in the work of education**

The final paragraph continues the study of the connection between the spirit of poverty and the salesian mission, and goes further into the special relationship that exists between our condition of poor people according to the Gospel and our task as educators. The perspective is that already referred to in art. 62 which spoke of young people of our time tempted by the "idolatry of possessions": they are living in a world which extols "having" much more than "being", the body at the expense of the spirit, material goods to the exclusion of anything spiritual.

Our Rule, based on the Word of God, gives prominence to the fact that the witness of poverty in the spirit of the beatitudes is very efficacious and can help the young to mature in the understanding of life's values: it can help them to perceive the genuine sense of worldly possessions as means for personal growth, and by leading them to "overcome their selfish possessive instinct" can bring them to appreciate the fraternal destiny of such goods for the building of a community founded on justice and love. We have the great responsibility of educating youngsters, by our example, to free themselves from slavery to material things, to recognize the value of spiritual goods and the pre-eminence of "being" over "having", and to form themselves to the ability to share. The expression "christian sense of sharing", used in the article, takes its inspiration from Christ's word reported in the Acts of the Apostles: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20,35)

*Lord, our God, we thank you  
for giving us in Don Bosco  
a model of evangelical poverty,  
detached from worldly goods,  
and generous and rich in initiative  
in the service of the young and the poor.*

*Grant that we may imitate him  
in detachment of heart and commitment of service,  
so that we may share in your Church's mission  
for the building of a world of justice and peace.*

*Sustain us by your grace so that,  
by the example of a poor life lived in communion,  
we may educate youth  
to the true christian sense of possessions.*

## ART. 74 REQUIREMENTS OF THE VOW OF POVERTY

By the vow of poverty we undertake not to use and not to dispose of material goods without the consent of the lawful superior.

Each confrere retains the ownership of his patrimony and the right to acquire other goods, but before his profession he freely disposes of their use and enjoyment and cedes their administration to others.

Before perpetual profession he draws up his will in conformity with the norms of civil law. After serious reflection, as an expression of his complete abandonment to divine Providence, he may also renounce definitively the goods of which he has retained the ownership in accordance with universal law and that of the Society.

After setting out the evangelical and salesian motives for our poverty, the Rule goes on to deal with its practical realization, beginning with the personal obligations that each one freely assumes when he makes the vow before God and the Church.

Art. 74 presents some concrete norms stemming from the radical demands of the Gospel, to which the Lord has invited us to respond with generosity: "Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19,21).

### **We undertake not to use or dispose of material goods autonomously**

The first paragraph encapsulates in a short formula the matter of our vow of poverty. The formulation is clearly inspired by the Code of Canon Law, which says: "The evangelical counsel of poverty ... involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute's own law".<sup>1</sup> For us Salesians such a norm is part of our tradition and goes back as far as the text

<sup>1</sup> CIC, can. 600

written by the Founder. We read, in fact, in chap. IV of the Constitutions of 1875: "The vow of poverty, of which we are speaking here, relates only to the administration of property, be this what it may, and not to its possession. Those, therefore, who have made the vows in this Society, will retain the ownership of their goods, but the administration and the distribution and use of their products are wholly and entirely forbidden them".<sup>2</sup>

Two observations can be made on the way in which the text sets out the matter of the vow:

a) "*We undertake...*": the use of the active form of the verb is meant to indicate the voluntary assumption of the limitations imposed by evangelical poverty, as a personal sacrifice offered to God. We oblige ourselves to practise the vow of poverty only because with full freedom we joyfully want to do so (cf. also C 72).

b) "*...not to use and not to dispose of material goods without the consent of the lawful superior*": the formula evokes, as was said earlier, the radical nature of the words of the Gospel. If, in fact, we use or dispose of some material possession, it is with the consent of the superior and, as will be said more precisely in the following article, within the ambit of community life and for the fulfilment of the mission. We accept the mediation of another person (the superior) to express our complete dependence on God, whom we proclaim in an explicit and practical manner to be the absolute Lord and provident Father in every aspect of our lives. The problem lies, as we shall see in art. 75, in not giving way to the temptation to manipulate this mediation to elude God.

## The administration and use of goods

The article's second paragraph completes the description of the requirements of the vow of poverty by specifying some canonical points.

<sup>2</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, IV, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 101)

Following a custom established in religious institutes during the nineteenth century, and adopted by our Founder (cf. the article in the Constitutions of 1875 already quoted) the Rule states that the vow of poverty does not prohibit the ownership, before civil law and society, of the property belonging to our patrimony<sup>3</sup>, and the ability to acquire other goods; it does indicate, however, the conditions to which the religious must submit so as to ensure a real renunciation of the administration and use of the goods themselves. A distinction is introduced between the radical possession of goods (the ability to acquire and possess a patrimony), and their use and disposal: the vow refers specifically and directly to this second aspect.

The canonical prescriptions indicated in this article of the Constitutions (and in particular the obligation to cede the use and enjoyment, as well as arranging for the administration of goods before profession together with the duty of making a will) are further specified by art. 51-52 of the General Regulations.

### We can renounce the ownership of our goods

The greatest innovation with respect to our traditions is found in the third paragraph which introduces the possibility, under certain conditions, of renouncing the radical ownership of our goods. The norm was suggested by Vatican II, which said in the decree "Perfectae caritatis": "Religious congregations may, in their constitutions, permit their members to renounce their inheritances, both those which have already

<sup>3</sup> The question of the vow of poverty of religious of "simple vows" with respect to their radical control over their goods had been raised from the eighteenth century. A solution had been found in 1839 in the "Apostolic Letters" by which the Holy See had approved the Rule of the Institute of Charity founded by Rosmini. The pontifical "*Declarationes*" of 1858, which followed the decree "*Super statum regularium*" of the previous year, practically made normative the principle that the vow of poverty did not take away the capacity for radical ownership of goods. Don Bosco, from the first draft of his Constitutions had included an article on these lines. But the formula he wanted to use: "Anyone entering the Congregation will not lose his civil rights..." (*Costituzioni 1858*, II, 2) was not approved by the Holy See, despite his appeal. On this point, cf. F. MOTTO, "*Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii, Fonti Letterarie*", in RSS 3, 1983, p. 367-369

been acquired and those which may be acquired in the future".<sup>4</sup> It is a case of a more radical response to Christ's invitation to leave everything, which the SGC thought well to accept and insert in our Rule of life.

The general statement is accompanied for us by three conditions which belong to our own particular law. In the first place the definitive renunciation of his possessions is an absolutely free choice and supposes in the professed member an inspiration of grace but also a "serious reflection" (on account of which art. 53 of the Regulations will specify that it can be done only after at least ten years of perpetual profession). Secondly, on the part of the Society it requires the consent of the Rector Major (cf. R 53). But especially its meaning must be clear: it is done in a spirit of evangelical detachment, so as to better express dependence on God and complete abandonment to his fatherhood. It is a kind of stripping of oneself, which would have no sense outside a poverty already deeply lived in all its aspects.

*Father, pour out in us your Spirit  
and give us a heart  
generous in detachment and burning with love,  
so that our practice of poverty  
may never be a mere external observance,  
but in seeking you, the one true Good,  
may become a trusting abandonment to your Fatherhood,  
and free us from all created bonds  
in the service of our fellow men.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> PC 13

## ART. 75 PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO POVERTY

Each one of us bears prime responsibility for his own poverty, daily living out by the frugality of his life the detachment he has promised.

He accepts his dependence on the superior and community in the use of temporal goods, but he knows too that permission does not dispense him from being poor in spirit and in fact.<sup>1</sup>

He is careful not to give way gradually to a desire for a comfortable and easy life, which poses a direct threat to fidelity and to apostolic generosity.

When his state of poverty causes him some inconvenience or suffering,<sup>2</sup> he is glad to be able to share in the blessings promised by the Lord to the poor in spirit.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 13

<sup>2</sup> cf. C 1875 (Introduction), p. xxvi

<sup>3</sup> cf. Mt 5,3

This article goes more deeply into the content of the preceding one and completes it: the canonical specifications concerning the vow must, in fact, be seen in the wider context of the virtue and spirit of evangelical poverty.

The four brief paragraphs indicate four elements in the approach of one who has resolved to follow Christ by sharing his poverty. We shall study them in two groups.

### Personal assumption of poverty

The first two paragraphs emphasize the *personal responsibility* involved in the assuming and effective living of a poor life. Evangelical poverty, as was said in art. 72, is a process of progressive assimilation to Christ who chose poverty and accepted its extreme consequences ("He abased himself, taking the condition of a slave"). This cannot be done by simply making the vow; what is necessary is the daily concrete



acceptance of its consequences, or (as Don Bosco called them) "the companions" of poverty.<sup>1</sup>

When he makes his profession in the Congregation, the salesian (and, for that matter, every religious) enters a structure which guarantees him food, lodging, clothing and a certain economic security. He runs the risk of living poverty in a manner which is almost automatic, trusting implicitly in the security of the institution. Without prejudice to the common life as a fundamental means of living the state of poverty (which will be dealt with in the following articles), the salesian is reminded that poverty (as indeed all the other virtues) will not be genuine unless he personally makes it his own. The conditions of life offered him by his house are often demanding and stimulating, but unfortunately we know that at times they may not prevent a drift towards a comfortable and easy life. In any case the salesian is called to think personally of his poverty in the light of the poor Christ, and check that he is really "*daily living out the detachment he has promised*", amid the circumstances, urgent needs and appeals, with which he may be challenged by times and places for a fuller and more generous self-donation. Evangelical poverty is not just a habit but a living love incarnate in each one's existence.

Explicitly recalled is the fundamental attitude which Don Bosco pointed out in his text of the Constitutions: "The observance of the vow of poverty in our Congregation consists essentially in detachment from all worldly goods".<sup>2</sup>

Following the same line of thought the Constitutions put the salesian on guard against a legalistic approach to "permissions". Art. 74 said that with the consent of the superior he can "use" and "dispose" of certain goods, and that he can buy, sell and administer. Art. 75 emphasizes a further important element, when it says that he accepts dependence not only on the superior but also on the community; living as in a family he is subject to communal norms, and willingly com-

<sup>1</sup> In the *Introduction to the Constitutions*, Don Bosco quotes St Bernard: "There are some who glory in being called poor, but who will not bear the consequences of poverty" (Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 232)

<sup>2</sup> *Costituzioni* 1867, V, 1: cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, IV, 7 (cf. F. MOTTO, 100 and 105).

pares his life style with that of the community. This double dependence in the use of goods, on the superior and on the community (even though it be in different ways), is part of our family tradition, but also points to the "character of dependence which is inherent in every form of poverty".<sup>3</sup>

But the Rule goes further than this and says that such material dependence is not enough. Vatican II, quoted in this article, says the same thing, inviting us to be "*poor in fact and in spirit*".<sup>4</sup> Paul VI said on this topic: "Religious should be distinguished for their example of true evangelical poverty, and so they must love the poverty they have freely embraced. It is not sufficient that they depend on the superiors as regards the use of goods; they must also be content with the necessities of life and shun ease and comfort".<sup>5</sup>

Even though Don Bosco invites him to go to the superior with complete confidence in every need,<sup>6</sup> it is still true that the religious cannot leave to the superior the entire responsibility for a decision; he must himself make a judgement about the need and expediency of what he is asking for. Both trust and loyalty are needed for a poverty which is real and not just nominal! Our Founder tells us: "You cannot practise poverty unless you love it".<sup>7</sup>

### Courageous acceptance of the hardships of poverty

To profess a life of poverty according to the Gospel means to accept a hard life, in which renunciations and sacrifices will not be lack-

<sup>3</sup> ET 21

<sup>4</sup> PC 13

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *Address to Superiors General*, 23 May 1964, AAS 56 (1964), p. 567

<sup>6</sup> In the *Costituzioni 1875*, III, 3, we read: "Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing, or to refuse it; but on perceiving that such or such a thing is either harmful or needful to him, let him respectfully mention the fact to the superior who will then, with the greatest care, make the provision that his needs require". (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 97). In poverty, as in obedience, confidence in the superior was a characteristic of Don Bosco's house

<sup>7</sup> BM V, 422

ing: so it was for Jesus who "had nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9,58), and so it will often be in the life of his disciple.

On this point Don Bosco is clear and forceful (we might even say 'radical'), just as Jesus was. We need only recall the words he wrote in the Introduction to the Constitutions: "All that is beyond food and clothing is superfluous for us, and contrary to a religious vocation. It is true that at times we shall have to suffer some inconvenience on our journeys, in our work, in times of health and of sickness; we shall sometimes have food, clothing and other things not to our liking, but it is precisely then that we should bear in mind that we have made profession of poverty, and that if we wish to have its merit and reward, we ought to bear with its consequences".<sup>8</sup>

The article recalls the duty of *vigilance* in this connection. Our selfishness, always lying in wait to trap us, and the world in which we live, dominated by the desire for possessions (the "concupiscence of the eyes" of which St John speaks: 1 Jn 2,16), can cause us to lose sight of where our true treasure is, and without our noticing it gradually lead us in the direction of ease and comfort. In addition to the motive of fidelity to the promise made to God, the text gives prominence to a reason which concerns us directly as religious and apostles: giving way before the demands of poverty is "a direct threat to fidelity and to apostolic generosity". Can a salesian, in fact, who seeks an easy life and becomes attached to material things, be still available for the young? How can he be "ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain" (cf. C 18) for them? How will his life bear witness to "seeking first the Kingdom of God and his justice"?

Here we take up again a topic that was touched on earlier. Art. 18 spoke of renunciations connected with apostolic life as a characteristic of the salesian spirit: "the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will bring about the Congregation's death"; and art. 61 describes the link between life according to the counsels and the apostolic mission in these words: "the obedient, poor and chaste salesian is quick to love and serve those to whom the Lord sends him, especially poor youth".

<sup>8</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*: cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 232

The article ends by indicating another element which should distinguish the attitude of the salesian in his life of poverty, even at times when this is the cause of "some inconvenience or suffering"; it is the *joy* experienced by one who has chosen to be the friend of Jesus and the servant of his Gospel: one who accepts poverty as a state on which God looks with predilection. Once again the text returns to Don Bosco's clear words in the Introduction to the Constitutions: "Should our state of poverty however cause us any inconvenience or suffering, let us rejoice with St Paul, who declares that he is overjoyed with all his affliction. Or again let us do as did the apostles, who were filled with happiness when they returned from the Sanhedrin, because they had been counted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. It is precisely to this sort of poverty that heaven is not only promised but assured by our divine Redeemer when he said: '*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*'".<sup>9</sup> This is a fine reminder from Don Bosco of the beatitude of poverty, which the Congregation has made its own; here lies the explanation of the joy shown by Don Bosco in privations and sufferings, and this too must be the perennial source of joy for every true salesian.<sup>10</sup>

*Let us pray with confidence to God our Father,  
for love of whom we have professed holy poverty,  
and ask him to help us to practise our vow  
with spiritual adherence*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Don Bosco's biographer speaks of the faith of our Founder in difficulties and trials, and adds: "From this trust he drew his unshakeable serene confidence in the future as well as his heroic love of voluntary poverty and the joy he felt in lacking even essentials" (BM V, 442; cf. also BM V, 444). Fr Caviglia, after noting that many of Don Bosco's talks to the confreres dealt with work, temperance and poverty, adds: "an austerity of life therefore that would seem opposed to joy?" He answers the question with an explanation of the saying "servire Domino in laetitia", which is not opposed to a life of sacrifice: in Don Bosco's house nothing is done by force, but everything spontaneously and willingly through love ('loving kindness'); nothing is suffered as an authoritarian imposition, but everything is done through conscientious conviction ('reason' and 'religion'). cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco - Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934, 2 edtn., p. 93

*to all that its observance demands of us  
as religious and Salesians.*

*That each one of us may feel a personal responsibility  
in the practice of poverty,  
by the generous daily living  
of detachment from all material things  
in a truly poor manner of life,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the strength of the love of God and our neighbour  
may enable us to see in our loyal dependence  
on our superior and community  
the expression and means for the integral living  
of our filial dependence  
on God, our one and only Good,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to accept together with poverty  
the renunciations and sacrifice it imposes on us,  
and thus adhere to the beatitude  
of being poor for the Kingdom of God,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## ART. 76 CHRISTIAN SHARING OF GOODS

After the example of the first christians, we share together our material goods,<sup>1</sup> the fruits of our work, the gifts we receive and whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies. We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience.

In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all.

As brothers we share what we have with the other communities of the province, and we show solidarity with the needs of the entire Congregation, of the Church and of the world.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Acts 4,32

With this article the Constitutions pass on to describe the community aspect of poverty, i.e. of poverty understood is its dimension as a way to fraternal communion.

This is an aspect to which Don Bosco was very sensitive. In the first drafts of the Constitutions he had headed the chapter on poverty with this definition: "Observance of the vow of poverty in our Congregation consists essentially in detachment from every earthly thing, which we practise by common life as regards food and clothing, and by keeping nothing for our own use without the permission of the superior".<sup>1</sup> In the text of 1875, approved by the Apostolic See, this article was moved to the end of the chapter to meet canonical requirements, but it remained one of the characteristics of salesian poverty. We embrace personal poverty to imitate Jesus Christ in his fruitful poverty, but also to form a community and have greater love for our brothers. This is also the thought of our Patron, St Francis de Sales: "To be poor means living in community".<sup>2</sup>

Art. 76 substantially develops two lines of thought, which we shall con-

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni 1864*, VI, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 100)

<sup>2</sup> *Oeuvres de St. Francois de Sales*, Ed. Anney, vol IX, p. 229; cf. also SGC, 606

sider in sequence: communion of goods within the community, and fraternal sharing beyond it.

### Sharing of goods within the community

The first two paragraphs refer directly to sharing of goods within the local community, without excluding the application of the principles involved to the provincial and world communities.

Our considerations are based on the situation of the first christian community born of the Lord's Passover. In the chapter on the fraternal and apostolic community was quoted the summary from the Acts of the Apostles, which described the community of the disciples using an expression dear to Don Bosco: "they formed one heart and one soul" (cf. C 50). In the present context we recall one of the concrete manifestations of this "cor unum et anima una", which the Acts describe in these words: "No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4,32). The sharing of possessions became a sign and means for the realization of a community of love after the example of Jesus.

In this way prominence is given to the evangelical basis for brotherly sharing, showing that it is an aspect of a deeper communion of persons. Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio", expresses this thought well, referring back to the christian tradition: "According to the expression in the Didache, 'If you share eternal goods, with all the more reason should you share the goods that perish'. Poverty really lived by pooling goods, including pay, will testify to the spiritual communion uniting you".<sup>3</sup>

On the basis therefore of the example of the first christians, the Constitutions assert that we too "*share together our material goods*", and because the reference is to a real sharing, the text goes on to enumerate some of these goods which we bring to the community:

<sup>3</sup> ET 21

"the fruits of our work", obviously without making comparisons between the income from different activities (the hardest work does not necessarily bring in the greatest returns!); "the gifts we receive", which we feel were given to us for the good and enjoyment also of our brothers; "whatever comes to us from pensions, subsidies and insurance policies", which are a contribution for the life of our family.

## The good of each becomes the good of all

But the sharing of goods extends beyond and above the ownership of purely temporal goods. Art. 16, speaking of family spirit, said: "In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced". And art. 51 on "relationships of fraternal friendship" specified that "we share our joys and sorrows and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences". It is in this wide perspective of exchange and sharing at a deeper level that the present article adds: "*We do the same with our talents, our energies and our experience*". The GC21 comments on this attitude with the happy expression: "Poverty means sharing all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do".<sup>4</sup> The sharing of goods becomes an expression of a shared existence.

The Rule therefore, following the spirit of the Gospel, leads us from the sharing of material possessions to the shared participation in deeper personal goods, and hence to the height of charity: as we said earlier, evangelical poverty becomes the *road to love*.

This is what is meant by the short but dense phrase of the second paragraph: "*In the community the good of each individual becomes the good of all*".<sup>5</sup> One may also read into this a human motivation of poverty as communion: it is a mutual enrichment; each one contributes his goods, his personal resources and his work, making them

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 40

<sup>5</sup> The phrase is inspired by an expression of Don Bosco: "*Let the good of one be the good of all*" (cf. MB XII, 630)



serve the community and thus enriching it; and on the other hand each one receives from the community according to his needs and is enriched by it.

But it is above all in the light of the Paschal mystery that "the good of each individual becomes the good of all", because each one, in the awareness that he has been redeemed by Christ and is a member of God's family, is able to communicate fully with his brothers the riches he has himself received.

In our salesian tradition a poverty lived in this way is described as a *poverty lived "in a family spirit"* or, as the SGC summed it up, a "poverty of the family".<sup>6</sup> In it the common life with its austerities (in the demanding sense of Don Bosco) flourishes in brotherhood lived in joy for the service of the young. It is fostered by the fatherliness of the superior who is attentive to the needs of each one, and the full confidence of the confrere who is not afraid to make known his needs.

Fr Caviglia has a significant passage about the joyful austerity in Don Bosco's house: "austerity is found in the daily usage, in the willingness for sacrifice and detachment, not in the tenor of life; everyone works, is tolerant, and feels the pinch of poverty quite happily, because the heart enters into everything, and the soul is so tempered to high ideals, so disposed to the renunciation of what is not necessary, that it allows of the greatest ease and nonchalance in spirit and action".<sup>7</sup>

### **Fraternal solidarity with other communities**

A feature of the family spirit passed on to us by Don Bosco is the sharing of goods, not only in the local community but in the provincial community and in the entire Congregation. This is what is referred to in the third paragraph of the article, which is a clear reminder of something said by the Council: "Provinces and houses of the different institutes should share their poverty with one another, those who

<sup>6</sup> SGC, 606

<sup>7</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco - Profilo storico*, SEI Turin 1934 (2 edtn), p. 93

have more helping those who are in need".<sup>8</sup> But the expression in the text would seem to be of still wider application: "*As brothers we share what we have with the other communities of the province, and we show solidarity with the needs of the entire Congregation*"; this is a sharing which involves not only material goods (referred to explicitly in art. 197 of the General Regulations), but also spiritual goods and the apostolic capabilities of each member. We must not forget Don Bosco's insistence on the fact that the Congregation forms a single body, a single family around the Rector Major, who is its father and guide: art. 59 had already anticipated the idea.

It should be noted however that art. 76 gives particular prominence to communion within the province. Referring back to art. 58 it emphasizes how the communal aspect of our poverty is important for the fostering of a true provincial community.

In conclusion the article hints at solidarity on a wider level still: "*with the needs of the Church and of the world*". Here too we are sent back to the directives of Vatican II. The decree "*Perfectae caritatis*" says, in fact: "The institutes themselves ... should willingly contribute part of what they possess for the other needs of the Church and for the support of the poor".<sup>9</sup> Although the direct reference of the Council text is to witness and service for the very poor, the Constitutions have inserted this appeal in the context of brotherly sharing, both as a reminder that we form part of a bigger family, and to emphasize an important objective for the putting of our goods in common. It was of this that Paul VI reminded religious superiors: "With the temporal goods divine Providence has bestowed on you, meet the requirements of your brothers in need, both those close to you and those scattered in other parts of the world".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> PC 13

<sup>9</sup> PC 13

<sup>10</sup> PAUL VI, *Address to superiors general*, 23 May 1964

To sum up, the article makes us feel very clearly that the goods we may have are not to be kept in storage nor as a guarantee of economic security; they are at the disposal of our brothers, because our poverty is at the service of charity; all we have is for the service of poor youth (cf. C 73, 79).

*God our Father,  
grant that we your servants  
may be able to share with generosity  
in our communities,  
with the Church,  
and with the poorest of our brothers,  
the gifts of nature and of grace  
and all the spiritual and material goods  
that your Providence offers us.*

*May our practice of evangelical poverty  
be an efficacious means  
for making us a true family,  
and for being in the world a sign  
foreshadowing the coming of your Kingdom.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 77 WITNESS OF POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN OUR WORKS

Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood and bears witness to its poverty by a simple and frugal way of life in unpretentious dwellings.

Following the example and spirit of our Founder we accept ownership of the means we need for our work, and we administer them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others.

Our choice of works and of their location is made in response to the needs of those in want; the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional.

This article continues the theme of communal poverty, developing in particular its witness value for youth and the world. As was said in the commentary on the preceding article the Council asks from religious "a *quasi-collective witness*" to poverty.<sup>1</sup> Such witness is important not only in itself but for the apostolic mission, since (according to what was said in art. 62) it is our life rather than our words which makes the announcement of the Gospel convincing. Addressing religious, Paul VI told them that this is a task specifically theirs: "At a time when there is an increased danger for many of being enticed by the alluring security of possessions, knowledge and power, the call of God places you at the pinnacle of the christian conscience. You are to remind men that their true and complete progress consists in responding to their calling to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men".<sup>2</sup> Our own SGC added that this witness to poverty is particularly meaningful when lived in community.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with the Council's doctrine and salesian tradition, art. 77 deals with three principal areas of the collective witness of poverty:

<sup>1</sup> PC 13

<sup>2</sup> ET 19

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 606

a simple and frugal way of life, the manner of using the means needed for apostolic work, and poverty in works and structures. We shall look at these points one by one.

### **Witness by a simple and frugal way of life**

In art. 76 it was said that a characteristic feature of the poverty of the sons of Don Bosco is that they live in perfect communion of material and spiritual goods. But it should be noted that although the individual religious by putting his own goods in common may realize an eminent form of personal detachment and generous self-giving, this may not be sufficient for a real collective witness of poverty. History shows unfortunately that there have been religious institutes in which the loyal detachment of the members led to an accumulation of goods which made rich the community itself. On the other hand Don Bosco himself warned his Congregation against the risk of seeking ease and comfort.<sup>4</sup>

In this light the first paragraph emphasizes that witness to the Kingdom of God and its transcendence is not only the duty of the individual. The profession of poverty calls in question the community as well, which must provide credible testimony precisely as a community, but at the same time it must not be forgotten that it is difficult for a religious to call himself poor if he is a member of a community that is rich!

How is this communal witness to be provided? "*By a simple and frugal way of life in unpretentious dwellings*", replies the Rule. The Acts of the SGC provide a very clear illustration of this obligation: "An austere style of common life: we must feel that we are closer to the poor by being frugal in food, by refusing all that is superfluous, and by aiming at functional simplicity in our buildings".<sup>5</sup> A little earlier

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MB XVII, 271-272

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 606

the same Chapter had spoken of a "way of life that is simple and austere, which rejects those comforts and conveniences that are commonly associated with the middle class".<sup>6</sup> These expressions recall what Don Bosco had written in his souvenir for the first missionaries: "Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food and abode, and you will be rich in the sight of God and will win the hearts of men".<sup>7</sup> And on another occasion he said: "My ideal was to found a Congregation which, at my death, would be a model of frugality".<sup>8</sup>

The text adds a nuance which is of practical importance: "Every community is sensitive to the conditions of its neighbourhood". The idea and phrasing come from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis",<sup>9</sup> already quoted in the preceding article. They are explained in the Acts of the SGC in the following terms: "We must bear in mind that the concrete picture of the social and economic poverty of the religious and consequently its value as a sign ... varies for different environments and countries, different cultures and civilizations as well as particular situations. This means that the exercise of poverty is subject to the principle of pluralism".<sup>10</sup> In practice, every community must find its own style of simplicity and austerity in line with its precise mission in a particular neighbourhood; but in every case the overriding norm is the same: to bring Christ to life and make him "visible" to those to whom we have been sent!

<sup>6</sup> SGC, 605

<sup>7</sup> *Souvenir for missionaries* (n. 12); cf. Appendix 1984 Constitutions, p. 266. Don Bosco reminds us: "To dwell willingly in a room which is uncomfortable or poorly furnished, to wear plain apparel, to eat coarse and common food, greatly honours him who has made the vow of poverty, because it makes him like Jesus Christ (*Introduction to the Constitutions*, Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 233)

<sup>8</sup> BM IV, 134

<sup>9</sup> PC 13

<sup>10</sup> SGC, 609

## Witness by the use of means necessary for the mission

The second paragraph of the article deals with a problem strictly tied in with the carrying out of our mission: that of the means needed for the community's work.<sup>11</sup>

The Society Don Bosco founded aims at the education and evangelization of youth, especially the poorest of them, and at the advancement of the working classes; these educational and promotional objectives require adequate means which are often quite expensive.

Don Bosco was not afraid of seeking and using the most suitable means for giving his youngsters, in addition to their daily food, the instruction they needed. It may seem strange, for instance, to find on the lips of Don Bosco, who had such a deep love for poverty, an expression like: "The Congregation will flourish as long as the salesians can appreciate the value of money".<sup>12</sup> Although he was so detached he did not revile money; he knew what toil it cost poor people to obtain it, and knew also that it was a means to help his boys and ensure them a less dismal future; it made their training possible. And so Don Bosco used money and every other means his ingenuity managed to obtain for the service of his boys. What he had to say about the use of means for education and advancement is well known; referring explicitly to the press he said: "In these things Don Bosco wants to be in the vanguard of progress".<sup>13</sup>

From this standpoint must be read the constitutional text: "Following the example and spirit of our Founder we accept ownership of the means we need for our work". We are aware that our mission needs means, and so we use them. But we must be guided always and solely by the spirit of disinterested and visible service: *"we administer them in such a way that all may realize they are being*

<sup>11</sup> The SGC expressed this problem in the form of a question: "How is it possible to reconcile a witness of poverty leading to total solidarity with the world of the poor with the functional and structural requirements of education? Is it possible to be poor in an institute which in some places takes on the appearance of grandiosity?" (SGC, 610)

<sup>12</sup> MB XVII, 486

<sup>13</sup> MB XVI, 323

*used for the service of others*". Our beneficiaries and those who observe us must be able to see quite clearly that our communal goods are effectively used for the purposes of the mission (evangelization, education and youth service), and that the Salesians live, individually and collectively, as the simple administrators of these goods.

## **Witness in works and structures**

What has been said about means necessary for the mission leads naturally to a discussion of the works and activities in which the mission is carried out. These too must be considered in the context of the witness of evangelical poverty, which is indispensable.

The general criterion which must guide the community in its choice of works and activities is similar to that stated with respect to instruments and means for apostolic work: they are first and foremost for the service of youth most in need, and therefore should be designed to meet those needs. A criterion of this kind has been already indicated by articles 7 and 41, in the context of the apostolic priorities of our mission. Art. 26 too, speaking of those to whom our work is primarily and principally directed, concluded with a clear choice of our field of work: "we work especially in areas of greatest poverty". All this is now taken up again indicating in fidelity to the service called for by the mission a way to provide a real witness of evangelical poverty.

Referring specifically to structures, the text adds to the general indication already stated a further detail: "the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional". Though it is necessary that the structures be functional in order to provide a truly efficacious service, the article points to the care necessary to avoid useless or excessive embellishments that would be a counter-testimony. Art. 59 of the Regulations states this aspect more clearly: "In every case whatever has the appearance of counter-witness to poverty should be avoided, remembering that effective service can often be rendered with very simple material structures and in works we do not own".

The depth of what is being said here should be noted. We are being asked to understand the real meaning of structures, which are



only a means of realizing our service to the young and testifying to the Gospel. Not only must we not ascribe to them an absolute value, but we must indeed be always willing to modify them so as to adapt them to the real needs of our beneficiaries. The ability to make use of simple structures and to adapt them easily to new situations is a sign of our full docility and trust in Him who sends us and whose alone is the saving work. The life of Don Bosco and the origins of our Society are a model we must never forget!

In this context too enters the invitation to a periodic verification ("*scrutinium paupertatis*") made by the General Regulations to local and provincial communities (cf. R 65).

*Lord, you want all our communities  
to be practical witnesses among youth  
of the beatitude of poverty.  
Help us to provide a credible sign  
by our plain and frugal life  
and the simplicity of our dwellings.*

*Lord, in your kindness  
and with the generous help of so many benefactors  
you have given us houses  
and the means needed for our work.  
Grant that we may always remember  
that we are only administrators of these your gifts,  
and use them as instruments for the service of youth.*

*Lord, the activities and works we undertake  
are signs of your love for us and for the young.  
Grant that we may not attach our heart to them,  
but see them always in their purpose  
of service to those for whom we work.*

## ART. 78 WORK

Unremitting and self-sacrificing work is a characteristic left us by Don Bosco, and is a concrete expression of our poverty.

In our daily labours we are at one with the poor who live by the sweat of their brow, and we bear witness to the human and christian value of work.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. ET 20

The last two articles of the section dwell on two characteristic features of the salesian manner of practising poverty: a life of work, and love of the poor. These are attitudes which refer to both witness and service, and equally concern both the individual and the community.

### Apostolic work an expression of our poverty

Art. 18 has already spoken of work in the life of the sons of Don Bosco as being one of the elements, which together with temperance, forms part of the salesian spirit: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish". Tireless work is an expression of pastoral charity, a fruit of the mystique of "da mihi animas, cetera tolle".

Art. 78 takes up the theme of work and presents it in its relationship with our poverty as religious and apostles: after following Jesus as agents of the Gospel, we imitate him in his tireless work for the Kingdom of God by dedicating ourselves with all our strength to the service of our fellow men.

To explain the connection between the work of the salesian and his choice of poverty, the article develops three main lines of thought: it recalls the example of Don Bosco the worker, declares that our work links us with our brothers who work for their livelihood, and speaks

of the efficacious witness we can give to men of the present day, and especially to the young.

To get an idea of the extent to which Don Bosco spent his life in work, one has only to read his biography: the pages of the Biographical Memoirs provide continuous testimony to the "unremitting and self-sacrificing" work (the two adjectives have been chosen deliberately), which the Saint carried out for poor boys. The words of Prof. Fissore of the University of Turin are well known: "He wore himself out through too much work! He did not die of illness, but rather as an oil-lamp which faded out through lack of fuel".<sup>1</sup> Fr Ceria, in turn, wrote: "It would be difficult to find another Saint who worked, and got others to work, to the extent that Don Bosco did".<sup>2</sup>

Don Bosco left his followers this style of work as a "*precious heritage*". In the Acts of the SGC we read: "Sensitive to the signs of his times which gave much credit to hard work, and urged on by interior zeal, Don Bosco wanted a Congregation that was established on tireless hard work".<sup>3</sup> He wanted his Salesians to be joyful, poor, frugal, but above all industrious: "Work, work, work!" he used to repeat, "That should be a priest's objective and glory. Never tire of working. How many souls would be saved!".<sup>4</sup> "My dear children," he said on another occasion, "I don't ask you to fast or scourge yourselves. I exhort you to work, work, work!".<sup>5</sup>

Apostolic work therefore (and not just any kind of work), is for us salesians a precious family heirloom; it forms part of our identity and is therefore a concrete way of following Christ, putting ourselves totally at the service of the mission he has entrusted to us. In this sense work becomes an *expression of poverty*, because it is the sign of the generous gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers.

<sup>1</sup> MB XVIII, 500

<sup>2</sup> E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, p. 262-263

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 597

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MB XVII, 383

<sup>5</sup> BM IV, 151

## Work done with love makes us one with the poor and becomes a testimony

To the salesian motivation another may be added of a sociological nature. Work, says the Rule, makes us one with so many of our fellow men who live by the sweat of their brow in daily toil and hope: rightly these are called poor before God. This motivation which sustains our commitment to humble work is drawn from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" which says: "Religious should, each in his own assigned task, *consider themselves bound by the common law of labour*".<sup>6</sup> Rightly can it be said that this is a concrete way of practising poverty according to the Gospel.

Finally there is a third motive which explains the salesian's daily dedication to work in joyful generosity even though it be tiring. The motive is expressed in the final phrase of the article and is taken from the text of the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio", addressed to religious of our time: "You will be able to understand the complaints of so many persons who are drawn into the implacable process of work for gain, of profit for enjoyment, and of consumption, which in its turn forces them to a labour which is sometimes inhuman. It will therefore be an essential aspect of your poverty to *bear witness to the human meaning of work* which is carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as the source of sustenance and of service".<sup>7</sup> Our work, carried out with love and for love, becomes a testimony for the men we meet. It is a question of an educative aspect of the life of poverty, which acquires a particular importance in our case as educators of the young; we have to be able to form the new generations to a true sense of work in the building of their own lives. Significant in this connection is Fr Caviglia's statement: "Don Bosco's greatest social merit lies in his discovery of how to educate to work by actually working".<sup>8</sup> It is a commitment for us too!

<sup>6</sup> PC 13

<sup>7</sup> ET 20

<sup>8</sup> A. CAVIGLIA, *Vita di San Domenico Savio*, SEI 1943, p. 75

*Lord Jesus,  
time is a great gift of your Love.  
Help us to use it always well,  
as agents of the Gospel,  
in unremitting and self-sacrificing work,  
following the example of Don Bosco  
the tireless apostle of the young.*

*In this way may we share the lot of the poor  
who gain their living by daily work,  
and bear witness for men of the present day  
and especially for our young people  
to the human and christian sense of work.*

*You live and reign for ever and ever.*

## ART. 79 SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

The spirit of poverty leads us to be one with the poor and to love them in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason we make every effort to stay close to them, to alleviate their needs, making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society.

In seeking and accepting help for the service of the needy, we imitate Don Bosco in his zeal and gratitude, and like him we retain the freedom the Gospel gives us. "Remember well", he tells us, "that what we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 13

<sup>2</sup> MB V, 682; BM V, 450

This article which concludes the description of our poverty at the school of the Gospel and following the example of Don Bosco is very significant and is linked, in a certain sense, with the evangelical source of the first article of this section. It presents another distinct feature of the salesian, who derives from the love of the poor Christ (cf. C 72) his love for the poor in whom Christ himself is manifested.

The text of the article evidently draws its inspiration from the experience and teaching of our Founder, but is based also on the whole of christian tradition which, ever since the first apostolic community (cf. Acts of the Apostles), has always held the poor in great honour as a sign of the presence of the Lord; such an obligation has been confirmed for religious by Vatican II and subsequent documents of the Magisterium.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. PC 13; ET 17 ff.; cf. also the document "*Religious and human promotion*" (CRIS, 1980)

## Being solid with the poor

Don Bosco's example, as was mentioned in art. 73, is evident from all his life and work. Born of a poor family and being poor through love, he not only esteemed his condition (he used to call himself "a humble peasant child"),<sup>2</sup> but showed a practical love of the poor. All his work was dedicated to the human and christian advancement of poor youth;<sup>3</sup> he was concerned too about the ordinary people (in the manuscript of the Constitutions of 1864 he spoke of the "lowest classes") who were in greatest need of help. The mind of Don Bosco concerning the poor can be understood from his expression: "Our Lord is present in the lowliest and most destitute beggar".<sup>4</sup> It is pleasant too to recall the advice he left his sons in his spiritual testament: "The world will always welcome us as long as all our concern is for the underdeveloped peoples, for poor children, for those members of society most in danger. *This is our real wealth which no one will envy and no one will take from us*".<sup>5</sup>

Faithful to Don Bosco the salesian, who has chosen to be poor with Christ, commits himself to the love and service of the poor. The Constitutions have already said as much in the chapter on the mission where is indicated the preferential option of the Society for "the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger" (cf. C 26) and its attention to "poor people in general" (cf. C 29). In art. 73 too, in the same context of poverty, was emphasized (as we have seen) our commitment to the service of those most in need, by which the salesian participates in the Church's mission. The present article now takes up the theme from the narrower aspect of the persons of the poor, and outlines an ensemble of basic attitudes which the salesian cultivates for them because of his vocation.

The article speaks of "*solidarity with the poor*" (which is in fact the title of the article). The GC19 had already outlined this important

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BM X, 141

<sup>3</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, I, 1. 3. 4 (cf. E. MOTTO, p. 73, 75)

<sup>4</sup> BM XIII, 84

<sup>5</sup> BM XVII, 272

task: "Today more than ever before Don Bosco and the Church send us by preference to the poor, ... to establish practical solidarity with them; only thus can we love them better, serve Christ better in them, and lead them more easily to the Saviour's riches".<sup>6</sup> The Constitutions make their own this appeal for solidarity with the poor. Now we know that to be solid with a person means to share his deep feelings, his interests and problems, and of course his life and destiny: something which is by no means easy; it needs constant commitment and proven virtue.

For this reason the Rule expressly indicates some manifestations of our solidarity with the poor, which we must make the effort to cultivate:

— *"to love them in Christ"*: it is love that makes solidarity possible, and solidarity finds its natural expression in love: Jesus Christ is solid with us because he has loved us and his solidarity has saved us! In this connection the text quotes explicitly from the decree *"Perfectae caritatis"* (which says literally "loves them with the tenderness of Christ", or with the "deep yearning" of Christ), and is founded on the persuasion of faith which discerns in the needy brother the countenance of Christ himself: "I was hungry and you gave me food... As often as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me!" (Mt 25,35.40).

One who has made himself poor for love of the Lord is able to love him in the poor because he knows that it is in them that Christ most surely loves to dwell. This means, in St James' well known expression, being concrete in our love for our fellow men. (cf. Jas 2,15-16).

— *"to stay close to them"*: it is not only a question of the indispensable need to be close to them in thought and feeling, but also of a material closeness in the service we give them; as has already been said more than once, this is the priority in our mission which is indicated by the Rule.

<sup>6</sup> GC19, p. 81-82



— *"alleviate their needs"*: the expression comes from a moving part of the text of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "The Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering Founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ".<sup>7</sup> The love of one who has followed the poor Christ makes him quick to see the needs of the poor, lets him become involved in their difficulties, weep with them in their suffering, and share more easily in their vicissitudes. He is able to help his poor brothers by staying at their side. But above all he is able to say to them the Word of God's Love and bring them the good news of Jesus the Saviour: "Pauperes evangelizantur" (Lk 7,22).

— *"making our own their lawful aspirations for a more human society"*: here we return from a different point of view to what has been already said in art. 7 and 33: it is a question of sharing by feeling and action in the great task of the liberation of the poor. Fr Luigi Ricci, VI Successor of Don Bosco, writing in this connection, said that participation in the commitment to development "belongs to the essence of the Congregation".<sup>8</sup> Our Constitutions highlight this social implication of our work and witness.

### Seeking help for the poor in a spirit of gospel freedom

The third paragraph deals with a problem which is linked to some extent with what was referred to in art. 77: the seeking of help and means for sustaining our works and for coming to the aid of the poor.

Here too we have before our eyes the example of the Founder. With his unlimited trust in Providence ("As long as we entrust ourselves to Divine Providence, our Society will prosper", he used to say),<sup>9</sup> he never hesitated to make himself Providence's instrument, asking help

<sup>7</sup> IG 8

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ASC 261 (1970), p. 16-17

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM X, 77

for his work from anyone who could possibly provide it. He was convinced that "Divine Providence wants to be assisted by the greatest efforts on our own part".<sup>10</sup> How much it cost him in humiliations and fatigue (think for example of his tiring journeys to France and Spain) to beg for his poor boys!<sup>11</sup>

Don Bosco never spoke badly of the rich, taken as a group; he certainly had some strong things to say about the rich who lived selfish lives, attached to their own possessions and often at the expense of the poor; but he had words of sincere gratitude for those who were generous in helping the needy: if we glance through his Collected Letters we shall be struck by the frequent delicate expressions of gratitude of our Father to so many benefactors of every social class!

The Constitutions tell us that "we imitate Don Bosco in his zeal and gratitude". We too therefore do right to have recourse to the help of benefactors so as to meet the needs of poor youngsters. We feel that our friends and benefactors (who are frequently not among the prominent people of this world, but people of modest means) are sharers in a movement of love, and we are therefore sincerely grateful to them in the Lord's name.

But the text of the Rule very properly points out that though we ask help from everyone, we remain "evangelically free", i.e. we remain servants of the Gospel, friends of the poor, "free" before those who might try to use us as a means of covering up their injustices by the donations they make to us.

## Conclusion

To conclude the article and the whole section on poverty, the text recalls a very expressive phrase of Don Bosco: "*Remember well that what we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well*".<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> BM XI, 43

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BM II, 201-202

<sup>12</sup> BM V, 450

Here we have a synthesis of all that we have said about our poverty lived as a witness and service. We have renounced everything in imitation of Jesus and to serve our fellow men. Because of this everything we have (the goods of our community) is a gift of God, given to us to be put at the disposal of our needy brothers. We are called to testify to detachment, but also to oblige ourselves to "make good use" of what Providence sends us for the most needy. In this we are stimulated by the moving appeal which Paul VI made to all religious: "You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, 'the cry of the poor'. Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going as far as to identify himself with them?".<sup>13</sup>

*God, our Father,  
you have asked us to make ourselves solid with the poor,  
and have opened to us the royal way  
of the imitation of Christ.  
Enliven our practice of poverty by the conviction  
that what we have is not our own  
but belongs to the poor,  
and help us to be among them  
a sign of your loving Providence.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>13</sup> ET 17

## OUR CHASTITY

*"I am sure that neither death nor life... nor things present, nor things to come,... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8,38-39).*

In line with the conciliar guidelines expressly quoted (C 80), chastity understood in the sense of the Gospel is dealt with from a decidedly christological standpoint. Chastity in its positive sense is that aspect of the one following of Christ which concerns religion of the heart (C 80). This fundamental perspective, to which Don Bosco added human concreteness and practical wisdom (C 81), properly finds in the text of Rom 8,38-39 one of the loftiest inspirations in the whole of the New Testament.

Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans represents a kind of "Te Deum" to the history of salvation. After overcoming the tragic weight of sin, often expressed in unbridled abandonment to selfish lust (Rom 1-3), man is "set free in Christ" from original sin (chap. 5), from personal sin (chap. 6), and from the impossibility of observing the law (chap. 7). He finds himself immersed in a closely woven story of love and service: with the Spirit of Jesus in the first place, and hence with God as Father and therefore in an inseparable brotherhood with the Risen Christ (8,1-18); he finds himself linked with all creation in being called to manifest the glory of the sons of God (8,19-25). In short, he finds himself immersed in God's eternal and inviolable plan of salvation (8,28-30).

"With God on our side, who can be against us?" (8,31). Here Paul starts on a series of leading questions, the replies to which overcome all fear. No creature can "separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ": a love which is monolithic, the love which in the first place God has for Paul, but which Paul also has for God. This does not mean that creatures are extinguished, or that the human capacity for loving is diminished. Chastity is not solitude, and still less is it hatred or aggression, but it is able to love while being still centred on Love itself with the joy and freedom, and hence with the attention, generosity, tenderness and delicacy characteristic of the love of the human heart of Christ "our Lord".

The holy memory of Don Bosco, chaste and smiling, capable of real sacrifices but at the same time of spreading joy in the hearts of his boys, becomes for us a happy witness to chastity lived in the spirit of the Gospel.

## ART. 80 GOSPEL SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR CHASTITY

Consecrated chastity because of the Kingdom is a "precious gift given to some by the Father".<sup>1</sup> Responding in faith we accept it with gratitude and we pledge ourselves by vow to live perfect continence in celibacy.<sup>2</sup>

We follow Jesus Christ closely by choosing an intensely evangelical way of loving God and our neighbour with undivided heart.<sup>3</sup>

Thus with a specific vocation we take our place in the mystery of the Church, which is totally united to Christ, and sharing in its fruitfulness we dedicate ourselves to our mission.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LG 42

<sup>2</sup> cf. CIC, can. 599

<sup>3</sup> cf. LG 42

<sup>4</sup> cf. ET 13-14; RD 11

This article, which opens the section on consecrated chastity, contains a great deal of doctrine. It presents the principal aspects of the "mystery" of celibacy for the Kingdom, together with the obligations before God that we take on by the vow. It is a presentation which from the outset highlights in its most positive form this aspect of the following of Christ. Although it is true that chastity implies certain renunciations (in the past it may be that too much emphasis was laid on this aspect, but it would be naive at the present day to ignore it altogether), it is first and foremost a positive reality within which renunciation is lived as an inseparable consequence of a greater gift. Chastity is "*a deeply evangelical way of loving*", i.e. it places the religious in a deep and vital relationship of love with God and with his fellow men.<sup>1</sup> The background in which the way of evangelical celibacy finds a place is solely that of Love: chastity is accepted not to renounce love, but to love to a much greater extent.

It may be useful here to refer to a question of terminology which arose during the revision of the constitutional text.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 562

The matter of this vow covers both the renunciation of marriage to follow Christ and serve the Kingdom, and also the concrete practice of chastity which corresponds to consecrated celibacy. It is clear that both aspects must be kept in mind, but to give greater emphasis to the former some would prefer to use always the expression "consecrated celibacy" (or "celibacy for the Kingdom"). The SGC, and more recently the GC22, in harmony with the documents of the Magisterium,<sup>2</sup> decided to keep the general word "chastity", and expressed its content by different phrases: "consecrated chastity" (C 80, 83), "celibacy because of the Kingdom" (C 83), "perfect continence in celibacy" (C 80), "perfect continence" (C 82). It is clear that the vow and the virtue are dealt with together.

The three paragraphs of the article present successively three aspects of the mystery of consecrated chastity: the charismatic, christological and ecclesial aspects.

### Chastity, a gift of the Father

The text begins in the same way as the documents of Vatican II. It declares at once the *divine origin of religious chastity* and its absolute gratuity, and recognizes it as an outstanding gift: "a precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father", as the Constitution "Lumen gentium" puts it.<sup>3</sup> The decree "Perfectae caritatis" too speaks of it as "an exceptional gift of grace"<sup>4</sup>. The phrase "glorious gift" is found in the decree on the priesthood, and "precious gift" in that of the training of priests.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Council uses various terms when speaking of chastity: "*virginity*", "*perfect continence*" (LG 43), "*chaste self-dedication to God*" (LG 43), "*chastity for the sake of the Kingdom*" (PC 12), "*following the virginal Christ*"; cf. also PC 15 and OT 10. Can. 599 of the CIC expresses it as follows: "The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy"

<sup>3</sup> LG 42

<sup>4</sup> PC 12

<sup>5</sup> Cf. PO 16; OT 10

The Church's doctrine on the point is very clear: virginity is not a human attitude nor an ascetical practice that a man can take up on his own initiative; it is a vocation, a call that stems from the initiative of the Father, to whom man responds by divine grace.

This conviction of the whole of christian tradition<sup>6</sup> has its roots in the Gospel. The Council, in fact,<sup>7</sup> bases its statement on two scriptural references: Mt 19,11-12 and 1 Cor 7,7. Paul declares: "Each has his own special gift from God, one with a gift of one kind and another with a gift for the opposite. Consecrated chastity is one of the special gifts distributed freely by God to whom he thinks fit. The text from Matthew is quoted to emphasize that God's grace is needed to appreciate such a gift, to accept it and live it to the full. It is the confidential remark made by Jesus to his disciples: "Some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. Let him accept this teaching who can".

To God's initiative follows our response. The Rule emphasizes that it is a *response in faith* (only in faith, indeed, can it be understood), and a response full of gratitude: given with joy and thankfulness, it not only expresses our love but becomes also a credible witness for our fellow men.

In connection with the response, the text specifies the obligations we assume by vow before God, and makes use for the purpose of the formula of the Code of Canon Law: "it involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy".<sup>8</sup>

We may conclude this first reflection, offered by the Constitutions as a foundation for the salesian's life of chastity, with a final observation. Chastity is a result of a special grace and calling, and cannot be lived except in an atmosphere of grace and the enduring dialogue

<sup>6</sup> In "*Evangelica testificatio*" this permanent ecclesial tradition is stated: "For our part, we must be firmly and surely convinced that the value and the fruitfulness of chastity observed for love of God in religious celibacy find their ultimate basis in nothing other than the Word of God, the teachings of Christ, the life of his Virgin Mother, and also the apostolic tradition, as it has been unceasingly affirmed by the Church" (ET 15)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. IG 42

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 599

which gave rise to it. As will be said explicitly in art. 84 it remains humble and is fostered by faith and grace: "Lord, preserve me in your grace". The Council tells us: "Religious ... should believe our Lord's words and, relying on God's help, they should not presume on their own strength".<sup>9</sup>

### The consecrated chastity, chosen by Christ, which we follow

After presenting the charismatic dimension of chastity, the article goes on to speak of the christological dimension: "*We follow Jesus Christ closely*".

Here again the text is founded on the Gospel, where Jesus calls his disciples to "follow him", and on the conciliar doctrine which (as we saw already when considering art. 60) presents the three counsels as so many ways of "following Christ more closely", of "conforming more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also."<sup>10</sup> The Council presents celibacy for the Kingdom as a participation in a sacramental expression of the virginity of Christ and Mary, a real configuration to Christ in his earthly life and a manifestation of the glorious Christ, prefiguring the definitive condition of humanity in the heavenly Kingdom. In the Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelica testificatio*", Paul VI wrote: chastity "reaches, transforms and imbues with a mysterious likeness to Christ man's being in its most hidden depths".<sup>11</sup> To those who ask us why we have chosen to live in celibacy, we reply: because this is what Jesus did to fulfil his mission, and because he has called us to follow him!

The Rule tells us that in following Jesus on the way of chastity, we shall reach the fullness of love, i.e. we shall come to love God — and in him our fellow men — "with undivided heart". The expression, culled once again from "*Lumen gentium*", is linked with the

<sup>9</sup> PC 12

<sup>10</sup> IG 46; cf. also IG 42; PC 1, 5

<sup>11</sup> ET 13



pauline theme from the first letter to the Corinthians: the married man "is torn two ways", distracted by the many preoccupations of his life, says the Apostle, urging the christians to "give their undivided attention to the Lord" (1 Cor 7,34-35). It is true that every christian, in every situation, should love the Lord "with all his heart" (cf. Mt 22,37); but one who has chosen to "follow the virginal Christ" can offer him "more easily"<sup>12</sup> his whole heart, and give himself for the service of the Kingdom.

Consecrated virginity, overcoming the mediation of a creature which belongs to married love,<sup>13</sup> realizes an intimate and immediate union with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and proclaims his total dedication to the love of "God alone". From this love of God "above everything else" stems the love of our fellow men in God's light and hence our dedication to their service, as the Rule will later explain at greater length. The Council's words still resound: chastity "uniquely frees the heart of man, so that he becomes more fervent in love for God and for all men. For this reason ... it is a more effective means for religious of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate".<sup>14</sup>

### Through consecrated chastity we are deeply inserted in the mystery of the Church

The final paragraph expresses two consequences of the fullness of love lived through commitment to chastity: deep insertion in the Church's mystery, and availability for the mission as a participation in her fertility.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. LG 42. It may be noted that the Council text says precisely "*facilius indiviso corde*"; cf. also LG 46

<sup>13</sup> *Evangelica testificatio* says: "Without in any way undervaluing human love and marriage — is not the latter, according to faith, the image and sharing of the union of love joining Christ and the Church? — consecrated chastity evokes this union in a more immediate way and brings that surpassing excellence to which all human love should tend" (ET 13)

<sup>14</sup> PC 12

The text says: "*we take our place in the mystery of the Church, which is totally united to Christ*". In this brief phrase is condensed the doctrine of all christian tradition, which sees in consecrated virginity (in line with a specific charism) the summit of the relationship of love between the creature and his Lord, and therefore the loftiest sign of the union between Christ and his Spouse, the Church. This is affirmed in a fine passage from the Apostolic Exhortation "*Evangelica testificatio*": "Chastity is decisively positive, it witnesses to the preferential love for the Lord and symbolizes in the most eminent and absolute way the mystery of the union of the Mystical Body with its Head, the union of the Bride with her eternal Bridegroom".<sup>15</sup>

We know that the Apostle Paul sees in wedded love the sacrament of the mysterious union of Christ with his Church (cf. Eph 5,32); but he makes it clearly understood that the reality of human marriage is no more than a pale image of the intimate communion of life and love which Christ, by his Passover, has inaugurated with redeemed humanity. In matrimony the love of the Church for Christ is indicated by a sign; but when "*the world as we know it has passed away*" (cf. 1 Cor 7,31) and there is no further mediation by signs, the Kingdom of the resurrection will finally appear, and then the union of the Church with Christ will be perfect and the Church will live only for her Lord. Religious who respond to their vocation of chastity bear witness to this reality of the Kingdom of the resurrection, by living already in faith and love on this earth their exclusive relationship of love with Christ. All this is wonderfully expressed in the decree "*Perfectae caritatis*": "For all Christ's faithful, religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only Spouse".<sup>16</sup>

There is still a last aspect of this mystery to which the Constitutions give prominence: the union of Christ with the Church, to which he communicates his Spirit, is the source of a *wonderful spiritual fertility*: the Church, as a "virgin mother" generates the sons of God.

<sup>15</sup> ET 13

<sup>16</sup> PC 12. On this theme cf. also the deeper analysis of John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation "*Redemptionis donum*" n. 11

Keeping in mind that christian marriage too is a participation in this fertility of the Church, the text is saying here that consecrated virginity, by totally inserting us in the mystery of the Church's love makes us in a unique way sharers in her spiritual fruitfulness.<sup>17</sup> In this truth is found a foundation for the apostolic mission. An author of the IV century writes in this connection: "Consecrated virginity is raised to the category of spiritual motherhood. It has a value which is essentially apostolic, because the essence of the apostolate is to regenerate men according to Christ, or to form Christ in men (Gal 4,19)".<sup>18</sup> Celibacy for the Kingdom is a stimulus to charity, and provides strength for a deeper and broader love of our neighbour. The Prior of Taizé says of religious chastity: "It enables us to keep our arms wide open, without ever closing them on anyone for themselves".<sup>19</sup>

To sum up, this article is rich in content and presents chastity under the sign of a reciprocal "gift": the "precious gift of the Father" and the total gift of ourselves. The salesian can live a chaste life only if he remains within these great faith perspectives, which enable us to share Don Bosco's enthusiasm for this virtue and for the role he attached to it for his mission.

*God our Father, we give you thanks  
for the precious gift you have given us  
by calling us to follow more closely Jesus your Son  
in the way of celibacy for the Kingdom,  
through the choice of a deeply evangelical way  
of loving you and our neighbour  
with undivided heart.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. ET 14

<sup>18</sup> S. Metodios, "El Banquete"

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. AUBRY, *Teologia della vita religiosa*, LDC Turin 1980, p. 113

*Grant that we may respond to your Love  
with faith and grateful joy,  
so as to be profoundly inserted  
in the mystery of your Church,  
totally united with her Lord,  
and share in the fruitfulness of her mission.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 81 CHASTITY AND THE SALESIAN MISSION

Don Bosco lived chastity as a love for God and for the young which had no limits. He wanted it to be a distinctive mark of the Salesian Society: "Anyone devoting his life to destitute youth should certainly strive to enrich himself with every virtue, but the virtue he should specially cultivate is chastity".<sup>1</sup>

Our tradition has always considered chastity a resplendent virtue, bearing a special message for the education of youth. Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young; it allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they "know they are loved"<sup>2</sup>, and it enables us to educate them to love and to purity.

<sup>1</sup> cf. C 1875, V. 1

<sup>2</sup> DON BOSCO, *Letter from Rome 1884*, MB XVII, 110

After basing our response of love on Jesus Christ, who first loved us and called us to follow him, we now turn our eyes to Don Bosco, who lived his vocation to celibacy in the gift of himself to the young for the love of God.

Art. 81 illustrates, in the light of experience and the teachings of Don Bosco, the connection between consecrated chastity and the mission of the salesian.

### Chastity a distinctive mark of our Society

To express synthetically how Don Bosco understood and lived the gift of chastity, the Constitutions use the simple expression: "*a love for God and for the young which had no limits*". This text sums up what the SGC had said to indicate the deep significance of consecrated chastity in Don Bosco and how it stimulated him in the mission he received: "Don Bosco chose to live a life of evangelical celibacy in order to express his great love for God and to carry out his mission as father and pastor to the young, in line with his priestly vocation. His total self-giving to the Church and especially to youth fostered a quality in

him which was as genial as it was creative and productive of new works; he found optimism and joy in his apostolic work and his zeal showed itself in inexhaustible drive".<sup>1</sup>

We know the esteem Don Bosco had for chastity as one of the fundamental virtues in the building of christian life, an esteem which is evident from the warm way in which he used to speak of this virtue, especially to his boys; he described it as "the loveliest flower of Paradise, ... a pure lily whose immaculate candour would make us akin to the angels".<sup>2</sup> "What a beautiful virtue this is! I would like to speak to you for days on this topic... It is the loveliest, most resplendent and, at the same time, the most delicate of all virtues".<sup>3</sup> Certainly Don Bosco was convinced of the pre-eminence of charity in christian life, but he was no less certain that chastity accompanies charity and is an expression of it. He says: "Charity, humility and chastity are three royal virtues which always go together: none of them can exist without the others".<sup>4</sup> "As long as one is chaste, he will always have a living faith, firm hope, and burning charity".<sup>5</sup>

To priests and religious Don Bosco recommended chastity as a fundamental virtue for fully corresponding with their vocation. He wrote: "This virtue enables a religious to attain his goal of total consecration to God".<sup>6</sup> "When a priest lives a pure and chaste life, he becomes the master of all hearts".<sup>7</sup>

But our Founder was not content with extolling chastity in words; he himself was an example of a priest who lived his evangelical celibacy to the full. His truest witness lies precisely in his life spent totally for God and for the service of the young, for whom he was ready to sacrifice everything: "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle!*" His saying: "I love you, my dear boys, and I am ready to give my life for you", repeated so often

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 572

<sup>2</sup> BM IV, 331

<sup>3</sup> BM XII, 413

<sup>4</sup> MB IX, 706

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> BM XII, 617

<sup>7</sup> BM IX, 180

and in so many different ways, is a sign of the love he felt in his heart, the love of a father for his sons. This surely is the deepest aspect of Don Bosco's chastity, made manifest in the gift of "spiritual fatherhood". But we must remember that to reach this goal of unalloyed love Don Bosco made use of the means of christian ascetics, gradually building a personality totally of Christ. In this light we can understand the testimony given by Fr Cerruti in the beatification process: "I think I may say that in the great purity of mind, heart and body that he practised with a dedication not just rare but unique, lay the secret of his greatness as a christian. In his demeanour, his gaze, the very way he walked, his words, his characteristic traits, there was never the slightest shadow of anything that could be contrary to the beautiful virtue, as he called it."<sup>8</sup>

From all this we can see why Don Bosco pointed to the virtue of chastity as something which must characterize the life and mission of the Congregation: "What must distinguish us from all others and be the hallmark of our Congregation is the virtue of chastity... Chastity must be the pivot on which all our actions revolve... Nowadays sterling modesty and chastity are a must... This will be the triumph of our Congregation".<sup>9</sup>

The text of the Constitutions which we are at present examining, sums up the thought of our Founder by presenting chastity as "*a distinctive mark of the Salesian Society*", saying that the salesian educator must cultivate it with predilection to attain the fullness of pastoral charity. For this reason the text written by Don Bosco himself in the Constitutions of 1875 is quoted: "Anyone devoting his life to destitute youth should certainly strive to enrich himself with every virtue, but the virtue he should specially cultivate is chastity".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> D. CERRUTI, Testimony at beatification process, "*Summarium super virtutibus*", p. 870

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM XII, 163. Don Bosco has another significant expression: "Chastity must be the outstanding trait of our Society, just as poverty and obedience are respectively the hallmarks of the Franciscans and of the Jesuits" (BM X, 29)

<sup>10</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 109)

## Chastity in the educative mission of the salesian

The second paragraph explains more fully the statements of the first part of the article, making clearer how consecrated chastity enters into the mission of the salesian and characterizes it.

In the first place the opening phrase summarizes what we have heard from the words of Don Bosco himself: the exceptional importance he attached to chastity for us Salesians derives not only from its being a sign of the love of God, but also from its strict connection with our task as educators. By practising chastity in its most genuine significance, we are able to behave as christian and salesian educators. Chastity, in fact, enables us to bring to the young a special message through an education according to God's plan. In the words of the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò: "In Don Bosco's spirit there is a strong *message of purity*; salesian tradition and the witness of our origins make this abundantly clear. We are concerned with a special message which we might call 'a partiality for purity': a typical message for the young".<sup>11</sup>

From this point of view the chastity of the salesian is called "resplendent". This adjective (Italian "irradiante") was deliberately chosen by the SGC to indicate the capacity of the chaste salesian to spread around himself the gospel message of purity, i.e. of transmitting to the young the richness and beauty of the pure love the Spirit gives them. This is an evident reference to the quite exceptional "splendour" that Don Bosco had seen attached to this diamond in his dream.<sup>12</sup> It was a characteristic so outstanding in Don Bosco that many attributed to the splendour of his chastity much of the fascination he had for young people and his skill in leading them to God. The salesian too by the splendour of his chaste life must be able to inculcate the love of God in the young.

<sup>11</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*, LDC Turin 1982, p. 178

<sup>12</sup> In the dream of the ten diamonds Don Bosco said of the diamond chastity: "It had a dazzling splendour all its own that caught and held the attention as a magnet attracts iron" (*Dreams of Don Bosco - Critical edition*, Turin 1978); cf. ASC 300 (1981), p. 38



The remainder of the article analyses from three different stand-points how consecrated chastity allows us to pass on a real message for the education of youth.

— It is said in the first place that *"Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young"*. These words take us back at once to art. 2 of the Constitutions, which presents the profound nature of the salesian apostolic project in the Church: Jesus sends us among youth, asking us to take them his saving love and reveal to them God's fatherly countenance. Such a task is clearly impossible for our weak human love; what is necessary is that we be so united to Christ that he manifests himself through us, poor and imperfect though we be. Chastity lived to the full in evangelical celibacy, conforming us to Christ and immersing us totally in his Love, gives us a powerful help to fulfil this task.

That this was wonderfully realized in Don Bosco we may glean from the testimony of Don Albera: "His every word and action showed forth the holiness of union with God, which is perfect charity. He attracted us to himself by the fullness of the supernatural love which blazed in, his heart and which by its flames absorbed and united the little sparks of the same love struck in our own hearts by God's love. We were his because each of us was certain that he was truly the man of God, 'homo Dei', in the most comprehensive sense of the word. It was this singular attraction that enabled him to conquer our hearts".<sup>13</sup>

— *"It allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they 'know they are loved'"*. By quoting an expression used by Don Bosco himself in his Letter from Rome of 1884, the text illustrates how the witness of chastity contributes to the building of that personal relationship between educator and pupil characteristic of the preventive system, that Don Bosco called "loving kindness" and in which the "heart" of the educator is revealed.

Already art. 15, dealing with the salesian spirit, had connected loving kindness with chastity as two aspects of a single attitude of life.

<sup>13</sup> D. ALBERA, *Circular Letters*, p. 374

It is a case of realizing the paradox of a true love and deep affection (that of a "father, brother and friend"), which becomes mutual ("able to draw out friendship in return"); but at the same time rejecting every temptation to draw people to oneself with a captivating or possessive love, every preference for one individual rather than another: it means loving a youngster only for himself and for God!

Once again it is a question of manifesting in human form God's fatherly character, and it is clear that in this consecrated chastity has an important role to play: It is nothing else but authentic and total love!

— *"It enables us to educate them to love and to purity"*: the Rule speaks of our message of chastity in relation to the educational task itself.

As an educator the salesian is called to open youngsters to the sense of true freedom, to form them to a genuine and generous love, to help them to understand the mysteries of life, inculcating in them a sense of delicacy as regards women to prepare them for their future mission as married people, as parents, or as individuals consecrated to God. The witness of love lived in chastity is a great help to the salesian educator in accompanying young people through this process: in him they can discover the significance of christian love which is faithful and sacrificing.

*Lord Jesus, grant to us,  
as you did to our Founder Don Bosco  
an enthusiastic and resplendent chastity,  
sustained by your grace and our efforts at perseverance.  
Unite us closely to yourself  
so that we may be bearers of your Love.  
Make us able to guide young people  
in the difficult way of purity.  
Allow us to love them with a true and sincere affection  
which will open their eyes to their vocation  
as children in you of the Father.  
We ask you this with trust and humility.*

## ART. 82 CHASTITY AND HUMAN MATURITY

The educational and pastoral demands of our mission and the fact that the observance of perfect continence touches some of the deepest drives of human nature,<sup>1</sup> require of the salesian psychological balance and affective maturity.

Don Bosco used to warn: Whoever has not a well-grounded hope of being able, with divine help, to preserve the virtue of chastity in word, in deed and in thought, should not make profession in this Society, for he would often find himself in danger.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. PC 12

<sup>2</sup> cf. C 1875, V, 2

This article is linked with the preceding one, of which it continues the theme and draws certain consequences: chastity, so important for our mission as educators but also so delicate because of our own weakness, has need of mature personalities for its development.

The sources of the text are easily recognizable: it comes from an article which Don Bosco had included in the Constitutions of 1875,<sup>1</sup> and a passage taken from the documents of Vatican II.

Don Bosco's phrase emphasizes the importance for the salesian of a strong and clear chastity, matured in a climate of grace but also through an adequate human formation, in view of the specific mission to young people who are "poor, abandoned and in danger". The expression reflects Don Bosco's preoccupation lest there should be lacking in his sons a sufficient human and religious maturity to enable them to live a perfect and resplendent chastity; the latter is more necessary than ever when dealing with youngsters suffering from greater lack of affection, or who have sometimes had negative experiences, and who must be guided at one of the most delicate periods of their growth. The "danger" of which Don Bosco speaks was explained by him in an article of the Constitutions of 1875 as follows: "Upon words and looks,

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni* 1875, V, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 109)

even when indifferent, a bad interpretation is oftentimes put by youths who have already been victims of human passions".<sup>2</sup> Unruffled prudence is a virtue of educators!

It could be asked where the "well-grounded hope" of preserving chastity, of which Don Bosco speaks, can come from; i.e. what are the signs of sufficient maturity for the salesian mission. Following salesian tradition, the signs which give rise to such hope can be detected in the experience of an irreproachable earlier life, but especially in the successful outcome of a practical test of salesian life, in formation to a life of strong piety, and in the judgement of experienced councillors.<sup>3</sup>

To the first motive, based on the "educational and pastoral demands of our mission", a second can be added which arises from the part played by sexuality in personal development. The formulation is taken almost literally from the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" on the religious life, which says of chastity: "The observance of perfect continence touches intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature. For this reason candidates ought not to go forward, nor should they be admitted, to the profession of chastity except after really adequate testing, and unless they are sufficiently mature, psychologically and affectively".<sup>4</sup>

As the SGC explains, recognizing the function of sexuality in human growth, the Council emphasizes the need for a slow and progressive maturing process — parallel to the psychological process for developing personality — which will make possible a mature choice of evangelical celibacy lived in a fully conscious way as a total self-giving to God.<sup>5</sup> The words of John Paul II also, in the Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris consortio" on the need for a clear and christian education

<sup>2</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 3 (ibid)

<sup>3</sup> In "*Criteria and norms for salesian vocation discernment*" (Rome 1985) are indicated elements of discernment as regards affective equilibrium. On the positive side are listed: the ability to love those with whom one lives; a serene attitude towards women; good psychological and emotional balance; and a normal capacity for self-control which makes the choice of celibacy possible (cf. n. 44). On the negative side some contraindications of a psychological and moral order are indicated, which should be kept in mind (cf. nn. 47-49)

<sup>4</sup> PC 12

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 562-563

in sexuality, may be thought specially applicable to us Salesians: "Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, educational service ... must aim firmly at a training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal, for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love... Education for chastity is absolutely essential, for it is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the 'nuptial meaning' of the body. Indeed, christian parents (and educators), discerning the signs of God's call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality".<sup>6</sup>

What is needed therefore is a formation which leads to interior solidity in a person who lives in undisturbed fashion his sexuality which he has integrated as part of himself and who, while recognizing all the value of human love and christian marriage, has fully understood and accepted celibacy as an authentic life-plan and as a precious benefit for the development of his own person, "so as to become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph 4,13).

All this interior work, with the help of a spiritual guide and above all with the powerful support of the Holy Spirit, leads to the attainment of that level-headed mentality through which on the one hand affective needs and reactions, freely perceived without inhibitions or interior defences, are consciously placed in relationship with one's own salesian religious life-plan, and on the other hand the love of Jesus Christ develops the ability for true personal love, so characteristic of the salesian educational mission.<sup>7</sup> A well-balanced mentality of this kind enables us to overcome successfully the inevitable trials (as will be said in art. 84) and bear joyful witness to the grandeur of living totally for Jesus Christ and his Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> FC 37; on education to chastity cf. also OT 10, and the document *"A guide to formation in priestly celibacy"*, Rome 1974, nn. 18 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. FSDB (1985), nn. 92-93

*Father of light,  
you know of what we are made.  
Kindle in us the fire and strength of your Spirit,  
so that with the love that binds us to you  
as our one secure foundation,  
we may make our life a pure and total donation  
for the good of the young you have entrusted to us.  
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.*

## ART. 83 CHASTITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Consecrated chastity, a "sign and stimulus of love",<sup>1</sup> frees and enables us to become all things to all men. It develops in us a christian sense of personal relationships, encourages true friendships, and helps to make the community a family.

In its turn the community's fraternal atmosphere helps us to live our celibacy because of the Kingdom with joy, and sustained by its love and understanding to come safely through difficult times.

<sup>1</sup> LG 42

In art. 61 it was said that "the profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community". This truth is now referred particularly to consecrated chastity, highlighting also the correlative relationship between community and chastity: not only does chastity contribute to the building of a genuine religious community, but the very life of religious communion is of great help in the joyful living of evangelical celibacy.

It may be noted that this is a new theme as far as the text of the Constitutions prior to 1972 is concerned. Its introduction was due to the analysis of religious chastity made by the Council, and is the result of experience which shows that not a few cases of crisis and abandonment are brought about by loneliness resulting from the lack of a concrete atmosphere of charity in the community.

### **Chastity contributes to the building of the community**

The article begins with a quotation from the Constitution "Lumen gentium" which, speaking of consecrated chastity, calls it "*a sign and stimulus of love*".<sup>1</sup> This expression links up with that of art. 80 of the

<sup>1</sup> LG 42

Rule, where the choice of celibacy for the Kingdom is defined as "an intensely evangelical way of loving God and our neighbour with undivided heart". The SGC, dealing with chastity in the light of its relationship with Christ's Passover, explains that religious chastity, by the power it draws upon from its relation to the paschal mystery, brings us to the perfection of charity to God and to our brothers. It cannot remain in isolation or be closed in on itself, but needs to reach out to others in prayer, in action and in service. It is the sacrament of charity, the sign of brotherhood and service.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, as the text says, it "frees and enables us to become all things to all men".

"This vital force", adds the SGC, "shows clearly the community dimension of religious chastity".<sup>3</sup> Every salesian, in fact, to the extent in which he unites himself with Christ and penetrates into his love, becomes the more imbued with divine charity and so is able to love as He loves, with a love that is totally sacrificing. And this love, set free and given power by the Spirit, generates, nourishes and builds the fraternal community. It helps to give strength to that communion in which individuals meet each other and love each other deeply in Christ.

The text goes on to list some aspects of this vital force of charity inherent in virginal love.

— It *"develops in us a christian sense of personal relationships"*, i.e. it informs our personal relations with other confreres, and instils in them a delicate and sincere brotherhood (love of communion) and fosters the growth of the spirit of mutual service (love of self-giving): in this connection we may recall the attitudes recommended by the Apostle Paul, and quoted in art. 51.

— Love lived in consecrated chastity also *"encourages true friendships"*, i.e. those friendships which are not coercive or limiting, but develop the ability for self-donation and are a valuable mutual help among the members to enable each one to become fully himself

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 569

<sup>3</sup> SGC, *ibid.*



in the Lord. They are friendships which are neither closed nor sentimental, but transparent and open to the common good, productive of an atmosphere in which each one feels that he is appreciated and loved with sincere affection. We know how our Father Don Bosco cultivated deep friendships (we recall in particular those with Luigi Comollo and with Don Cafasso), which helped him a great deal to make progress in virtue; and in addition he often invited his boys to become "friends of Don Bosco". It is precisely this atmosphere of brotherly friendship, which must distinguish the community, that is referred to in art. 51 and through which the Lord makes felt his living presence.<sup>4</sup>

— It is easy to see where all this leads to: consecrated chastity "*helps to make the community a family*", i.e. it leads to a growth in the family atmosphere (already referred to when dealing with the salesian spirit and fraternal community), in which each member is welcomed, esteemed and loved for what he is, and where he is able to make his specific contributions.

### **The community is a help to the joyful living of chastity**

The second paragraph continues the theme of the relation between chastity and community, developing the complementary aspect to that spoken of above: if it is true that chastity generates fraternal charity, it is equally true that fraternal charity sustains chastity and makes it fruitful. This truth comes directly from Vatican II which emphasized the importance of brotherhood as a guard for chastity: "Let all,

<sup>4</sup> On Don Bosco's invitation to be friends cf. BM III, 111, 140; VI, 210-212; VII, 386; X, 17; XI, 215. cf. also the supernatural motive: to be friends so as to be united heart and soul in loving God (BM V, 354). Concerning friendship in the fraternal community, the document "*A guide to formation in priestly celibacy*" (CEC 1974) says: "Voluntary celibacy makes sense when it is viewed in a context of relationships with others lived in a fraternal community where one can 'reach' others without 'having' them, i.e. when it is an exercise in non-possessiveness. It is a sign of celibacy rightly assumed when one can create and maintain worthwhile inter-personal relationships while experiencing the presence of friends even in their absence, refusing to impose oneself on them, and showing that need of them is limited" (n. 49)

and especially superiors, remember that chastity is preserved more securely when the members live a common life in true brotherly love".<sup>5</sup>

The text in turn says that "the community's fraternal atmosphere helps us to live our celibacy because of the Kingdom with joy". By his profession the religious has given himself totally to God and lives in the Lord's love and service. But he needs to feel this experience of God's love manifested in the love of the brothers God has put beside him in the community. When this love is felt, it becomes easier for him to face up to the renunciations and overcome the difficulties associated with celibacy. Thanks to his brothers he finds himself happy in the community and can live his celibacy more easily "in joy", and in this way provides an efficacious testimony for the young to a true chastity, in which the sense of gift prevails over that of renunciation.

Finally, the article dwells on the particular contribution the fraternal community can make in "difficult times". These are moments of temptation, of doubt and of trial, which are never lacking (as we shall see in the next article), but occasionally become more violent. It is precisely at these times that the understanding and affection of the other members of the community is seen to be truly important. At such times one may say that every member has the duty in one way or another of supporting his confreres in the struggle which has broken out in their hearts.

Those words of Scripture, dear to the heart of Don Bosco: "*O quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum*", when realized in a fraternal community, are indeed a great help for tasting the joy of consecrated love in chastity.

*Lord our God,  
grant that we may live in all its fullness  
our consecrated chastity,  
as a full and unselfish opening  
to you and to our brothers.*

<sup>5</sup> PC 12

*May it cause to flourish in our communities  
the family spirit  
and that true and sincere friendship,  
which will help us to walk together in joy  
towards you, our highest Good,  
and strengthen us in moments of trial.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 84 ATTITUDES AND MEANS FOR GROWING IN CHASTITY

Our chastity is not a conquest made once for all time. It has its moments of peace and moments of trial. It is a gift which because of human weakness demands a daily pledge of fidelity.

For this reason the salesian, faithful to the Constitutions, lives a life of work and temperance, practises mortification and the custody of the senses, makes discreet and prudent use of the means of social communication, and does not neglect the natural means which contribute to physical and mental health.

Above all, he implores God's help and lives in his presence; he nourishes his love for Christ at the table of the Word and the Eucharist, and humbly purifies it in the sacrament of Reconciliation; he entrusts himself with simplicity to a spiritual director.

He turns with filial trust to Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians, who helps him to love as Don Bosco did.

It is well known that in presenting the virtue of chastity Don Bosco, while on the one hand singing its praises in inspired fashion, on the other made many recommendations for its preservation, suggesting well balanced ascetical means prompted by a deep spiritual life. The same kind of presentation is found also in the constitutional text he wrote and in his Introduction to the Constitutions, which is an authoritative and fatherly commentary on them.

In our text too a significant space has been given to the "attitudes and means for growing in chastity; the theme is dealt with not only in the light of our traditions, but also in that of the rich conciliar doctrine and present salesian reflection on the mystery of consecrated chastity.

## Chastity is a reality lived in continuous development

The first paragraph of art. 84 contains an important idea which has its foundation in various statements of the preceding articles and which, in a certain way, overrides a fairly widespread mentality of the past.

The Rule, which requires of the salesian "psychological balance and affective maturity" (C 82), now tells us that "*chastity is not a conquest made once for all time*": i.e. chastity is not a treasure won once and for ever on the day of profession and which afterwards needs simply to be "preserved" intact. The SGC explains: "to open oneself to receive this singular gift of celibacy is to accept a task which never ends".<sup>1</sup> Chastity is indeed a quality inscribed simultaneously by the grace of God and freedom of choice in a living person, and is therefore linked with the history of that person and his building to full maturity: it is therefore a value that has to be continuously reactivated in changing situations and circumstances. This is the sense of the expression: "a task which never ends", a long period of growth which is never completed.

In this process chastity "has its moments of peace and moments of trial". The great majority of people, and consecrated persons are no exception, experience difficulties at times: we may think of the Apostle Paul who was not ashamed to confess to his brethren his own temptations and weaknesses, over which triumphed the victorious grace of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4,7-12; 12,7-10); we may think even of Don Bosco himself who was not exempt from temptations and inclinations of the flesh, as he confided to some of those who were close to him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 564

<sup>2</sup> We have some witnesses concerning the difficulties experienced by Don Bosco. Don Rua testified: "With regard to temptations against this virtue, I think that he did experience them, judging by some of the things he was heard to say when he was recommending temperance in drink". This testimony agrees with that of Don Lemoyne: "That he had had temptations against purity he once confided to the members of the Chapter, among whom I was present, explaining why he preferred vegetables to meat". (cf. P. BROCARDI, *Don Bosco profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 111-112)

We can understand the reasons for these difficulties. "We carry this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4,7) says St Paul of God's gifts. And Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelica testificatio" says of chastity that it is a "fragile and vulnerable gift because of human weakness".<sup>3</sup> It is easy to understand that times of difficulty can occur for all, when we remember that the religious remains a sexual being and has to live his life following the normal lines of human existence and in the concrete circumstances of time and place in which he is called upon to live. There can be moments when there is awakened in him the desire for marriage or for physical fatherhood; there can be times when he feels lonely and temptation makes headway.

Consequently chastity *"demands a daily pledge of fidelity"*: "daily" because the salesian reponds anew every day to the call of the Lord and, with the support of his grace, adapts his strength to the difficulties which arise from various circumstances. In this way he "grows" in his response of love.

## Natural and supernatural means

Speaking of the means for preserving chastity, Don Bosco indicated in the first place prudence in relations with young people and with the world;<sup>4</sup> then he pointed to the directly supernatural means of prayer and the sacraments.<sup>5</sup> The order here is that of wisdom and experience: even the most fervent prayers have little effect in one who does not at the same time practise a certain austerity and mortification in his personal life. The text of this article follows a similar order, with an obvious reference to the directives of the Council when it speaks of religious chastity.<sup>6</sup> The last three paragraphs present various means for keeping the gift of chastity alive and ensuring its growth.

<sup>3</sup> ET 15

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 4, 5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 111)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 112)

<sup>6</sup> PC 12

To express a *first series of practices* for preserving and strengthening a chaste love, the Constitutions — in addition to the text of Don Bosco — draw on the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which declares: "Religious ... should practise mortification and custody of the senses. Nor should they neglect the natural means which promote health of mind and body".<sup>7</sup>

In the matter of mortification, we know the recommendations of our Founder: "Keep the senses under control... I recommend to you special moderation in eating and drinking".<sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt that good physical balance helps to maintain affective level-headedness, while on the other hand nervous fatigue resulting from an overburdened life, constantly under pressure, leads sooner or later to a state of mental or physical depression which offers fertile ground to temptations. Don Bosco gave the first missionaries this advice: "Take care of your health. Work well, but only do as much as your strength will allow".<sup>9</sup>

But he also told them: "Shun idleness".<sup>10</sup> Even while paying due attention to one's health, work is a great means for the practical manifestation of self-donation and for overcoming sexual instincts. This is why the Constitutions remind us of the importance of living "*a life of work and temperance*".

The article makes special reference to the "discreet and prudent use" of the instruments of social communication: they are the windows through which that world (in its sinful aspects) can enter, which we have renounced. Art. 44 of the General Regulations will take up this point again from the standpoint of community life.

In conclusion we may say that a means which sums up all the foregoing is *fidelity to the Constitutions*. Don Bosco always said as much: "The exact observance of our holy rules, and especially of the

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, Chastity, cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 234

<sup>9</sup> D. BOSCO, *Souvenir for first missionaries*, cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 266

<sup>10</sup> D. BOSCO, *Souvenir for first missionaries*, l.c. p. 265; cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, V, 6 (F. MOTTO, p. 112)

vows and the practices of piety, triumphs over every vice and is the faithful guardian of chastity".<sup>11</sup>

The following paragraph begins with the adverbial phrase "*above all*". This is a clear indication of its priority and recalls what has been said all the way from art. 80, i.e. that chastity, a gift of the Father, can grow only in a climate of grace, and our own personal efforts will be unavailing unless they are sustained by the Father's grace. Virginity can exist only if not separated from its Source; it is a response to the call of Love, and hence it is clear that it cannot be maintained and developed unless our gaze is fixed on the countenance of this infinite Love.

And so the Rule proposes a series of fundamental means for fostering the love of Christ and intimate union with Him who is our highest Good, to whom we have handed over ourselves and our life, and once again we find that these means are precisely the ones recommended by our Founder.

— The first one mentioned is *prayer*, prolonged in a life lived in God's presence: a person who has chosen to follow the virginal Christ lives in contact and living dialogue with him at every moment of life.

— In this dialogue with the Lord a special place is given to *the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist*: our love is continually purified in the sacrament of forgiveness, and is nourished each day at the table of the Lord's Body and Blood, from which it draws strength and grandeur.

— We are all aware of the importance of a good *spiritual guide* to accompany us on our way through life, helping us to discern God's will and enlightening us so that we can respond ever better to his love.

In conclusion the article lifts our gaze to *Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians*, to her who was Don Bosco's guide and who will guide us too in fidelity to our vocation.

<sup>11</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, l.c.



From the earliest christian tradition Mary has been called "the Virgin", "the Most Holy Virgin", "the Virgin of Virgins". Mary's virginity is at the heart of her vocation and at the heart too of the redeeming mystery of the Incarnation. After Jesus, Mary is the one in whom is realized most completely christian and religious virginity. She is the model, the type and the example of the virginity of the Church, and at the same time its active support; she is a virgin in spirit in the first place, because of the completeness of her acquiescence with the Father's designs, and also a virgin in body as the sign and first fruit, jointly with her Son, of the new virginal humanity.

To Mary therefore we betake ourselves with confidence, and to her we entrust our love, so that she may make it strong and generous for Christ and for the young. The Rule assures us that she will teach us to love in the way she taught Don Bosco.

We may note that this reference to Mary in the concluding article of the whole of Chapter VI on the evangelical counsels is an invitation to look to her as the model for a joyful and generous response of our whole life in the spirit of the counsels. She is a model of obedience to the Word of God ("*be it done unto me according to your Word*"), a model of poverty in spirit ("*he has looked with favour on his lowly servant*"), and a model of virginal love ("*I do not know man*"). By imitating Mary, we too can experience the great things which God works in his servants ("*the Almighty has done great things for me*").

*The Lord has called us to live,  
in strength and fidelity  
and with joyful trust,  
the complete donation of ourselves  
in the bond of perfect chastity.  
Let us ask him for the gift of perseverance  
and to defend us against every danger.*

*That the awareness of our fragility  
may not cause us fear and discouragement,  
but lead us to a secure trust  
in the assistance of the Holy Spirit,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That day by day we may renew  
our commitment to fidelity in prayer  
for ourselves and our brothers,  
and in dedication to our mission of education,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be faithful and diligent  
in using the means suggested by Don Bosco  
for the preservation and growth of chastity:  
prayer and mortification,  
work and temperance,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our love for God and our neighbour  
may be constantly nourished  
at the table of the Word of God  
and of the Body and Blood of Christ,  
and be constantly purified  
in the sacrament of reconciliation,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*God, our Father,  
you have consecrated us to your love  
by calling us to celibacy for the Kingdom.  
Fulfil in us the whole of your designs,  
and by the example and intercession of the Virgin Mary,  
of Don Bosco and of our glorified Brothers,  
confirm us in the gift of ourselves,  
and keep us joyful and chaste in your sight  
to the day of Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

## CHAPTER VII

### IN DIALOGUE WITH THE LORD

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3,16-17).*

It is not easy to find a biblical text sufficiently far-reaching to provide inspiration for chapter VII. Only two texts are explicitly quoted in the chapter for motivation purposes: Mary's meditation on the Word of God (Lk 2,19.51) in art. 87, and the thanksgiving to God which is necessary in daily life (Eph 5,20) in art. 95. The emblematic passage from the Letter to the Colossians was eventually chosen, a passage which is dense in significance and practical renown.

It should be remembered first of all that the objective of the Letter to the Colossians is to emphasize as strongly as possible the central position, or rather the primacy, of Christ in the world and in human history. It is a primacy which puts to flight fear and the service of false gods, and at the same time reconciles every creature under the loving guidance of Christ (1,15-2,23).

This leads to a community life marked by this "mystery". The traditional liturgical, catechetical and behavioural formularies are here taken up again to be relived in the joyful awareness of this "life hidden with Christ in God" (3,3), and in a wide ecumenical sense since "Christ is all, and in all" (3,11), sustained by the "hope of glory" which is "Christ among you" (1,27). A new humanity (3,5-11), a new community (3,12-17).

The new community, intimately sustained by the christian agape (3,12-13, the text which is quoted in C 51 in connection with the fraternal community) is characterized by diligent attention to the Word of Christ which is the fullness of the Word of God. This has pride of place, and it fits naturally into the community. It gives vitality, unity and thrust to the whole assembly. It becomes a living wisdom circulating among the members in words of correction and edification, and reaches its natural climax in choral celebration animated by the Spirit: psalms, hymns and 'spiritual' canticles (compositions from the Old Testament and the early christian communities used in prayer); a celebration marked by thanksgiving ('eucaristia') to God the Father through Jesus Christ. The vibrancy of tone of this celebration is indicated by the way Paul himself opens the letter with a magnificent hymn (1,13-20). But the force of the Word does not end here. It permeates the whole existence (words and deeds), as the place where the saving action of God takes effect, and hence where life becomes liturgy.

Listening to the Word, celebration (eucharist), communal edification, and mission in the world: these are a dynamic ensemble of experiences which form the content, climate and rhythm of "dialogue with the Lord" on the part of the Salesians, of which the articles of the Constitutions, at the wonderful school of Don Bosco, have become an exemplary expression.

\* \* \*

## 1. The location of the chapter

A first point to be noted, and one that was already mentioned in the introduction to Part II is the new location of this chapter on the prayer of the salesian, which is now located in the large block formed by the second Part: "Sent to the young etc.", to serve as *its conclusion*. It would be quite wrong to interpret this as any lessening of the importance given to prayer because it is treated "after" the themes of the mission (chap. IV), the community (chap. V), and the evangelical counsels (chap. VI). Quite the contrary! By placing prayer here at the conclusion, the GC22 wanted to make it clear that salesian consecrated and apostolic life, with all its various commitments among youth, with brotherhood lived in community, and with the demands of obedience, poverty and chastity, has a character so supernatural, so far above the capabilities of our good will, that it would not be practicable nor even possible without the Holy Spirit, without the grace of God which is continually offered and given in prayer and the sacraments. When the salesian or the salesian community prays and draws near to the sacramental sources of grace he is visibly acknowledging his dependence on God who has consecrated him and sent him. He puts himself in immediate contact with his Lord, so as to revive his "awareness of his intimate and living relationship with him" (as art. 85 puts it), and to be purified and enlivened by him and sent forth once again for a better service of his Kingdom.

It is suggested too that all the concrete commitments of the salesian's life and activity are destined to blossom out into prayer, and

themselves become a deep communion with God, as will be well said in the final article of the chapter and of the second Part.

In this way, from the very location of the chapter the necessity of "*dialogue with the Lord*" is evident.

## 2. The title of the chapter

The title of the chapter is substantially a definition of explicit prayer, and equally a specification of the basic spiritual attitude underlying the life of the professed salesian, already indicated in art. 12: the salesian "cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand". "The special Covenant that the Lord has made with us" (C 195) *requires that we live "in a state of dialogue with him"*.

## 3. The overall perspective of the chapter

The whole chapter is shaped by the perspective of the entire second part of the Constitutions: "Sent to the young in communities following Christ".

Our prayer is of the kind proper to "missionaries of the young"<sup>1</sup> who work together *animated by the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd*, enlightened by his Word, nourished by his Body and Blood, enlivened by his mysteries, purified by his forgiveness, stimulated by the example and intervention of his Mother. "Pastoral love" or the "love of the Good Shepherd" is a term specifically used in two places (C 92, 95), but there are references to it in many other articles: art. 85 considers the prayer of the community in the light of the "da

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Message of John Paul II to GC22; GC22, 13

mihi animas"; art. 86 speaks of "apostolic prayer"; art. 87 sees among the fruits of daily meditation on the Word that of "proclaiming it with zeal" (cf. also C 93); art. 88 says that we are led by the Eucharist to "renew our apostolic commitment", drawing from it "energy and endurance in our work for the young"; art. 90, speaking of the sacrament of Reconciliation, states that it "purifies our apostolic intentions"; Mary gives us "courage for the service of our brethren" (C 92); and in conclusion all our prayer is linked with our "tireless industry" (C 95).

The various expressions of the salesian's life of prayer converge therefore on the same objective: *to centre it more and more on the two inseparable poles of his life*: the Lord who has chosen him as an instrument in His work of salvation, and youth to whom he takes this salvation in the Lord's name.

#### 4. Two major characteristics

In the fundamental aspect referred to above, the GC22 has met a double preoccupation that had been expressed also by provincial chapters: to make it clear that our prayer is at the same time *deeply ecclesial*, responding to the demands for liturgical renewal made by Vatican II, and *characteristically salesian*, in line with our specific mission in the Church.

a) The concern for a firmly ecclesial form of prayer appears especially in three points which lead to a better understanding of the broad and complex reality covered by the expression "prayer": it is a matter of welcoming the saving action of God and entering into a colloquy with him.

In the first place attention is drawn to the decisive initiating role of the *Word of God*: prayer is indeed a dialogue, but a dialogue in which it must be left to the principal participant, God, to take the initiative. The "life of prayer" is above all else a matter of listening and meditating. And the prayer itself is an adequate "response" to the Word that has been heard and understood. Chapter VII insists very opportunely on the dynamics of listening and response: explicit references to this are found in the opening biblical quotation, in ar-

ticles 85 (invitation and response), 87 (the Word is heard, accepted, meditated on, brought to fruition and proclaimed), 88 (celebration of the Word), 90 (the Word which calls to conversion), and 91 (listening and discernment).

The chapter also emphasizes the *centrality of the Eucharist*: the celebration of the paschal mystery, seen as the summit and perfect source of union with Christ, of brotherly communion and of apostolic commitment. It is prepared by listening to the Word and is prolonged in the Liturgy of the Hours (C 88, 89).

Finally the text draws attention (C 89) to the liturgical dimension of *sanctified time* in its triple rhythm: daily (the Hours), weekly (the Sunday celebration), and yearly (the liturgical year). Also indicated is the movement of thanksgiving and praise which is present all through the liturgy and gives to it its most characteristic feature: the biblical citation, art. 89 (praise of the Father), art. 92 (the joy of the Magnificat), art. 93 (gratitude to the Father), art. 95 (giving thanks in everything).

b) The other preoccupation evident in the constitutional text is that of emphasizing the *salesian style* of our prayer. Here again there are three particular points to note.

An entire article is given over to an indication of the characteristic qualities of our prayer, and the basis of the prayer experience of Don Bosco himself (C 86). The description is not meant to be exhaustive, and indeed some features of our style of prayer are to be found in other articles of the Constitutions, e.g. in those which insist on its sacramental and Marian components.

But there are two other aspects which deserve special notice. Salesian prayer, as appears from the text, is permeated by the *apostolic concept of the "da mihi animas"* (already noted in connection with the global perspective of this chapter). For this very reason salesian prayer *"is drawn from life experience and flows back into it"* (C 86), and becomes a "liturgy of life" (C 95). Don Bosco, in fact, saw no division between prayer and life: he gives us a wonderful example of an apostle who lives the "grace of unity", who is able to combine intense activity with a deep interior life, who prays to God with a heart full of anxiety over his youngsters and works among them with a heart aflame for God's glory.

## 5. Structure of the chapter

We are now in a better position to understand the structure of the chapter. It is composed of 11 articles, which can be easily gathered into four groups:

1. *The overall significance and characteristics of our prayer:*
  - prayer is a response to God's initiative: *art. 85*
  - it has a salesian style: *art. 86*
2. *The more decisive elements of our liturgical life:*
  - the hearing and active acceptance of the Word: *art. 87*
  - celebration of the Eucharist and eucharistic devotion: *art. 88*
  - liturgical sanctification of time: *art. 89*
3. *"Continual conversion" and its expressions:*
  - daily conversion and the sacrament of Reconciliation: *art. 90*
  - conversion at specific "times of renewal": *art. 91*
4. *Three particular elements:*
  - Mary: how we see and honour her: *art. 92*
  - the personal prayer of the salesian: *art. 93*
  - the remembrance of dead salesians: *art. 94*
5. *Conclusion: "life as prayer": art. 95*

## 6. Communal prayer and personal prayer

There is a further aspect that should be pointed out before we go on to examine the separate articles.

We must realize the need we have for personal as well as communal prayer. There is a simple but fundamental reason for this: in the Church and in the Congregation each of us is, before God, a unique individual different from all others, a son with distinctive features, but at the same time a member of the People of God and of the salesian community. In the Gospel Jesus speaks of two kinds of prayer, and in fact he engaged in both. In practice the two kinds have a mutual influence on each other.



The question is sometimes asked: "Which of the two forms of prayer should be given priority?" At the level of principle the reply is clear: communal liturgical prayer is "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and the fount from which all her power flows".<sup>2</sup> On the other hand there can be no communal prayer without personal prayer. In practice, since the supreme law of charity is realized in the full conformity to God's will, the salesian will respond to God who calls him to pray with the community or "in secret": through the Rule or through the circumstances of life or the apostolate.

Looking at chapter VII, we may note that the text, although speaking always of prayer in relation to the community, frequently insists on the need of the personal commitment of each individual. Various articles carry points applicable to the two aspects, and some make explicit reference to personal prayer: meetings with Christ in the tabernacle (C 88), Sunday as an enriching experience for the Salesian (C 89), commitment to conversion "on the part of each member" (C 90), retreats and spiritual exercises "for each salesian" (C 91), Marian devotion for a more convinced "personal imitation" (C 92), and finally the entire art. 95 is written from the point of view of the individual salesian.

The Constitutions therefore strictly unite communal prayer with personal prayer. There we can find the response to the concern expressed by the Rector Major: "How are we to explain the lack of interior life? I am becoming more and more convinced that it stems from a lack of application to 'personal prayer', or in other words to the contemplative dimension which is at the root of every religious heart. Personal prayer has this indispensable primacy of importance: it is at the foundation of a convinced and well fostered community prayer".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> SC 10

<sup>3</sup> E. VIGANÒ, GC22, RRM n. 284

## ART. 85 THE GIFT OF PRAYER

The community expresses in a visible manner the mystery of the Church, which is not born of any human will but is the fruit of the Lord's death and resurrection. In the same way God brings our community together and keeps it united by his call, his Word, his love.

In praying, the salesian community responds to this call; it deepens its awareness of its intimate and living relationship with God, and of its saving mission, making its own Don Bosco's prayer: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".

The chapter begins with an article which sets out from the perspective of the community with the purpose of "locating" communal prayer. Why must the community pray, and what does it do when it prays? It is of the greatest importance that this be specified from the outset, so as to preclude a pietistic mentality and assign to prayer its basic and vital character.

The truth here given prominence is the supernatural foundation of the salesian community as a group of religious apostles whom God consecrates and sends out for his service (cf. C 3). The first paragraph recalls this divine initiative, which in this way is linked with the opening declaration of the Constitutions: "We believe that (our) Society came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C 1). The second paragraph draws the logical consequences from this: to pray is to go back consciously to one's Source, it means giving a response in "dialogue with the Lord".

### **God himself unites the community and keeps it united**

To affirm the supernatural character of the community, the text recalls its ecclesial significance, connecting it in this way to chapter V on the community.

The Church is a "mystery" of "communion" (as was said in art. 15): it unites believers in brotherly fashion "in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit",<sup>1</sup> and hence in a unity which is divine in its source and is given to men through the paschal mystery of Christ; through his reconciling death and resurrection, Christ fulfilled the Covenant and gave rise to the saved Church, sending it the Sanctifying Spirit.

Of this mystery the community is the visible expression because, after the example of the first community of Jerusalem, it brings together to live in Jesus believers who have felt the same special invitation.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental truth, therefore, to be accepted in faith, is that notwithstanding the obvious weaknesses of our communities it is neither spontaneous fellow-feeling nor the desire to work together that unites us, or at least gives rise to our deeper unity, nor is it on our own initiative that we commit ourselves to apostolic work; *it is God himself who unites us and keeps us united*. God the Father "calls us to live in community" (C 50) by his Word, which in the Son never ceases to gather us together (C 87), and by his Love, the Holy Spirit, which he diffuses in our hearts.

Again it is the Father who sends us to work in his vineyard and the Risen Son who sends us his Pentecostal Spirit, so that we can go and raise up disciples: art. 55, speaking of the rector in the community, said that he "represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father".

*Our life of prayer is founded entirely on these convictions of faith.* We read in the Acts of the SGC: "The moments of reunion in prayer of our 'little Church' are an expression of the great 'praying community' which is the universal Church".<sup>3</sup>

It is pleasant to call to mind the significant expression of our Father Don Bosco, who said that prayer was the foundation of his Oratory:

<sup>1</sup> LG 4

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II looked at religious life in this perspective, cf. LG 43-44; PC 1, 2, and especially 15. cf. J. AUBRY, *La vita religiosa nella sua dimensione ecclesiale*, in "Teologia della vita religiosa", LDC Turin, 1980, p. 47-59

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 538

"I have called this place an Oratory to make it strikingly clear that prayer is ultimately the only means on which we can rely".<sup>4</sup>

### The community recognizes God's initiative

Evidently a community must seek a way of living permanently its "mystery" in communal relations and apostolic tasks. But it is absolutely necessary that it be directly aware of it, that it express it visibly and that it reactivate its power at certain times and in certain specific ways: this is the radical sense of its explicit prayer.

When a salesian community prays, it evidently attains all the purposes of christian prayer, but it does more than that: it reasserts itself as a specific community within the bosom of the Church, it rediscovers its deep identity, it renews its ability to really live its fraternal communion and its apostolic service. A community which did not pray would gradually lose the sense of its own identity and destroy its own roots, through forgetting "its intimate and living relationship with God".<sup>5</sup> Evidently it is not primarily a case of quantity, but of truth and quality.

In this way, in "dialogue with the Lord", as our prayer is defined in an overall manner, our own part is clearly specified: it is always a *response* to God who never ceases to take the initiative by his presence and action. And so prayer is both a gift (the "gift of prayer", in the words of the article's title) and also the loving response of sons.

To understand this is of truly fundamental importance: to the possible temptation to doubt whether the God we invoke really hears us and listens to us attentively, our faith immediately reacts: "How could he not hear us who has made us, who holds us in his hands and who sent us to serve him?"

The article ends by recalling the apostolic aspect of prayer: the praying community "*deepens its awareness of its saving mission*". It

<sup>4</sup> BM III, 73

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 538-539

is a salesian community which prays, but even in its moments of deepest contemplation it can never lose sight of youth to be saved! It was a happy idea to quote our motto at this point: it reminds us that it is in fact a prayer, and invocation by which we recognize the divine source of our zeal: "*Tu, Domine, da mihi animas — give me souls, O Lord, that I may be able to give them back to you!*" Prayer, for a salesian, means always the gaining of a new awareness being sent to young people by the Lord himself. The following article will develop this truth.

*God our Father,  
in the power of the Risen Christ  
you have brought our community together in unity  
and keep it united by your Word and your Love.  
Make the awareness of our bond with you  
living and efficacious in us,  
and grant that following the example of Don Bosco,  
we may ask you every day:  
"Give me souls; take all the rest away".  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 86 SALESIAN PRAYER

Docile to the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco lived an experience of humble, trusting and apostolic prayer in which praying and living were spontaneously united.

We learn from him to recognize the action of grace in the lives of the young; we pray for them so that the design of the Father may be fulfilled in each of them, and we pray with them that we may witness to our own faith and share the same hope of salvation.

Salesian prayer is joyful and creative, simple and profound. It lends itself to community participation, is drawn from life experience and flows back into it.

Our prayer draws its typically salesian characteristics from the fact that it is the prayer of apostles dedicated to the good of youth.

Chapter II on the "salesian spirit" has already described an important element of salesian piety: the continual union with God or spirit of prayer, even in activity, an aspect to which we shall return at the end of the present chapter. The present art. 86 outlines the overall style of our explicit prayer in three steps:

- Don Bosco is our model;
- the young have a place in our prayer;
- from these two facts derive the typical features of our prayer.

### Don Bosco, our model in prayer

*"We learn from him...":* Don Bosco is generally put before us as a model of activity and less frequently as a model of prayer; it is therefore of great significance that the Constitutions refer us to his experience as a holy priest and educator, who prayed a lot more than would externally appear. This was the fact that inspired Don Ceria's book, "Don Bosco con Dio".

Many have borne witness to Don Bosco's spirit of prayer. It can be said, declared Don Barberis during the beatification process, "that he was always praying; I have seen him hundreds of times in prayer as he went up and down stairs. He prayed as he went from one place to another. On journeys, when he was not correcting printers' proofs, I saw him always praying".<sup>1</sup> And Don Rua added: "Many times I came upon him absorbed in prayer during his brief moments of respite".<sup>2</sup>

He considered prayer as a voluntary sharing by God of his omnipotence with human weakness, and he gave to it absolute priority: "Prayer is the most important thing", he used to say; "nothing is begun well unless it starts from heaven".

Prayer was for him the work par excellence, because "it obtains everything and triumphs over everything". It is like "water for the fish, air for the bird, running streams for the deer, warmth for the body". "Prayer does violence to the heart of God".<sup>3</sup> "Woe to those who neglect prayer",<sup>4</sup> he would repeat. "Prayer is ultimately the only means on which we can rely".<sup>5</sup>

With absolute truth Don Ceria was able to write: "In Don Bosco the spirit of prayer was what the martial spirit is to a good army officer, or the spirit of observation to a good artist or scientist: an habitual disposition of the soul, readily activated with constancy and great delight".<sup>6</sup>

Later we shall analyze in the second and third paragraphs the features of prayer as seen in Don Bosco. For the moment we merely take note of the fact. We shall find the right style for our prayer *by taking a long look at the Founder*. His style is, in fact, part of the charism

<sup>1</sup> D. BARBERIS, *Summarium super virtutibus*, Unione con Dio

<sup>2</sup> BM IV, 318

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM III, 250; MB XII, 626; MB XV, 492; cf. also for a synthesis of the importance attributed to prayer by Don Bosco, P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo - profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 99

<sup>4</sup> BM IX, 98

<sup>5</sup> BM III, 73

<sup>6</sup> E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, p. 105-106

we receive as a precious heritage. If we too are docile to the Spirit, our prayer will not only be imbued with the apostolic slant of the "da mihi animas", as was said at the end of the preceding article, but will also be expressed externally in forms suited to our youth ministry.

### The young have a place in our prayer

How did Don Bosco pray? To sum up Don Bosco's way of praying, we could say that his prayer was that of a man of God who had no other aim than the salvation of youth: even in prayer he lived "the spiritual and educational experience" of the preventive system, as was said in art. 20 and 21.

From this fact the Constitutions deduce that *salesian prayer is that of an apostle and an educator* who has given his life to the Lord in a commitment to the salvation of the young. As was the case with Don Bosco, so also in the salesian, prayer is an indispensable factor which *precedes, accompanies, and follows up activity*. It *precedes* it, because it is in prayer that the apostle thinks out his activity in God and according to God, and directs it to the divine will and glory. It *accompanies* it, constantly referring it to the Lord with the request for grace and help, especially in moments of fatigue and difficulty. "Let us never lose heart in the face of dangers and difficulties", Don Bosco exhorts us; "if we pray with confidence to God he will give us his help". It *follows it up*, as an act of thanksgiving: "How good the Lord is!" "God's works are wonderful".<sup>7</sup>

In this prayer, marked by educational and apostolic experience, *young people are therefore present*. The Rule indicates the various ways in which this can happen.

In the first place they are *present spiritually*: "We pray for them". The young automatically enter our prayers and intentions: we pray for their happiness in time and eternity, that they may be open to the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. BROCARDO, o.c., p. 100-101



mysterious action of grace so that our efforts may bear fruit; synthetically, we pray for them "so that God's will may be fulfilled in each of them", an expression which reminds us to pray not only for "youth" in general, nor even for our own particular group, but indeed for each one individually. Every now and then the salesian will go into the chapel taking with him a list of all the boys of his class or oratory, and bring them one by one before our Lord or our Blessed Lady, recalling the name and appearance of each. He prays not only for them but in their name, and during this kind of prayer he will certainly not become bored!

But the *physical presence* of the youngsters is not ruled out: "*We pray with them*", in application of the principle of educational living together after the manner of a family. And how many consequences there are for our prayer! Two immediately come to mind. We cannot accept a style of prayer which is too high-flown, too intellectual and severe; it must be at their level. If youngsters find it hard to join in our prayer and find it neither revealing nor attractive, it means that it is not very salesian and needs "rejuvenating". We and they together must manage to "*share the same hope of salvation*".

A second consequence: "we pray with them *that we may witness to our own faith*". One of our tasks is that of educating young people to prayer. It would be just about the limit if the educators were not the first to pray and to be able to pray "in spirit and in truth"! A youngster in a group making a retreat once asked the preacher: "Father, you have said a lot of wonderful things about prayer; but now we would like you to tell us in just a few minutes how you pray yourself". Prayer is one of those things which is learned a little bit from words and a great deal by an initiation process. "We walk side by side with the young... we introduce them to an active participation in the liturgy... with them we celebrate...", say articles 34 and 36. Our prayer must be a *practical school of prayer* as well.

## The salesian style of prayer

We have given a brief sketch of Don Bosco as a man of prayer and have spoken of the importance he attributed to it for the fulfil-

ment of his mission. But the Constitutions also list some of the principal characteristics of his prayer and of that of the salesian: a prayer which is genuine and substantially complete, simple and straightforward in form, popular in content, joyful and festive in expression; a prayer within the capabilities of all, of children and humble folk in particular, and a prayer finally which is intrinsically geared to action.

Combining the first paragraph on the "prayer of Don Bosco" with the third on the "prayer of the salesian", we can detect no fewer than ten features of what can be called the "salesian style of prayer". Here we shall consider just three of them: *simplicity*, *liveliness*, and *truth*, three qualities which appeal to youth and to ordinary people.

— *Simplicity*. Salesian prayer is called "simple, humble and trusting". It is simple in its gospel inspiration, in its quantity and in its external expression. The salesian "experiences the fatherhood of God", and "prays in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy ... with the Father whom he feels close at hand" (C 12). He rejects prayers that are too long and tiring, and which risk becoming boring (certainly there is nothing to prevent anyone who wants to pray longer from doing so). He is not fond either of high-flown formulas, complicated rites, and from too flashy or emotional external expression, and from anything that might in practice reserve prayer to a chosen few.

— *Liveliness*. For Don Bosco, "simple" was not the same thing as "passive". Salesian prayer is described in the article as joyful, creative and open to community participation. The salesian "radiates joy and is able to educate to a christian and educative way of life: 'Let us serve the Lord in holy joy'" (C 17). Don Bosco always wanted the liturgy to be well carried out in an attractive manner, with singing and music, and with a certain balanced variety that held the attention, renewed interior joy, and made those present feel how wonderful! it was to be with God!

— *Truth* or authenticity. Simple and joyful prayer did not mean for Don Bosco that it would be superficial. Salesian prayer should be deep or profound, in the sense that it spontaneously links prayer with life; it "is drawn from life experience and flows back into it". It starts from a sincere and piously animated heart, rejects conformity and formality, and wants authentic formulas, dignified gestures and celebra-

tions which have an incidence on life to transform it little by little into a "liturgy" and spiritual cult.

If we want to sum up the content of this article, we might go back to the text from St. Paul quoted at the beginning of the chapter: "Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God... and do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3, 16-17).

The SGC in outlining the "style of prayer" of the salesian, in addition to speaking of "simple and vital prayer", points out among its characteristics: openness to the sacramental world, and special confidence in Mary.<sup>8</sup> Later articles (cf. C 80, 90, 92) will deal specifically with these elements.

*Lord Jesus,  
you taught your disciples to pray.  
Teach us also to pray as Don Bosco prayed,  
with the simplicity and trust of children,  
with the joy and creativity of the young,  
and with the burning zest of apostles.*

*Help us to prolong our prayer  
into the whole of our life,  
so that we may cooperate  
with your designs of grace for young people  
and in union with you contribute to their salvation.*

*You live and reign for ever and ever.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. SGC, 103-105

## ART. 87 THE COMMUNITY ATTENTIVE TO THE WORD

The people of God are gathered before all else by the Word of the living God.<sup>1</sup>

For us the Word, listened to with faith, is 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.

With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand,<sup>2</sup> we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart,<sup>3</sup> so that it will bear fruit and we may proclaim it with zeal.

<sup>1</sup> cf. PO 4

<sup>2</sup> cf. PC 6

<sup>3</sup> cf. Lk 2,19.51

Articles 87, 88 and 89 form a small block indicating the three major forms of the liturgical life and prayer of the community and individual salesian: listening to the Word, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the sanctification of time during the liturgical year through the divine Office.

The first attitude of the praying community is not that of speaking; as in the case of every believer, it must be silent and listen. In fact the "living God", who has brought the community together and who keeps it united, never ceases to speak: to humbly listen to him is the most meaningful way of acknowledging the primacy of his initiative.

One paragraph explains the benefits of listening to the Word in faith. A further paragraph speaks of the reactions of the community in this regard. We may note that everything said of the community applies equally to the individual salesian.

### What the Word of God implies

The article's first and second paragraphs briefly recall the fundamental role of the Word of God in every christian community, and

therefore with greater reason in every religious apostolic community,<sup>1</sup> whose members profess to obey the Word and have the mission of educating others to accept it in faith. The article draws largely on the conciliar texts for its formulation.

The Word of God is not just a simple literary expression nor an "empty" word. It is God himself who is speaking, and for this reason we can understand why and to what extent it can be efficacious. It is first of all a uniting force, because God addresses himself to men in the first place to "call them together" and implant in all of them the same response. The decree "Presbyterorum ordinis", quoted in the article is quite definite about this fact: the first task of priests is that of announcing the Good News "so as to set up and increase the people of God. For by the saving Word of God faith is aroused in the heart of unbelievers ... and by this faith the congregation of the faithful begins and grows".<sup>2</sup>

In this "community of believers" the Word produces a series of benefits which the conciliar Constitution "Dei Verbum" describes as follows: "Such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve ... the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life".<sup>3</sup> And further on in the same document: "It should be remembered, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man".<sup>4</sup> "Strength", "food", and "source of life" (*robur, cibus, fons*) are all expressions included in our text.

The first expression emphasized in the article is rather like a synthesis of the whole content: the Word is in general a "source of spiritual life". Under this aspect it spreads its fertile influence in three directions: it gives rise to the response of prayer, it makes known the will of the Father, and it helps in its practical realization.

<sup>1</sup> For clarification of this point, cf. SGC, 540; cf. also SGC, doc. III "Evangelization and catechesis", especially 283-288, 339-340

<sup>2</sup> PO 4

<sup>3</sup> DV 21

<sup>4</sup> DV 25

Hence to pray in truth, to know what it should do, to be able to bring to the Kingdom of God its own contribution, the salesian community must lend a willing ear. This is precisely what is said in the third paragraph, which puts the community face to face with the Word.

### The community face to face with the Word

Through every saving event God speaks to us of his design of salvation centred in Jesus Christ. But his Word is found substantially and in writing in Sacred Scripture:<sup>5</sup> and to this therefore the community is directed in a special way, as is explicitly stated in the decree "Perfectae caritatis" and the Constitution "Dei Verbum".<sup>6</sup> "*With the Sacred Scriptures in hand*" means, in the context, to read them (or hear them read) and meditate on them. "*Daily*" clearly implies that the reference is not to a merely occasional reading: the Bible is food for every day! It is a matter of learning, especially from the Gospel, "the highest knowledge of Jesus Christ" (cf. C 34), which is a knowledge infinite in depth.

The conciliar text suggests various attitudes which the community and the individual should display before the Word of God. They should:

- *listen to it* with humility at suitable times and in various ways;
- *accept it* in heart with docility as the supreme criterion, and hence let themselves be judged by it: this is the act of faith,<sup>7</sup> of which Mary is the perfect model;
- *preserve it* in life, where it produces its fruit;
- *proclaim it* with zeal in the apostolate.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. DV 9-10

<sup>6</sup> Cf. PC 6; DV 25

<sup>7</sup> Cf. DV 5

These are radical commitments for a salesian community and for each of its members: the Word must enter our ears (we "listen" to it), descend into our hearts (we "welcome" it), pass into our hands (we "practise" it), and issue from our mouth (we "proclaim" it). This imposes four serious obligations on us: the duty of learning to be silent and listen, to acknowledge our radical poverty, to bear witness to the Word, and zealously to commit ourselves to spread it abroad. But it may be that in the first place this will give rise to an immediate practical problem: the members of the community must agree on the times and concrete ways in which they will listen in common to the Word of God.

As far as the individual salesian is concerned, here is applicable what art. 93 says about "personal prayer", understood as intimate meditation on the Word of God.

The SGC comes to the conclusion: The Word of God "is a concrete Word, which questions our community and each of us personally on the here and now of our existence: it is a 'living and effective Word' (Heb 4,12), 'incessantly at work' (DV 8), and of necessity calling for a reply which will be expressed in our personal and community life".<sup>8</sup> The Constitutions have given us the timely indication that the most significant moments of our community life, those of seeking and fulfilling the divine will, are indicated for us by the Word of God (cf. C 66).

*God our Father, grant us full docility  
in listening to your Word.  
May it be for us the source and food of life,  
strength in fidelity, and light for our path,  
so that by its daily meditation,  
we may like Mary draw fruit from it for ourselves,  
and proclaim it efficaciously to our fellow men.*

<sup>8</sup> SGC, 540

## ART. 88 THE COMMUNITY MADE ONE BY THE EUCHARIST

The hearing of the Word finds its privileged place in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is the central act of every salesian community: it is a daily festive celebration in a living liturgy.

There the community celebrates the paschal mystery and unites itself to the immaculate body of Christ, which it receives so as to build itself in him into a fraternal communion and renew its apostolic commitment.

Concelebration stresses the richness of this mystery: it expresses the triple unity of sacrifice, priesthood and community, a community whose members are all at the service of the same mission.

For us sons of Don Bosco the eucharistic presence in our houses is a reason for frequent encounters with Christ. From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young.

In the Church, the Word always reaches its climax in the Sacrament: what is proclaimed in the former is brought about in a mysterious manner in the latter. Hence the article on the Word leads quite logically to that of the Eucharist, which is at one and the same time the "privileged place" for the hearing of the Word and its living realization.

The article deals in its four paragraphs with two related themes: the communal eucharistic celebration (the first three paragraphs), and the eucharistic presence which gives rise to personal eucharistic devotion (final paragraph). As regards the first theme, the text considers both the significance of the Eucharist for the community, and the active participation in it of the celebrating community. We shall reflect separately on these various aspects.

It will be useful to keep in mind what Don Bosco has passed on to us, and to remember the essential role of the Eucharist in his own life. Reference has been already made, when speaking of our mission and educational method, to the central position of the Eucharist in Don Bosco's thought (cf. C 36), but it can also be said quite certainly that the Eucharist is one of the columns on which is built the whole edifice of the holiness of our Founder and of his sons.



To Don Bosco's burning love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament many passages in the "Biographical Memoirs" bear witness: "When he preached on Our Lord's love for us", writes his biographer, "he would often weep and bring tears to the eyes of his hearers. Even during recreation time, if the conversation turned to the subject of the Holy Eucharist, his face would light up with holy ardour. He frequently said to the youngsters: 'My dear boys, if you want to be truly happy, love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with all your hearts.'"<sup>1</sup>

Although Don Bosco's eucharistic doctrine did not have the ecclesial breadth of Vatican II (it obviously depended on the theology of the time), we can see very well what a living reality the Eucharist was for him, the true and living presence of the risen Christ under the sign of bread; and the eucharistic table and the tabernacle are still at the present day the places where one can have a real and vital meeting with him. Through communion Don Bosco lived a strong and tender concrete relationship with Christ, and wanted his boys to have the same love: "How happy I would be if I could kindle in you a spark of this great love for Mary and for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament... To do so I would be willing to crawl and lick the ground from here to Superga".<sup>2</sup>

With this brief look back to our Founder, we are now in a better position to understand the text of the article.

## The action on the community of Christ in the Eucharist

The eucharistic celebration is called by the Council "the source and summit of all preaching of the Gospel ... the centre of the assembly of the faithful", "the centre and culmination of the entire life of the christian community".<sup>3</sup> "However, no christian community is built up

<sup>1</sup> BM IV, 317

<sup>2</sup> BM VII, 410; on the eucharistic doctrine of Don Bosco, cf. also J. AUBRY, *L'Eucaristia nella prassi salesiana in "Rinnovare la nostra vita salesiana"* LDC Turin 1981, vol I, p. 176 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PO 5; CD 30. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Consilium* applies these expressions to the liturgy itself, of which the heart is the Eucharist: "The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows" (SC 10), as is recalled in C 36

which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist; from this all education for community spirit must begin".<sup>4</sup>

With all the more reason can these strong expressions be applied to a community of religious apostles. With the Eucharist the salesian community receives two fundamental benefits: it is rebuilt in Christ in fraternal communion, and it finds in him the enthusiasm for renewed apostolic commitment. Two brief explanatory phrases, but pregnant with meaning.

With the Eucharist the community "*celebrates the pascal mystery*", the mystery which was said in art. 85 to have given rise to the Church itself. The death of Christ has destroyed all divisions, and his new life in the Spirit is the principle of deep unity among those who are saved. By celebrating the Eucharist the salesian community truly celebrates the Act of redeeming love which was and always remains the source of its unity.

Moreover, the community "*unites itself to the immolated body of Christ*": to be united to the eucharistic Body of Christ means to be inserted in his mystical Body, according to the great doctrine of St Paul;<sup>5</sup> union with Christ implies communion between ourselves in him. The concrete nature of the sacrament makes the assertion of art. 85 shine in all its splendour; God it is "who keeps our community united", and the Body of his Son continually rebuilds it, in the measure of the living faith of the participants, stimulated by fraternal charity.

Speaking of this reality, the SGC commented: "In the unceasing task of constructing the community it is precisely the Eucharist that is the fundamental and decisive instrument, the 'sign and cause' of that unity, both the leaven and what unity demands. It is, in other words, the sign of that unity which is the goal of our life. It is this however in the measure in which in reality we already live and dedicate ourselves to the task of reaching communion with each other. Only to this extent is the sacrament also a 'cause' of unity".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> PO 6

<sup>5</sup> "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10,16-17)

<sup>6</sup> SGC, 543

But in the celebration of the Eucharist, the salesian community *opens itself energetically to apostolic horizons* and nourishes, as well as fraternal charity, its pastoral charity too. The SGC says once again: "The Eucharist is the point of departure and point of arrival of all the community's apostolic activity".<sup>7</sup> In offering the paschal mystery it takes into its own hands the concrete existence of youngsters and of the faithful in general, to transform them in the offering of Christ to the glory of the Father. Communicating in the Body of Christ, the members take to themselves the Good Shepherd who has given his life for his sheep, and prepare to immolate themselves for the good of the young, becoming themselves too in this way the bread which saves and gives life.<sup>8</sup>

### **Active participation of the community in the Eucharist**

But the extent of these wonderful fruits is governed by the living faith of the "celebrants". This faith is already invoked indirectly in the first paragraph, where the Eucharist is spoken of as a *"daily festive celebration in a living liturgy"*. Is there here, perhaps, a contradiction in terms? Can a feast remain a feast if it is celebrated every day? What is meant here is that the Eucharist must be celebrated as the festive moment of each day, in the conviction of its quite extraordinary value. It calls, therefore, for an intimate preparation, for an attentive and loving heart. Externally too it calls for a style of celebration which helps to stimulate faith. A 'living liturgy' is one which rejects routine, which every day finds space for creative freedom while always remaining faithful to the Church's rites, which allows every individual to participate actively. The time given to deep and intensive thanksgiving for the gift received is a sign of love and of the beginning of that constant contact with Christ which will be prolonged throughout the day.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> "By being nourished with Christ's Body, priests share in the charity of him who gives himself as food to the faithful" (PO 13)

In the community, united as a family around the Eucharist, particular significance attaches to *concelebration*, recommended by the Constitutions. This offers the possibility for a "living liturgy", directly linked to the communal aspect of the eucharistic mystery. Concelebration manifests, in fact, a triple unity: "*the unity of the sacrifice*", since the Masses celebrated by different priests are all the one sacrifice of Christ (the only thing multiplied is the sacramental rite); "*the unity of the priesthood*", since the different priests are nothing else than efficacious signs of the one High Priest who offers his sacrifice (all that is multiplied is the sacramental re-actualization); and "*the unity of the community*", gathered around the same altar for one and the same celebration, in which each one plays the priestly role (ministerial or common) which is properly his.

This community may nevertheless be thought of at two levels: the salesian community alone, whose members all commit themselves anew to the same task and, better still, the community extended to include youngsters and others; around the altar the salesian community then appears as a body united for the service of a group of believers within a wider ecclesial community.

### **The eucharistic presence and the devotion to which it gives rise**

The final paragraph touches on an aspect which is largely personal and no longer explicitly liturgical. It deals with "*the eucharistic presence in our houses*" and the devotion to which it gives rise. "*For us sons of Don Bosco*", the chapel with the tabernacle is the living heart of the house and of the community. The "frequent encounters with Christ" refer to what salesian tradition calls "visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament". We know what great store Don Bosco set by this practice and how much he recommended it to both salesians and boys. The Council recommends it explicitly in the case of priests: "Priests should love to talk daily with Christ the Lord in their visit to the most Blessed Sacrament and in their personal devotion to it".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> PO 18

It is well to recall the significance of this devotion, so well expressed in the Instruction "Eucaristicum mysterium".<sup>10</sup> In the first place it remains strictly dependent on the eucharistic celebration: "This presence derives from the sacrifice and is directed towards both sacramental and spiritual communion", i.e. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is always the Christ who is both Victim and Food. But on the other hand the devotion has a different objective: the Mass is the liturgical action of Christ and the assembly, offered to the Father; eucharistic devotion is addressed to the sacramental Christ in forms which are private in character. Its essential fruit is to stimulate faith and love towards Christ the redeemer. The article of the Constitutions well says: "*From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young*".

Don Bosco tells us: "Let us go frequently to visit Jesus in the churches where day and night he waits for us... Friends in this world find so much pleasure in each other's company that they sometimes waste whole days so as to stay together. So why shouldn't we find some time during the day to visit the best friend of all? Oh, how lovely is Jesus' company! ... Who could ever express the extent of the joy felt by St John at the Last Supper when, sitting at Jesus' side, he was able to lay his head on the divine breast, like a baby in its mother's arms? We should feel a similar joy when we visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament".<sup>11</sup>

*God our Father,  
in the Eucharist you enable us to relive  
the paschal mystery of your Son,  
in our communion with his Body and Blood.  
By the strength of this sacrament of love  
consolidate our unity as brothers,  
and give fresh life  
to our dedication as apostles.*

<sup>10</sup> *Eucaristicum mysterium*, 25 May 1967, n. 50

<sup>11</sup> G. BOSCO, "Nove giorni consecrati all'augusta Madre del Salvatore, sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice," 1870, in OE XXII, p. 330-331

*Grant that we may celebrate the Eucharist  
as a "daily feast",  
and that from frequent meetings with the Lord Jesus  
we may derive energy for our mission among youth,  
and constancy to bring it to fulfilment.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 89 THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN TIME

The Liturgy of the Hours extends the grace of the eucharistic mystery throughout the day.<sup>1</sup>

The community, united to Christ and to the Church, praises and makes supplication to the Father, nourishes its union with him<sup>2</sup> and maintains an attentive attitude to the divine will. Without prejudice to the obligations assumed by clerics at their ordination,<sup>3</sup> the community celebrates Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer with the dignity and fervour that Don Bosco recommended.

Sunday is the day of Easter joy. Lived in apostolic activity, piety and cheerfulness, it reinvigorates the salesian's confidence and optimism.

The commemoration of the mysteries of the Lord, as they occur in the liturgical year, makes of our life a time of salvation in hope.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. IGLH 10, 12

<sup>2</sup> cf. LG 3

<sup>3</sup> cf. CIC, Can. 1174,1

<sup>4</sup> cf. SC 102

Art. 89 sets out the manner in which the salesian community takes part in the liturgical life of the Church according to the daily, weekly and yearly rhythms. The whole of cosmic time and history is sanctified in this way, i.e. is offered to the glory of the Father and used to communicate to us Christ's salvation.

### Daily rhythm: the Liturgy of the Hours

The opening phrase serves to connect this article with the preceding one, and shows how the Liturgy of the Hours is linked with the central mystery of the Eucharist. The phrase is taken from a Council text<sup>1</sup> and from an expression in the "General Instruction on the Liturgy of the

<sup>1</sup> PO 5

Hours": "The Liturgy of the Hours extends to the different hours of the day the praise and prayer, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation and the foretaste of heavenly glory, which are offered to us in the eucharistic mystery, the centre and culmination of the whole life of the christian community".<sup>2</sup> But the Instruction makes clear that it is in itself also an excellent preparation for the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist.

The salesian community, deeply inserted as it is in the Church of which it is a living part, by the visible expression of the mystery of its total consecration to God (cf. C 85), enters quite naturally into the liturgical prayer of the divine Office, and endeavours to understand in faith its divine grandeur: "It is the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to the Father".<sup>3</sup> The spiritual advantage that derives from this "praise and supplication to the Father" consists in progress in a loving communion with him<sup>4</sup> and in active fidelity to his will.

One thing should be very clear: the Liturgy of the Hours is not something reserved to priests or contemplatives. It is the official prayer of all the People of God. We need only note (as indeed the article itself does with regard to clerics) that some members of the Church receive an explicit mandate to celebrate it in the name of all: they are deacons, priests, and orders of canons, monks and nuns who are bound by law or their constitutions to choral office;<sup>5</sup> but this does not mean that they pray *instead* of all others. "The prayer of the Hours is proposed to all the faithful, even to those who are not bound by law to recite it".<sup>6</sup> In the case of religious, the Council is precise: "Any religious who in virtue of their constitutions recite parts of the divine office, are thereby joining in the public prayer of the church".<sup>7</sup> Finally it should be noted

<sup>2</sup> "Instructio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum" (IGLH), 25 March 1971, n. 12

<sup>3</sup> SC 84

<sup>4</sup> Union with the Father rather than with Christ, as the note suggests which refers us to LG 3, where union with Christ is presented as a fruit of the Eucharist

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SC 95-96; IGLH 28-32

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Laudis canticum*, 1 Nov. 1970, n. 8; cf. SC 100 (participation of the laity) and IGLH 32

<sup>7</sup> SC 98



that "although the private prayer of members of the Church is always necessary, ... community prayer has a special dignity (Mt 18,20)". "Celebration in common shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of the Liturgy of the Hours... Therefore whenever possible communal celebration is to be preferred to individual and quasi-private celebration".<sup>8</sup>

These notes will be useful for a full understanding of the constitutional norm (made more specific in art. 70 of the General Regulations): "Without prejudice to the obligations assumed by clerics at their ordination, the community celebrates Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer". Why Lauds and Vespers? Because "by the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds and Vespers are the two hinges on which the daily office turns and are to be celebrated as such".<sup>9</sup>

The verb used both here and in the Regulations should be noted. The Hours are "*celebrated*" and not simply "recited": even though there may be only rarely a "celebrant" who presides, they are always celebrated because of their character as "prayer of the Church".

The concluding phrase of the paragraph is an encouragement to carry out the celebration with "dignity and fervour", even when there is no special solemnity. We know that Don Bosco wanted prayer to be "complete", i.e. that it should have the double characteristics of external dignity and internal fervour: each of these should contribute to the other. But Don Bosco's recommendation referred to here was in fact more precise: in an article of the first Constitutions he asked for a "clear, devout and distinct pronunciation of the words of the divine office", and he presented this as a salesian characteristic.<sup>10</sup>

In this context it may be helpful to recall that art. 70 of the Regulations adds: "Other prayers may be substituted according to circumstances". Far from being a contradiction of the general norm expressed above, this specification emphasizes the importance of daily prayer also for those in particular circumstances (for instance those who are sick) who are not able to celebrate Lauds and Vespers; with other

<sup>8</sup> IGLH 9, 33; cf. IGLH 20-27

<sup>9</sup> SC 89 and IGLH 37-40 explain at length the precise and rich significance of Lauds and Vespers

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, XIII, 2 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 183)

forms of prayer they unite themselves with the praying community, offering with them their own sacrifice of praise.

### **Weekly and yearly rhythm: Sundays and the liturgical year**

The third paragraph invites the salesian to celebrate fervently *Sunday*, "*the day of Easter joy*", because it is the day of Christ's resurrection and of the christian assembly, "the original feast day", as the Council calls it.<sup>11</sup> For the salesian it is usually a day of heavy work, often different from his ordinary work during the week: deeply "apostolic" work in contact with the young and the people. Here, in the manner of celebrating Sunday, is an appropriate place for the application of the typically salesian trilogy: "*work, piety, cheerfulness*", and we can understand how Sunday, lived in such a climate, can give us a taste of the fruits of Christ's paschal mystery, and can contribute especially to the fostering in our heart of the optimism and joy described in the chapter on the salesian spirit (cf. C 17).

The final paragraph broadens the horizon to the entire *liturgical year* and refers us to the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II. The best commentary on the constitutional article is the text of the Council itself: "In the course of the year, Holy Mother Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ... By recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace".<sup>12</sup>

We may say in conclusion that the salesian will live his liturgical life fervently and efficaciously, be it daily, weekly or yearly, to the extent that he is conscious of his role of initiating the young to this same life, as art. 36 of the Constitutions reminds us: "With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ".

<sup>11</sup> SC 106

<sup>12</sup> SC 102

*God our Father,  
may the praise of your holy name fill our days,  
and mark the rhythm of our whole existence,  
in union with your holy Church  
spread throughout time and space.*

*Grant that as seasons and years go by  
we may relive with her  
the mysteries of our salvation,  
and become efficacious disseminators  
of the joy of the Holy Spirit.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 90 THE COMMUNITY IN CONTINUAL CONVERSION

The Word of God calls us to continual conversion.

Aware of our weakness, we respond by vigilance and sincere repentance, brotherly correction, mutual forgiveness and the calm acceptance of our daily cross.

This commitment to conversion on the part of each member and of the whole community is brought to its fulfilment by the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Prepared by the daily examination of conscience and received frequently according to the Church's directives, this sacrament gives us the joy of the Father's pardon, rebuilds brotherly communion, and purifies our apostolic intentions.

We have reached the third group of articles in this chapter. Articles 90 and 91 concentrate on a characteristic aspect of christian and religious life, enlightened by the Word and sanctified by living contact with the Person and mysteries of the Saviour: conversion. This is presented as a permanent requirement, which is nevertheless expressed with particular emphasis in the sacramental act and at certain other times in functions organized for the purpose. In this way we find repeated to a certain extent, for conversion, the tripartite scheme of articles 87-89: Word, Sacrament, History.

The word "*conversion*" is used in both these articles. What exactly does it mean? It might be thought that a generally faithful religious is already converted, and needs only to make progress. But Scripture, the Church, and human experience itself, tell him that sin still finds its way into his life: he needs purification and penance for the purpose of attaining a greater and more authentic love. An expression of the conciliar decree "*Presbyterorum ordinis*", which partly underlies the article, may be enlightening as regards this process: "The repeated sacramental act of penance, prepared for by a daily examination of conscience, is a powerful incentive to the essential turning of the heart to the love of the Father of mercies".<sup>1</sup> It is a matter of *turning towards*

<sup>1</sup> PO 18

*the love* of God and one's fellow men, of passing from a negative to a positive attitude, and maybe still more of passing from an uncertain, meagre and insufficient kind of love to one that is firmer and more generous: a task that never comes to an end!

The Constitutions outline a programme of the efforts needed for this kind of penitential process, and indicate its main recurring points. Some practices are needed continually, some "daily", others "frequently", still others (as will be said in the following article) "monthly" and "annually".

Art. 90 has four paragraphs and two parts: the first two paragraphs define the permanent "commitment to conversion", while the third and fourth refer to the sacramental act of Reconciliation.

### **Continually needed: vigilance and repentance**

Through his Word, God calls man to continual conversion, as is well explained in the "*Ordo Paenitentiae*".<sup>2</sup> At the same time this Word appraises us and never ceases to make us aware of our responsibility and our sin, to invite us to conversion and penance, and to reveal the mercy of God who is always ready to forgive us and set us off once again on the road of reconciliation and love.

To this Word "we respond", both individually in the knowledge of our own weakness, and as a community before the sometimes frightening demands of the common life (patience, mutual tolerance and forgiveness, the struggle against individualism, as was said in speaking of articles 51 and 52). It is a matter of the daily rebuilding of what is destroyed by our selfishness and forgetfulness.

<sup>2</sup> "The sacrament of Penance should begin with a hearing of God's word, because through his word God calls men to repentance and leads them to a true conversion of heart" ("*Ordo Paenitentiae*", n. 24; cf. also n. 1)

Five points are recommended as elements of an attitude for continual conversion:<sup>3</sup>

- *vigilance* (already mentioned in connection with art. 18 as a guard for the heart and for self-mastery), which presupposes awareness of one's innate weakness and leads to trusting abandonment in the hands of the Father;
- sincere *repentance*, implying the will to correct oneself;
- acceptance of one's *daily cross*, a delicately salesian means of expiation in the line of "work and temperance" according to the expression of art. 18: "he accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life";
- *mutual forgiveness and brotherly correction*, which are also indicated by art. 51 and 52 as means for the continual rebuilding of communion;
- *communal penance* on Fridays and during Lent, following art. 73 of the General Regulations.

This ensemble of elements is more than enough for ensuring that the individual salesian and the community are able to undertake a very efficacious penitential process.

## The sacrament of Reconciliation

The expression used in the text should be noted: all this penitential commitment is "brought to fulfilment" by the sacrament, just as is brought to fulfilment the enlightening and transforming action of God started by the Word. Through his mystery and in the name of his Father, Christ the Saviour intervenes visibly to lift up and purify the penitent disciple, who on his side expresses the full awareness of

<sup>3</sup> The "*Ordo Paenitentiae*" speaks of penitential attitudes in the life of the Church in these terms: "The people of God accomplish and perfect this continual repentance in many different ways. They share in the sufferings of Christ by enduring their own difficulties, carry out works of mercy and charity, and adopt ever more fully the outlook of the gospel message; thus they become in the world a sign of conversion to God" (n. 4)

his sin, his desire for conversion to a more realistic love, and his welcoming acceptance of reconciliation with God and with his brothers. On the level of endeavour for conversion, the sacrament has the quality of "source" and "summit" that was attributed to the Eucharist on the level of overall christian life.

From this perspective follow two fundamental and complementary truths. On the one hand the "sacrament of penance" will have little sense or efficacy in a life that is not repentant; and on the other a penitent life which never or rarely makes use of the sacrament will have little support or strength for its relaunching. The two aspects are mutually dependent on each other.

The expression: "this commitment to conversion on the part of each member and whole community", not only emphasizes the communal dimension of the penitential process, but also fits in well with the two forms of the celebration of Reconciliation, individual and communal, with appropriate frequency.

The text points particularly to the fruits resulting from the sacrament; there are three main ones and they touch on the salesian's triple relationship with God and Father, with his brothers, and with the young.

The first, as is only appropriate, is "*the joy of the Father's pardon*", the unfathomable experience of his infinitely patient and merciful love. The cheerfulness to which the salesian bears witness and which he spreads around him (cf. C 17) has its firm foundation in the sacramental encounter with the Father.

The second is the *rebuilding of brotherly communion*, because "those who approach the sacrament of Penance ... are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins;<sup>4</sup> they are therefore disposed for forgiveness and for growth in brotherly love.

And the third is the *purification of our apostolic intentions*: by self-detachment, so as to be converted to the Father, the penitent salesian is ready for a better service of God's glory in a more authentic

<sup>4</sup> LG 11

service of the young; the gift of reconciliation impels him along the road of a more living and loving apostolate!

Finally the Rule tells us that this sacrament should be "*received frequently according to the Church's directives*". A decree of the Congregation for Religious interpreted this as "twice a month", keeping in mind however the "due freedom" asked for by the Council.<sup>5</sup> In deciding the frequency each one will take into account the amplitude of the penitential area in which he is involved; he will therefore have a programme appropriate to his own spiritual endeavour and the ascesis of his daily life, and will give importance to spiritual direction; but at the same time he will be awake to the teaching and example of Don Bosco and the living tradition he has left us.

We cannot conclude without a further reference to our Founder, for whom the process of continual conversion, the effort to defeat sin and be ever more closely conformed to the divine model, were essential features not only of his own holiness, but also of the kind of holiness he proposed to his boys.

We have already seen, in commenting on various articles of the Constitutions, the ascetical commitment lived and proposed by Don Bosco: the ascesis of work and temperance (cf. C 18), the ascesis imposed by a poor life in imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. C 72 and 75), and especially the ascesis connected with obedience and the daily fulfilment of one's duty (cf. C 18, 71).

But it is in the sacrament of Penance, in the encounter with the forgiving Lord, that all penitential efforts find their fulfilment. Don Bosco can be called a true apostle of Confession as a divine means for the salvation of souls. We recall how often he spoke about this sacrament (it was a very frequent topic of the so-called "word in the ear" which he used to say to his boys), but especially we remember the example of his priestly life dedicated to the ministry of hearing confessions.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Dum canonicarum legum*, CRIS 8.12.1970, AAS 63 (1971), p. 318

<sup>6</sup> Don Bosco's biographer emphasizes that the ministry of hearing confessions was one of the things he never renounced at the Oratory; cf. BM XIV, 86. On Don Bosco as a confessor, cf. also E. CERIA, "*Don Bosco con Dio*", chap. X



For Don Bosco, Penance with the Eucharist formed one of the columns on which his preventive system was based<sup>7</sup>, and the sure way to holiness. "Do you want to become saints?", he once asked a group of boys; "here is the secret. Confession is the lock; confidence in your confessor is the key. This is how you open heaven's gates".<sup>8</sup> The biographies he wrote of some of the Oratory boys, Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone, are all a hymn of praise to Confession as a road to holiness.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the frequency of the meeting with our Lord in the sacrament of Penance, we may recall what Don Bosco once said in a Good Night: "If you care but little for your soul, go once a month; if you want to save your soul but are not too eager about it, go every other week; if you want to aim at perfection, go every week. Do not go more often than that unless your conscience bothers you".<sup>10</sup>

*God our Father,  
we carry the inestimable treasure of your life  
in earthenware vessels,  
marked as we are by weakness and sin.*

*Help us to hear your voice  
calling us to continual conversion,  
and grant that we may respond with vigilance,  
sincere repentance,  
and generous brotherly forgiveness.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. D. BOSCO, *The preventive system in the education of the young*, II (Appendix 1984 Constitutions, p. 249); cf. also BM II 412, 119 ff.

<sup>8</sup> BM VII, 37

<sup>9</sup> At the end of his life of Dominic Savio we read: "Do not fail to imitate him by frequent confession, because this was his mainstay in his constant practice of virtue, and it led him securely to such a glorious end. While we live let us approach this healing bath often and with proper dispositions" (cf. OE XI, p. 286)

<sup>10</sup> BM XII, 415

*Reconciled to you through the Passion of Christ  
by means of the sacrament of Penance,  
may we grow in purity and holiness  
and, together with our young people,  
be welcomed to your fatherly embrace.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 91 OPPORTUNE TIMES FOR RENEWAL

Our will for conversion is strengthened in the monthly recollection and in the annual retreat. These are occasions of spiritual renewal which Don Bosco considered the fundamental part and the synthesis of all the practices of piety.<sup>1</sup>

For the community and for every salesian these are privileged moments for listening to the Word of God, discerning his will and purifying our hearts.

These times of grace restore to our spirit a deep unity in the Lord Jesus and keep alive in us the expectation of his return.

<sup>1</sup> cf. C. 1875, (Introduction), p. xxxiv

This article is directly connected with the previous one and presents a third element in the penitential process: they are the significant times for spiritual renewal each month and each year, i.e. the monthly and annual retreats.

It should be noticed that the Constitutions deal with these in connection with the personal and community efforts at "continual conversion", as special times of spiritual revival or renewal, and as particular "times of grace".

The life of the salesian, like that of every apostle immersed in daily activity, is subject to the risk of superficiality and the ravages of time: it is easy to let oneself get over-involved in mechanical activity and never find the necessary time for a pause for deeper thought and contemplation. Every month on the day of retreat, and every year in the spiritual exercises, the community provides time for a spiritual pause, for the purpose of recharging the batteries of the spirit and relaunching it in apostolic service. It is the Lord who invites his followers to "come away by themselves and rest awhile" (cf. Mk 6,31) in greater intimacy with him.

The Rule invites us to give importance to these significant times of the spirit; any temptation to convert them into days of study or discussion must be resisted. Their purpose could not be clearer: it consists first and foremost in *listening (as individuals and as a community) to*

*the Word of God* (cf. C 87), which enables the Lord's will to be discerned for the present moment and his call to conversion to be heard, and consequently in accepting this conversion, i.e. in the *purification of the heart*, made especially through a carefully prepared confession made with living faith. It will be remembered that the previous article ended with a reference to the purifying effect of Reconciliation.

The importance of the monthly and annual retreats was strongly emphasized by Don Bosco. The article refers explicitly to the text of the Introduction to the Constitutions where our Founder says: "The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all, consists in making the spiritual retreat each year and the Exercise for a Happy Death every month... It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may justly be said to be assured, if he approaches the sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order as if he were really about to leave this life for eternity".<sup>1</sup> Don Bosco repeated the same thing in other circumstances too. For instance, he once wrote to a cleric: "Never omit the exercise for a happy death once a month, to examine *quid sit addendum, quid corrigendum, quid tollendum, ut sis bonus miles Christi* (what needs to be added, what corrected, what taken away to be a good soldier of Christ)".<sup>2</sup> Very striking is Don Bosco's insistent recommendation to missionaries to be faithful to this exercise, because in their busy life they have great need of a periodic pause for verification and renewal. In a letter to Don Cagliero in 1876 he wrote: "When you make contact with the confreres, recommend them to never omit the monthly exercise for a happy death. It is the key to everything".<sup>3</sup>

The annual retreat too takes on special importance for the spiritual progress of the individual and the community. Don Bosco did not hesitate to say: "The spiritual exercises can be called the support of religious congregations and the treasure of those who take part in

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to Constitutions* cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 240

<sup>2</sup> Letter to cleric Thomas Pentore, 15 August 1878, cf. *Collected letters*, Vol III, 381

<sup>3</sup> Letter to D. Cagliero, 1 August 1876, *Collected letters*, III, 81; cf. also Souvenir to first missionaries and letters to Don Remotti (IV, 9-10), and to clerics Joseph Quaranta (IV, 10) and Bartholomew Pannaro (IV, 12)

them".<sup>4</sup> In the first draft of the Regulations for Retreats he had written: "Our own humble Society is indebted to them for its great development, and many of its members acknowledge some retreat as being the beginning of a better life".<sup>5</sup>

The article concludes by recalling that the finest fruit of these retreats is the possibility they offer the salesian for unequivocal renewal of his "fundamental option", by putting once again at the centre of his life and whole being the Lord Jesus and His service, and finding in Him with greater vigour the deep unity of his own spirit. In this light can be well understood two further points of Don Bosco: the most decisive act of both the monthly and the annual retreat is the meeting with Christ the Saviour in the two sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist; and secondly the perspective which stimulates the fervour of the salesian is that of the passage of time (the monthly retreat is called "*exercise for a happy death*"): <sup>6</sup> death will be for each one the Lord's return and the full and definitive meeting with him.

Let us make the best possible use of the time that remains to us to love and serve him with all our strength!

*In your mercy, Father,  
you continually renew for us times and moments  
in which to meet your Word and Love.*

<sup>4</sup> Regulations for Retreat, approved by GC3, Introduction

<sup>5</sup> SCA, ms. 23223 (*Fondo Don Bosco*, n. 1942)

<sup>6</sup> In living salesian tradition, the monthly pause was always called "*exercise for a happy death*". Don Bosco presented it under this title and so it was called in the first edition of the Constitutions; in the approved text of 1875, however it appears under the simple name of "spiritual retreat" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 187). The GC22 chose the current modern terminology ("monthly retreat"), which recalls Christ's invitation to draw aside to spend some time with him. It is clear however that the new name covers the substance of all that Don Bosco included in the "*exercise for a happy death*"

*Help us to accept them as times of grace  
for deepening our contact with you,  
for a better discernment of your will,  
and to purify our minds and hearts  
as we attentively await the return of your Christ.  
He lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

## ART. 92 MARY IN THE LIFE AND PRAYER OF THE SALESIAN

Mary, Mother of God, holds a unique place in the history of salvation.

She is a model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family.

We contemplate and imitate her faith, her concern for the needy, her fidelity at the hour of the cross, and her joy at the wonders wrought by the Father.

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.

We develop a strong filial devotion to her. We recite the rosary each day and celebrate her feasts to encourage a more convinced and personal imitation.

The Constitutions have already spoken of the special presence of Mary in the life and mission of the Society (cf. especially C 1, 8, 9). In the present article Mary is presented in the prayer-life of the salesian. She is not only the object of our devotion, but she teaches us how to pray and how to live our apostolic consecration to the full.

The article should be read in the light of the Constitution of Vatican II on the Sacred Liturgy, which says: "In considering the annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honours the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a special love. She is inseparably linked with her Son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be".<sup>1</sup> This text, so dense and wonderful, lets us understand how the mystery of Mary is intimately linked with the mystery of Christ. The presence of Mary in our life is a fact which forms part of our christian vocation, and our devotion is a permanent attitude, even though it reaches a peak on her feasts.

<sup>1</sup> SC 103

Art. 92 has to be tied in with all our christian and salesian history. Our devotion to Mary does not depend on sentimental feelings, but on the lucidity of our faith. It is a recognition of objective facts (dealt with in the first three paragraphs of the article), and the response we make to them (the last two paragraphs).

### Mary's initiative and significance as an example

The first three paragraphs bring together those aspects of the figure of Mary which attract us most as christians and salesians, and constitute the foundation of our devotion to her.

*As christians* we recognize that Mary, through God's good pleasure, "holds a unique place in the history of salvation" and in the building of the Church through the centuries, a place perfectly described in synthesis in the final chapter of the Constitution "Lumen gentium". In her quality as the first of the redeemed and the first christian, Mary is presented to us as the most perfect model after Christ himself, and hence we find in her the most effective model of sanctity.

In a synthesis which follows the principal events in Mary's life, the Constitutions put forward the attitudes which we must "contemplate" and "imitate" in her:

- *her faith* (cf. C 34), i.e. the way in which she "welcomed the Word" and pondered it in her heart (already pointed out in art. 87): this truth takes us to the Annunciation and the "fiat" of the "handmaid of the Lord";
- *her "joy at the wonders wrought by the Father"*, which takes us to the "Magnificat";
- *her "concern for the needy"*: we think of her at the Visitation and at the marriage at Cana;
- *her "fidelity at the hour of the cross"*, the decisive moment of her participation in the salvation of the world: "Standing by the cross of Jesus was his Mother" (Jn 19,25).



As *salesians*, we recognize in Mary other features more explicitly linked with our vocation:

- she is the *teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family*: here we go back to Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine ("I will give you a Teacher under whose guidance you will learn to be wise")<sup>2</sup>, and to the content of art. 8;
- she is the *model of prayer and of pastoral charity* who invites us to realize in ourselves the "tireless industry, made holy by prayer and union with God" which is one of our characteristics, as will be said in art. 95; she is in fact the mother of a family and an active disciple of her Son;
- we remember too what was said in art. 34: "The Virgin Mary is present as a mother" in the journey of our youngsters towards Christ; she "helps and infuses hope".

All this forms part of Don Bosco's spiritual experience. As we have already said in the commentary on art. 8, Don Bosco felt the presence of the Virgin Mary in his life and work as *a living motherly presence, and a powerful helper*.

That Mary most Holy was for Don Bosco a living presence is repeatedly borne out in the Biographical Memoirs. From his dream at the age of nine to the complete realization of all he had seen in that dream, Mary was at Don Bosco's side. She showed him the way to prepare himself for his mission,<sup>3</sup> she guided his steps in the early stages of his work,<sup>4</sup> she pointed out exactly the spot where the work would find a permanent site;<sup>5</sup> she revealed to him the way in which the work would develop,<sup>6</sup> she showed him how to find collaborators,<sup>7</sup> and also how to ensure that they stayed with him;<sup>8</sup> she again it was

<sup>2</sup> BM I, 95

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM I, 96

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM II, 190-191

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BM II, 335

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BM II, 232-234

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BM II, 190-191

<sup>8</sup> Cf. BM II, 232-234

who showed him the style and method of a formation which prepared them for the mission among youth<sup>9</sup> and at the same time let him see the immense field of work destined for the zeal of his sons.<sup>10</sup> Don Bosco's conviction of the living presence of Mary in the Oratory and in every house of the salesians and FMA is shown by the moving words he repeated insistently to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in his last visit to Nizza Monferrato: "The Madonna is really here, here in your midst! She walks around in this house and covers it with her mantle".<sup>11</sup>

This presence of Mary in Don Bosco's house was perceived as the *presence of a Mother*. She was the Mother of the Oratory and of all the boys there: this is how she was always invoked. Don Bosco's biographies of some of the youngsters, and of Dominic Savio in particular, make this very clear. Significant too is the prayer which arose spontaneously from his heart after the death of Mamma Margaret, when he poured out his grief at the feet of the Blessed Virgin in the Sanctuary of the Consolata: "Most compassionate Virgin, my sons and I are without a mother! Please be our mother from now on".<sup>12</sup> Even on his deathbed Don Bosco invoked Mary under her name of Mother: "Mother, Mother... Mary most Holy, Mary, Mary...".<sup>13</sup>

Finally it can never be forgotten that Mary is presented as a *Mother most Powerful, Helper of the Church* and of every christian in his pilgrimage towards the Lord. In this way devotion to Mary becomes, together with the Eucharist, one of the two columns on which the Church and the world can rely: "Believe me, my dear sons, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that frequent Communion is a solid column upon which one pole of the world rests; devotion to Our Lady is the column which supports the other pole".<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM III, 25-27

<sup>10</sup> Cf. MB XVIII, 73-74

<sup>11</sup> MB XVII, 557

<sup>12</sup> BM V, 374

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MB XVIII, 537; cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosita cattolica*, LAS Rome 1969, II, p. 175

<sup>14</sup> BM VII, 352; cf. BM VII, 354

## The response of our devotion

Our response to Mary is an ample one: it is a matter of accepting her presence in our life, of taking this Mother "into our own home", as did the apostle John: it is an integral part, says the Rector Major, of the "salesian phenomenon in the Church", "an essential part of our charism".<sup>15</sup>

From the contemplation of Mary in the two mysteries most frequently referred to in our traditions ("*Mary Immaculate*" and "*Mary Help of Christians*"), we draw two series of benefits. Because she is *Immaculate*, consecrated by God and completely docile to him, "she leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord", especially by means of the evangelical counsels. As Queen of the apostles and *Help of Christians*, at the service of the extension of the Kingdom of her Son, she is a stimulus to us too to fulfil our apostolic mission in favour of our fellow men. Our love for Mary therefore is not a kind of emotional compensation, nor is it an encouragement to the practice of hidden virtues; it is deeply inherent in our vocation as apostles and an element of our zeal in regard to the young people who are her children.

Our devotion to Mary, solidly based on these motives we have set out, is also manifested in acts and attitudes which express joy at having received from the Lord the gift of his Mother. The Constitutions specify that our devotion to her is "strong" and "filial", which not only implies our tenderness to her who is the "Mother most amiable", but also our courage in imitating her in her complete dedication to the will of God.

But external expressions of devotion must not be overlooked, at either individual or community level. The text recalls some of these.

The Marian feasts occurring in the liturgy are excellent occasions for showing our love for Mary<sup>16</sup> and for "making her known and loved" (C 34). Art. 74 of the Regulations recalls some salesian practices: the commemoration on the 24th of the month, the concluding prayer to

<sup>15</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Mary renews the Salesian Family*, ASC 289 (1978), p. 29

<sup>16</sup> Cf. LG 67

the daily meditation, and the frequent use of the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

On the personal level each one has his own way of responding according to his spiritual sensitivity, using the forms he likes best, which however should always lead to a convinced imitation of Mary's virtues.

To this end the daily recital of the Rosary is of special value, because in it "Mary teaches her sons how to unite themselves with the mysteries of Christ". This has always been a precious family tradition in Don Bosco's houses.<sup>17</sup>

*Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church,  
we believe that you hold a unique place  
in the history of salvation,  
and that you are the teacher and guide of our Family.*

*We contemplate with joy and want to imitate  
your faith and docility to the Lord,  
your gratitude for the wonders wrought by the Father,  
your pastoral charity  
and your fidelity at the hour of the cross.*

*We entrust ourselves to you with filial love:  
as the Immaculate Conception  
you educate us to the fullness of self-donation,  
as the Help of Christians  
you give us courage and confidence  
in the service of the People of God.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, 1974, 42-55. After emphasizing the "gospel inspiration" of the Rosary, its "christological orientation" and its contemplative dimension, the Pope speaks of the relationship between the liturgy and the Rosary. About the family aspect of this prayer, he says: "We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer the Rosary is a frequent and favoured manner of praying" (n. 54)

*We ask you, O Holy Virgin,  
to continue to protect each one of us,  
our Congregation and the entire Salesian Family,  
and the young people you entrust to our care.*

## ART. 93 PERSONAL PRAYER

We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer.

Each one needs to express his own personal and heartfelt way of being a son of God, expressing his gratitude, telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate.

For us mental prayer is essential. It strengthens our intimate union with God, saves us from routine, keeps our heart free and fosters our dedication to others. For Don Bosco it is a guarantee of joyous perseverance in our vocation.

In the Introduction to chap. VII of the commentary on the Constitutions it was pointed out that, in developing the content of prayer, there should be present both the communal and personal dimensions.<sup>1</sup> Many of the articles already examined have indicated a certain number of forms of personal prayer, and especially the attitudes that the salesian should cultivate in his own prayer. But this article, and in particular the first paragraph, emphasizes that the importance of communal prayer, on which in general the previous articles have been insisting, must not cause the need for personal prayer to be overlooked. The two forms are, in fact, mutually dependent on each other. The value of communal prayer renders urgent the fostering of personal prayer, on which the quality of the communal prayer depends: how, indeed, could a group of dead members celebrate a living liturgy? The opening phrase of the article is significant: *"We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer"*.

Nevertheless personal prayer cannot be considered solely in connection with the prayer of the community. It has its own specific importance, which is explained in the second paragraph, while the third deals with one of its essential forms, mental prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Introduction to chap. VII, 6: "Communal prayer and personal prayer", p. 665-666

## The sense of personal prayer

Personal prayer is a response to a need which every salesian, as a man of faith and a religious who has given himself to God, feels deep within himself: the need to go into his own room, shut the door, and pray to his Father in the secrecy of that hidden place, which is nevertheless well known to the Father. These are expressions of Christ himself (cf. Mt 6,6), and have been included in the Council's documents.<sup>2</sup>

Communal and personal prayer respond to our two aspects as men and sons of God (referred to at the beginning of this chapter). Before our Father in heaven we together form the ecclesial community which he himself has constituted, which he keeps united and which he sends on a mission (cf. C 85); but each of us is one of his sons, unique in a certain sense, a son personally called and loved (cf. C 22), and bearer of a precise responsibility. To pray "in secret" means to express this "personal way of being a son of God", thanking him for the many gifts he has bestowed; it also means "telling him about the yearnings, and the concerns in the apostolate" which everyone feels within himself in the course of his experiences, successes and failures. The text of the Rule refers, in an incisive manner suitable for an apostle, to the fundamental expressions of christian prayer: *adoration* ("he expresses his own personal way of being a son of God"), *praise and thanksgiving* ("expressing his gratitude"), and *petition* ("telling him about his yearnings and his concerns in the apostolate").

Prayer of this kind is completely spontaneous, and could be called imaginative as well, even though it is true that even personal prayer should be inspired by a liturgical spirit.<sup>3</sup>

We think of Don Bosco and the simple and spontaneous way in which he prayed, a way he had been taught by Mamma Margaret. With true christian wisdom she saw in creation and daily events the presence of God and this she taught to her sons: "One beautiful starry night,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SC 12

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SC 12, 13, 90

she pointed to the sky and told her children: 'God created the world and adorned it with all those stars; if the sky is so beautiful, what must heaven be like?'. In springtime at the sight of the radiant countryside, a flower-strewn meadow or a rosy dawn, she would exclaim: 'How many beautiful things the Lord has created for us!'. When the harvest was good and abundant, she would say: 'Let us give thanks to the Lord! How good he has been in giving us our daily bread.'<sup>4</sup> Don Bosco never forgot this style of prayer, and this is what he taught his boys. On the other hand the same Mamma Margaret, speaking to her son who was now a priest, recommended to him the simple prayers of a good christian, saying: "By all means study your Latin and learn your theology, but your mother knows something more than that: she knows you must pray".<sup>5</sup>

If a salesian did not pray in this more personal way, it would mean that he had lost the sense of the deepest mystery in his life: "Lord, I know that you love me, that you are calling me, and that I can talk to you". Deep in this prayer there lies the practice of faith, hope and charity.

### **Mental prayer. Meditation**

The third paragraph speaks of *mental prayer*, a form of prayer which has always been held in high esteem throughout the history of christian spirituality: the believer applies his heart and spirit to the mystery of God, and enters into conversation with him, meditating on his Word and contemplating his love; in this way mental prayer becomes an expression of contemplative prayer.

We know that there are many forms of mental prayer, and each individual can find many ways of personal dialogue with God; the "frequent encounters with Christ" present in the Tabernacle, referred to in art. 88, are one example.

<sup>4</sup> BM I, 35

<sup>5</sup> BM I, 37



Nevertheless, the Rule asks from us a daily form of mental prayer, called by the traditional name of "*meditation*". This is the name it has in art. 71 of the General Regulations, and it corresponds to a form of the "*lectio divina*", to use the expression characteristic of monastic life.

For us Salesians this form of prayer is well and truly based on the example and teaching of Don Bosco. From the words of our Founder, which he wrote himself in the "*Memoirs of the Oratory*", we can deduce the value he attributed to meditation for his own personal spiritual growth. While still a boy he had been encouraged by Don Calosso to begin meditation, after he had told him of his desire to become a priest: "He recommended me to go frequently to confession and communion, and he taught me how to make a short meditation each day, or better a little spiritual reading".<sup>6</sup> When he received the cassock, we find among the resolutions in the little rule of life that he drew up on that occasion: "in addition to the ordinary practices of piety, I will never omit a short meditation and some spiritual reading".<sup>7</sup> Again, among the resolutions he made at his priestly ordination, one was: "I shall set aside some time every day for meditation and spiritual reading".<sup>8</sup> That Don Bosco later remained faithful to these resolutions in his life of intense priestly activity we do not know from his own hand, but it is quite clear from the evidence of many witnesses, especially in the processes for beatification and canonization, who testified to the habit of mental prayer which had become second nature to him.<sup>9</sup>

We can deduce the importance for his sons that Don Bosco attached to meditation from various passages in the "*Biographical Memoirs*". For Don Rua, who had been appointed Rector of the College of Mirabello in 1863, he wrote a series of recommendations, among which was: "Every morning a little meditation, and during the day a visit to the Blessed Sacrament".<sup>10</sup> When these recommendations developed into the "*Confidential advice to Rectors*", Don Bosco wrote

<sup>6</sup> MO, 36

<sup>7</sup> MO, 88

<sup>8</sup> MO, 115, note; cf. BM I, 385

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the chapter on prayer in P. BROCARDI, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo - profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 96-106

<sup>10</sup> *Collected letters*, vol I, p. 288

more strongly: "Never omit the morning meditation".<sup>11</sup> On 26 September 1868, at the conclusion of a retreat, he spoke of the practices of piety and said: "Our daily practices of piety are meditation, spiritual reading, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the examination of conscience"; then he went on: "I recommend mental prayer... I assure you that the man of faith who visits the Blessed Sacrament and makes a daily meditation with sincerity of heart will not fall into sin".<sup>12</sup> In a handwritten note containing some retreat schemes, we read some considerations of Don Bosco on the importance of meditation: "Be it long or short, always make it. With a book if possible. Let it be a mirror (says St Nilo) in which we can see our vices or lack of virtue... But never omit it. A man without prayer is a man who is lost (St Teresa). It is for the soul what warmth is for the body. Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul".<sup>13</sup>

For his youngsters too Don Bosco suggested a form of meditation suited to their age and condition.<sup>14</sup>

From all these indications we can understand why meditation is for us, sons of Don Bosco, an indispensable form of prayer. We must understand well, in the complexity of its content, the significance of that "half an hour" the Rule asks of us (cf. R 71). On the one hand it is true "meditation", which usually begins from a text of Scripture or the day's liturgy: in which case the paragraph can be interpreted as a natural complement to art. 87, where it was said: "With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand, we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart".<sup>15</sup> Meditation, however, is not limited to reflecting on

<sup>11</sup> Cf. BM X, 447 ff.

<sup>12</sup> BM IX, 166f

<sup>13</sup> MB IX, 007

<sup>14</sup> On this point, cf. "Quaderni di spiritualità salesiana", n. 2 "Meditation", Institute of Spirituality UPS, September 1985, p. 17 ff.

<sup>15</sup> It should be kept in mind that the "Word of God" is found not only in the Bible, but also in the authentic magisterium of the Church and of the Congregation, in the works of the Fathers and Masters of the spiritual life, whose books foster spiritual growth. Underlying all these is the inspiration of the Word of God. But for this Word to be life-giving it must be absorbed interiorly through the process which the Masters of the spiritual life expressed in the following terms which are strictly linked with one another: *lectio*, *meditatio* or '*ruminatio*', *oratio*, *contemplatio*; i.e. what is needed is a meditated reading of a text followed by its interior assimilation; this leads to its expression in prayer, and (often) contemplation

some christian truth; even an atheist could get as far as doing that! But because meditation is on the Word of God, it provokes a response from us and becomes *mental prayer*: a prayer without any explicit words, but in intimate dialogue with the heart of God.

It may be thought surprising that while meditation is proposed in an article of the Constitutions entitled "personal prayer", the corresponding article of the Regulations asks us to make it "in common" (R 71). In reality it is a question of prayer which always remains personal, but which takes place in a communal setting. This is in line with our tradition: in the majority of our communities the daily timetable is arranged to ensure that the confreres have the necessary space for this "essential" prayer by the provision of a suitable place and time. This is a norm dictated by practical salesian common sense. On the other hand it should be remembered that meditation is not the only form of personal mental prayer.

The text also includes a description of some of the purposes and advantages of this kind of prayer. It mentions three of them.

The first and most obvious one concerns our relationship with Christ and with the Father: "*It strengthens our intimate union with God*". Here can be directly applied everything that has been said about personal prayer in general. All authentic love needs periods of close intimacy, and this is impossible unless a certain amount of time is available.

The third purpose or effect concerns our relationships with others: mental prayer "*fosters our dedication to others*". Deep love in fact blossoms out into dedication to others: one who converses with the Lord is always more docile and available for his service.

Between these two effects, the text inserts another, which it puts second and concerns our state of mind and style of life: prayer keeps us alive. The two expressions used ("*saves us from routine*", "*keeps our heart free*") help us to be aware of a great danger that exists. In the course of the day, under the pressure of work and fatigue, our heart can lose its enthusiasm, love can become weaker, and we can drift into mechanical habits; and from that point it is a short step to mediocrity. Personal prayer gives us a breathing space and arouses us again; it enables

us to go ahead once more in creative freedom. Anyone who has once understood this will never again want to leave it aside!

To all this we can add a fatherly and practical thought from Don Bosco: meditation faithfully practised enables us to press on with joy, and so becomes a guarantee of our perseverance.

But one of the most characteristic sayings of our Founder on this point, as also the famous art. 155 of the former Constitutions (on how to make up for it if one is unable to make the meditation), enables us to understand another of our Founder's convictions; meditation opens the salesian to the spirit of prayer which should pervade his entire day and animate all his work, encouraging him to work only for the glory of God. This is the perspective for the third kind of salesian prayer: alongside vocal and mental prayer there are *ejaculatory prayers*, which help to transform the whole of life into prayer, as will be said in the last article of the chapter (C 95).<sup>16</sup>

*I ask you, Father,  
to incite in me a deep desire  
to speak personally with you  
through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.  
Help me to express in my words  
the joy of being your son,  
and grant that I may find in meeting with you  
support for my apostolic life,  
so as to keep always alive  
my love for you and for my brothers,  
and strengthen my dedication to the young.  
I ask you this through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>16</sup> "Ejaculatory" prayers were called by St Augustine "rapid messages sent off to God". Don Bosco was of the same idea: he saw ejaculations as a concentrated sort of prayer: "Ejaculations sum up vocal and mental prayer... they speed to God from the heart; they are like fiery darts which carry the feelings of the heart to God, and which wound the enemies of the soul, like temptations and vices" (MB IX, 997). For Don Bosco they could substitute for meditation in the case of one unable to make the latter: "If you cannot make a normal meditation because of travel or some other urgent duty, do at least what businessmen do; no matter where they are, their thoughts are always on business" (BM IX, 167)

## ART. 94 THE MEMORY OF OUR DEAD CONFRERES

Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace. They have spent their lives in the Congregation, and not a few have suffered even to the point of martyrdom for love of the Lord.

United with them in an exchange of spiritual benefits, we gratefully offer for them the prescribed suffrages.

Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission.

Art. 92, which is complementary to art. 8, reminded us of the presence in our midst of our heavenly Mother. In the first part of the Constitutions, art. 9 told us that "as members of the pilgrim Church, we are conscious of our fellowship with our brothers in the heavenly Kingdom". In turn art. 54, which dealt with the death of the salesian, stated that "the memory of departed confreres unites, in a love that will not pass away, those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ". The Constitutions therefore invite us to invoke our heavenly Protectors and ask for their intercession, and at the same time ask us to pray to the Father for our confreres who now form part of the Church suffering. With all of them we live the wonderful mystery of the communion of saints.

The present article has to be read against this background, enlightened by "faith in the risen Christ" and the hope raised in us by baptism. It insists on "memory" (cf. the title) and "remembrance" (third paragraph): our memory is very short! Explicit and frequent prayer for the dead, stimulated by the daily communal reading of the necrology (cf. R 47) is a family way of "keeping alive" our communion with these confreres.

As we have said, the whole text is a synthesis of the christian doctrine of the communion of saints. Christ, "the first fruit of those who have died", has associated his brothers with his death so as to make them sharers in his resurrection; for this reason we feel that they are living in Christ and are still united with us in a real interchange of

spiritual benefits. Obvious here is the reference to Don Bosco's faith in Paradise, where he wanted to gather together all his sons. Don Rua declared: "He assured us that he had asked for and obtained from our Lord, through the intercession of Mary most holy, a place in heaven for hundreds of thousands of his sons. Incessantly he raised his pupils' minds to heaven, instilling into them a most firm hope of one day being there with him".<sup>1</sup>

We have two reasons for not forgetting, and for intensifying our prayers: *gratitude*, because the Congregation in which we find so many good things was built up through the labours of our departed brothers ("they have spent their lives"), and by their "sufferings"; and also *responsibility for the present and the future*, because we are called to continue the work they began, in fidelity to the same vocation. In this we are stimulated by their example which sometimes took them even "to the point of martyrdom for love of the Lord". The article delicately proposes our dead members as a model for our imitation: in the giving of themselves to God, in their work, in their hope, we find the road of salesian sanctity marked out before us; if they have followed it, why should we not succeed in doing the same?<sup>2</sup>

Art. 76 of the Regulations, which specifies the forms of suffrage for the dead confreres, draws our attention to the fact that our gaze must be broadened to embrace the whole Salesian Family: "for deceased parents", "for deceased benefactors and members of the Salesian Family".

*God, our Father,  
you have passed on to us  
the gift of our vocation and mission  
also through the work of our dead confreres.  
Grant that we may live in communion with them,*

<sup>1</sup> BM VIII, 200

<sup>2</sup> This is the well-known expression of St Augustine: "*si isti et illi, cur non ego?*" (if they can do it, why shouldn't I?)

*by faithfully continuing their work  
and following their example.  
Bestow quickly on them  
the fullness of the beatific vision,  
and allow us to share it with them in Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

## ART. 95 LIFE AS PRAYER

Immersed in the world and in the cares of the pastoral life, the salesian learns to meet God through those to whom he is sent.

Discovering the fruits of the Spirit<sup>1</sup> in the lives of men, especially the young, he gives thanks for everything;<sup>2</sup> as he shares their problems and sufferings, he invokes upon them the light and strength of God's presence.

He draws on the love of the Good Shepherd, whose witness he wants to be, and shares in the spiritual riches offered him by the community.

His need of God, keenly felt in his apostolic commitment, leads him to celebrate the liturgy of life, attaining that "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God"<sup>3</sup> that should be the characteristic of the sons of St John Bosco.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Gal 5,22

<sup>2</sup> cf. Eph 5,20

<sup>3</sup> R 1924, art. 291

This is the article which concludes both the present chapter on our prayer and also the whole of the second part of the Constitutions on our life of consecrated apostles. And it concludes by passing from the communal aspect to the personal aspect ("the salesian...") and saying what we have been pointing out from the beginning of the chapter: the salesian's "life of prayer" must blossom into a "prayer that is lived", into the "liturgy of life". In particular, apostolic work must be transformed into a sanctifying encounter with God.

Art. 95 is linked in this way with art. 12 on union with God in activity, and develops its content. It also has links with art. 18, where it was said that the salesian, in giving himself to his mission "with tireless energy", knows that he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom, and he is therefore carrying out a work which allows him to be united with them.



## Prayer lived by the salesian

The article has four paragraphs, all of which develop the same thought, and describe some features of apostolic spirituality which distinguish the life of the salesian and characterize the way he prays.

The salesian, a man of faith and aware that he must witness to the Good Shepherd, embarks on his activity animated by the "pastoral charity" of Christ and sustained by the spiritual values lived in the community. These are the two sources on which the apostle continually draws, as is well expressed in the third paragraph. It is fitting at this point to recall each one's obligation to verify constantly that he is remaining faithful to these two indispensable points of reference, but it is also important to emphasize the duty of the community to offer to each member the possibility of an encounter with God. For this reason the General Regulations indicate the responsibility of the community for drawing up a suitable programme for its life of prayer (cf. R 69).

Immersed in apostolic activity, but with these two powerful supports, the salesian learns to meet God, and feels continually prompted to pray to him in his heart. In the persons of those to whom he is sent, and especially in the young, he discovers God who is working there, he becomes aware of "the fruits of the Spirit" and can give thanks to the Father as did Jesus himself, who "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: "I thank thee, Father...!" (Lk 10,21), and like Don Bosco who was amazed at the work of grace in the soul of Dominic Savio or of Michael Magone. He empathizes with the young in their problems and sufferings and is moved to pray for them asking that they be given divine light and strength.

It may be noted how the Constitutions enumerate the different forms of prayer (praise, thanksgiving, petition) which are reflected in the salesian's life. It is an immediate, spontaneous and cordial prayer, not needing a place set apart, expressed frequently in short formulas or ejaculations: it is the prayer of life, consciously and attentively lived in God's presence in daily occupations; it is the prayer of an apostle who lives with Jesus and works for him.

## The liturgy of life offered by the salesian

In this way the salesian realizes the "grace of unity"<sup>1</sup> of his vocation. The Rule says that he celebrates the "*liturgy of life*", a felicitous expression which the Constitution "*Laudis canticum*" applies to christians who "offer themselves in loving service to God and men, adhering to the action of Christ".<sup>2</sup> This is the practical way in which the salesian, be he priest or brother, puts into effect Christ's teaching to "pray always and never lose heart" (cf. Lk 18,1), or the invitation of the apostle Paul: "Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God" (Rom 12,1). "Never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3,17). St Augustine re-echoes the scriptural texts when he says: "Sing to God not only with the tongue, but with in hand the psaltery of good works".<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco followed perfectly this line of thought and action. Confirmation of this is found in the article he himself wrote for the Constitutions in which he placed a strict linkage between "good works" and prayer properly so called: "The active life, towards which the Society more especially tends, renders its members unable to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore supply for these by giving one another *good example*, and by *fulfilling perfectly* the general duties of a good christian".<sup>4</sup> The whole of his apostolic life, which is an expression of pastoral charity, becomes for the salesian a true source of prayer, and a wonderful ever-present opportunity for exercising his own baptismal priesthood. The salesian acts in complete apostolic integrity, as a servant, as a son, as a priest: not for himself but solely for the glory of the Father, offering to him his work, his exertions, and each and every youngster in whose midst he works.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 127

<sup>2</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Constitution *Laudis canticum*, Rome 1970, n. 8

<sup>3</sup> "*Non tantum lingua canta sed etiam assumpto bonorum operum psalterio*" (St Augustine)

<sup>4</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, XIII, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 183)

In this perspective, and in no other, can be understood the deep union between work and prayer. In Don Bosco's life this union was so intense that his biographers have said that in him work was in fact prayer. Don Ceria declared: "The thing that is distinctive about salesian piety is that it can make a prayer out of work", a statement that was taken up and endorsed by Pius XI: "This is one of the most wonderful characteristics of Don Bosco, that he was available to everyone, continually busy about so many problems, beset by anxieties, facing endless requests and consultations, and yet his spirit was always raised on high where he was always at peace, where his tranquillity was never disturbed, so that work effectively became prayer for him and in him was verified the great principle of christian life: *qui laborat orat*".<sup>5</sup>

Work is prayer, not because it takes the place of prayer (indeed, an apostle of Christ feels the absolute need for prayer), but because it is lived in a love of charity and is a synthesis of the life of the Trinity which gives unity and consistency to the whole life of a christian. Work and prayer are in fact two aspects of one and the same love, so that they can be said in a certain way to become identified with each other. This is the sense of the *"tireless industry sanctified by prayer and by union with God"*, which Don Rinaldi said is "the characteristic of the sons of Don Bosco".

The moments of explicit prayer of the salesian are the visible expression of the offering he has made of himself in Jesus to the Father, and at the same time the source of the reactivation of that offering. In this perspective the central role of the eucharistic celebration is seen even more clearly: in it the salesian victim offers himself, and is offered, with the perfect Victim: "May he make us an everlasting gift to you... Through him, with him, in him, all glory is yours, almighty Father!".

Chapter VII "In dialogue with the Lord" opened with the declaration that the community has God as its Source (C 85), and it closes by saying that through each of its members it lives for God as its last

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo - profondamente santo*, LAS Rome 1985, p. 105

end, in fidelity to the salesian ideal of "seeking souls and serving God alone".<sup>6</sup>

*Lord Jesus, in your life on earth  
you were unceasingly united to the Father.  
Grant that I may meet you and the Father  
in everything and every event,  
and especially in my brothers and youngsters.*

*May my apostolic work be an occasion  
for living in greater union with you;  
may my every thought, word and deed  
become a sacrifice pleasing to the Father,  
in communion with your perfect sacrifice,  
for the salvation of all men.*

*You live and reign for ever and ever.*

<sup>6</sup> Collect of the Mass in honour of St John Bosco; cf. C 10

## THIRD PART

### FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS

#### 1. A general view

The entire third part of the Constitutions is dedicated to formation and is entitled: "FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS". It comprises two chapters: VIII (which has two sections) and IX, with a total of twenty-four articles between them.

They are complemented by the second part of the General Regulations, itself made up of two chapters, with a total of twenty-five articles.

We take a rapid look at the individual chapters and sections so as to understand from the outset the overall structure.

1.1 Chap. VIII presents the "GENERAL ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATION" and is divided into *two sections*.

a) *The first section (art. 96-101)* refers to the totality of SALESIAN FORMATION, and indicates its underlying theological principles, model, agents and method.

*The theological principle* is the Lord who calls certain people to live Don Bosco's project in the Church (*art. 96*). *The model*, with whom the members primarily identify, is Don Bosco the founder, a secure guide (*art. 97*). *The chief agent*, after the Lord, is the salesian. In his community the latter develops the attitudes and uses the means to "learn by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation" (*art. 98*), living and working for the common mission (*art. 99*), which is *the method* suggested.

In this undertaking the *provincial community* has its own particular role and obligations (cf. C 58), because it must follow closely the process of formation to see that it is adapted to the local culture (*art. 100-101*).

This ensemble of general aspects is located in the context of a biblical quotation which links their source and purpose with the person of Christ: "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15).

b) In the *second section* (art. 102-108) are presented the GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE INITIAL FORMATION. These do not exclude what was said in the first section, but rather presuppose it and make it more specific with regard to the special requirements of this first period of formation.

The attitudes to be cultivated are especially those of *listening* and of *docility*: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears!" (1 Sam 3,9).

In face of the complexity of the *objectives* to be achieved and to be brought into harmony within the vital union of the individual (art. 102), the need is pointed out for *formation guides*, "instruments through whom the Lord works" (art. 104; R 78), and for *formation communities* "specifically designed for the purpose" (art. 103; R 78. 80. 81).

In settings of this kind, where there are true and authentic relationships, this *period of dialogue* between God, who has taken the initiative and called, and the salesian, who has freely accepted the call and gives a faithful response, becomes formatively efficacious (art. 105).

## 1.2 Chap. IX describes THE FORMATIVE PROCESS.

It is a real progressive process which has both *a beginning and an end*: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1,6). The process begins when the confrere, feeling within himself that he has a call from God, sets about verifying whether it is authentic and whether he has the necessary suitability (art. 109), and it ends when with the help of divine grace he brings his consecrated life to its highest fulfilment (cf. C 54).

It is a process in which there are *specifically distinct periods* (immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself, the period of temporary profession) each with its own particular *objectives*, passage from one phase to another being by *admissions*, which are occasions for assessing whether the necessary degree of maturity has been attained.

Perpetual profession does not mark the end of an individual's formation. What it does is recognize the existence of a level of spiritual and salesian maturity sufficient for "acquiring the ability to learn from life's experiences" (*art. 119*), so that he can live his future life in such a way as to use situations, from the simplest to the most difficult, as means of further formation.

## 2. Some points of interest

This rapid survey prompts us to pause and seek a better understanding of certain aspects which arouse our interest.

- 2.1 In the overall plan of the Constitutions, why has "Formation" been assigned to the THIRD PART?
- 2.2 On what basic principle has this vast amount of material been organized and given a particular order?
- 2.3 Why is so much emphasis placed on initial formation?
- 2.4 What are the reasons that make formation so important in the Congregation?

### 2.1 Significance of Formation as the third part

The third part of the Constitutions, dedicated to formation, follows the first and second parts, which presented the essential features of the physiognomy of the Society of St Francis de Sales and the plan of life which is proper to it as "Don Bosco's living testament",<sup>1</sup> its authentic way of living the Gospel, now renewed and brought up to date; the fourth part will deal with the service rendered by authority in the realization of this same plan.

<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions 1984*, Foreword; cf. Presentation, p. 6

The question may be asked: Is there some special significance to the location of formation at this particular place in the overall contents? Or is it just a formality?

The answer is found in the text of the Constitutions itself.

To *form* means to accompany an individual until he reaches full development and, at the same time, put him in active relationship with the reality he must get to know and serve and save: young people, especially the poorest of them, and working-class neighbourhoods. The very title says as much: "Formed for the mission of pastors and educators".

But *without a valid plan of life*, without a deep and certain idea of its significance, no one can ever be formed: the process of contacts, discovery, conversion and growth is impossible.

The Congregation, when faced by problems or difficulties,<sup>2</sup> always hopes to resolve them in a positive manner. But it links this hope and optimism with the knowledge and acceptance of the plan of life it must preserve and pass on, and which was lived by Don Bosco in the first place (the FIRST and SECOND PART); it asks that this plan be rendered real in individual members and in communities through a process called "formation" (the THIRD PART); and for this purpose uses the charisma of authority which it possesses and exercises "in imitation of Christ and in his name" (C 121). It organizes and provides necessary disciplinary norms only for what it lives (the FOURTH PART).

The Constitutions condense this sequence (the *plan* and *formation*) into two brief expressions found in art. 96: Jesus "*calls us too to live out in the Church our Founder's project as apostles of the young. We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation*".

Don Bosco lived and passed on to his sons the need for esteem and enthusiasm for a plan of life and a commitment to formation.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 658



Canon Giacinto Balleio speaks of the extraordinary climate of personal contacts through which Don Bosco's plan was passed on, of its beauty and fascination: "The food was nothing to rave about. When we think of how we ate and slept, we just wonder how we pulled through without harm and complaint. We were happy because we felt we were loved. We lived in a wonderful atmosphere and we were totally absorbed in it; nothing else mattered".<sup>3</sup> That is the project, the first and second part of the Constitutions!

Don Bosco awoke strong desires in others, needs which just had to be satisfied. We recall the effects on Dominic Savio of his sermon on holiness on one of the Sundays when the Lenten catechism lessons were being given. But he not only implanted the desire for holiness; he took part personally in its development by motivating, convincing, and leading each one to a mature freedom and autonomy: "Together we shall climb the Lord's mountain", he used to say.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Ongoing Formation, the basic attitude and principle

As we read Part Three of the Constitutions, we soon discover that the text takes the concept of *ongoing formation* as one of the unifying criteria for the whole of the formative process.

Ongoing formation is "first of all a *personal attitude*" which, because of its innate dynamism and extension, becomes "an *organizing principle* which inspires and orientates formation along the whole arc of life".<sup>5</sup> The GC22 rapidly arrived at a happy consensus on this

<sup>3</sup> BM IV, 233

<sup>4</sup> BM VII, 199. Don Bosco used this phrase when relating a dream in which he was laboriously climbing a high mountain with his collaborators. As some of his fellow travellers began to fall by the wayside, Don Bosco reflected: "I know now what I must do. I can rely only on those I have trained myself. Therefore I shall now go down again to the foot of the mountain. I will gather many boys, win their affection and train them to face hardships and sacrifices bravely. They will gladly obey me, and together we shall climb the Lord's mountain"

<sup>5</sup> GC21, 308

point, which had already received the support of the GC21, the FSDB/1981, and numerous provincial chapters.<sup>6</sup>

This personal attitude implies on the part of the individual the willingness and concrete commitment to make of his own being an "historical, free and responsible response"<sup>7</sup> to God's invitation.

The dialogue between God who takes the initiative, and the salesian who freely responds, takes place:

- in the context of a Covenant. The Lord's invitation, in fact, is to an act which "recalls and endorses the mystery of the baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression" (C 23). It is a Covenant which is perceived and experienced as a divine principle seated deep in the heart, which moves, shapes and influences the whole of life from inside.<sup>8</sup>
- within a project which was that of Don Bosco and which, by a grace analogous to his, is also ours. A description of this project is furnished by the main titles running through the Constitutions: *Sent to the young — in fraternal and apostolic communities — following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ — in dialogue with him.* It is a characteristic project, a vocational experience understood as the "sequela Christi" lived in Don Bosco's spirit, always open to the just demands of new innovations discernible in the life of the Church and in changing cultures, especially those of youth and the humbler classes of people.

It is a plan which, for those who are faithful to it, leads to the commitment to an adequate ongoing formation which lasts all through life and in every circumstance, because on it depends the "quality and fruitfulness of our apostolic religious life" (C 118). This personal attitude to ongoing formation is so tied in with vocation itself, and so comprehensive as regards its lifelong significance and obligations, that it spontaneously suggests itself as the *organizational principle* for the whole formation process.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GC21, 308; FSDB/1981, 415; GC22 *Schemi precapitolari* I, 1168, 1187; II, 387-388

<sup>7</sup> SGC, 661

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jer 31,31-34; Ezek 36,26-27

It underlies, in fact, the various *criteria* which shape the formative process itself in all its complexity.

Because it is the individual who must respond to God's call, formation must be *personalized*, i.e. it must be based on the nature of the individual, maintaining a proper balance between his own formation and that of the group, and between the time foreseen for each phase and its adaptation to each individual case.

Because each one has to be followed up individually and his progress fostered in a process in which every part of him is involved, this procedure must be:

- *one and only*, in the sense that in every phase must be present the various aspects of salesian formation, blended in a vital unity: human maturity, deeper understanding of the religious life, intellectual preparation and insertion into apostolic work;
- *progressive and gradual*, since each phase must be a continuation of the preceding one and a preparation for the one which follows, without prejudice to the emphasis which must be laid on the specific items of each.

It is the individual who is called by the Lord and inspired and led on by him, and so it is the individual who must be the chief agent in this process; the central position of his personal experience becomes the criterion which sets the whole process in motion and demands consistency between methods, settings, conditions and the corresponding instruments.

This therefore is how the personal attitude to ongoing formation becomes the organizing principle behind the whole process through which it is carried out.

### 2.3 Initial formation

The Constitutions, in the section dealing with formation, are set out against the background of ongoing formation. But at the same time they give particular prominence to initial formation.

This was the approach also of the GC21: "We direct our attention principally to the initial stages of formation, since these reflect the problems highlighted by the provincial chapters, and also because they present special formative characteristics which do not recur".<sup>9</sup>

The GC22 endorsed this arrangement by dedicating to initial formation 7 of the 13 articles of chap. VIII and 8 of the 11 of chap. IX of the Constitutions, together with 11 articles of the 15 of chap. IX of the General Regulations.

The reasons seem evident. Initial formation needs to be given special attention, because:

- it is at the root of the sense of belonging, and ensures a common spirit and feelings in the light of which all that follows is desired, undertaken and realized;
- it is at the service of the mission, because it gives rise to the ability to make integral critical judgements according to criteria of science and faith. Without this ability there would be a tendency to the mechanical repetition of the past or to the uncritical acceptance of preformulated judgements according to the mood of the moment;
- it is at the service of the individual in so far as it gives rise to the personal conditions which enable the confrere to carry out pastoral work efficaciously so that it becomes a natural daily setting for further formation.

#### 2.4 Importance of Formation

To conclude this overall presentation of the third part of the Constitutions, it will be well to reflect for a moment on the significance of formation in the salesian life and mission.

<sup>9</sup> GC21, 243

The SGC declared: "*The importance of formation is fundamental*. On it depends, to a large extent, the personal realization of every salesian and the unity of spirit of the whole Congregation".<sup>10</sup> After thirteen years and a verification of the life of the Congregation, the same point is made once again with equal decision and conviction in the closing address at the GC22: "In the vast cultural transition in which we feel ourselves involved, the formation of members emerges as an indispensable priority for the future".<sup>11</sup>

Formation, in fact:

- continues the work of the *Founder* and his *spiritual fatherhood*;
- fosters fidelity to the *unity* of the charism and commitment to its *development*;
- places in proper relationship in the community the gifts of nature and grace of the individual members with the charisma of the Institute, so that both can grow "towards the perfect love of God and men".<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.4.1 Formation prolongs the work of the Founder and his spiritual fatherhood

In Don Bosco the presence of the Spirit gave rise to the charism and revealed the particular form of life and mission his Society was called upon to realize in the Church.

In reading his life one is impressed by the awareness he had of being chosen as God's *instrument*: "God is my master. He it is who inspires and sustains my undertakings; Don Bosco is but his instrument",<sup>13</sup> inspired and led by a new way he did not know, the

<sup>10</sup> SGC, 659

<sup>11</sup> GC22, 87

<sup>12</sup> C 25; cf. PC 1

<sup>13</sup> BM IV, 175

direction of which he came to decipher only gradually. Conscious of the responsibility that had been entrusted to him by our Lord and our Blessed Lady, he once said: "The Virgin Mary had revealed to me in a vision the field of my labours. I had, therefore, a complete course of action planned in advance. I could not and absolutely would not alter it. I clearly saw the path I was to follow and the means I was to use to attain my purpose... I had to look for young companions and then select, instruct and form them as I had been shown in my dreams".<sup>14</sup>

Don Bosco expressed very strongly, and sometimes with trepidation, *the desire to pass on his experience* and to take care himself of this transmission: "We are now beginning to appoint as rectors confreres who have spent little time at Don Bosco's side, and there is danger that cordial relations between confreres in different houses will be lessened",<sup>15</sup> and it will be "difficult and burdensome to shape so many into one soul and spirit".<sup>16</sup> He made use of writings and conversations, but most of all the Rule itself, as means for passing on the charisma. "I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place".<sup>17</sup> They gather together, as far as it can be done in words, an experience of the Spirit destined to promote another experience, that of the Founder who dialogues with his disciples to promote in them his own longings and desires, and form them to his own way of doing things.

In this sense *the Founder is a father*: he generates a new dimension of life and communicates what he has received, but after making it his own and transmitting it as such. He is therefore also a *formation guide and teacher of formation* in so far as he provides vital communication, involves others in accordance with God's plan, teaches, points the way and guides his followers along it.

<sup>14</sup> BM III, 171

<sup>15</sup> BM XIII, 692

<sup>16</sup> BM IX, 284

<sup>17</sup> *Constitutions 1984* Foreword; cf. D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 498

Don Bosco understood two very important points:

- that apostolic formation demands *a high degree of identification*: i.e. it calls for the commitment of all the aptitudes and gifts of grace of the salesian (cf. C 99, 102) and this for the whole of life (cf. C 98); otherwise he will never be an apostle of youth;
- that this progressive identification cannot be achieved except *through mediation and models* which help to convert the feelings of joy experienced in their company into a challenge to become like them by the personal assimilation of the same values, which then have to be passed on in turn (cf. C 104).

The Spirit who pours out his grace in us, a grace like that he gave to the *Founder*, acts through various mediations: his own, first of all (cf. C 96) and that of the *religious family* which preserves the charisma, keeps it alive and active, manifests it in its own existence and responds to the demands it makes. The Congregation makes use of *all suitable formative elements*, so that the experience of the Founder which lives in it may be made real and personal in each of its members. In this way it carries on the original process of spiritual generation.

#### 2.4.2 Vocational identity, the individual and formation.

There is a strict linkage between vocational identity, the individual and the future of both. The vocational project, if properly understood, accepted and translated into the existence of the individual, calls in question the salesian's commitment and responsibility, his freedom and creativity and, above all, his docility. The project becomes a continual challenge to him with its questions and demands.

Formation can provide answers to these questions and satisfy the demands. It accompanies his passage from the "theoretical" salesian proposed as an ideal (first and second parts) to the salesian "in ongoing formation", as he moves towards the fulfilment of himself (third part).

Indications of this dynamic movement are provided by the very terms themselves used in the third part in connection with formation and its setting: "dialogue" (C 105), "call" and "response" (C 96), "process" and "experience" (C 98), "responsibility" and "growth" (C 99), "process of growing responsibility" (C 105).

Vocational identity, its unity and development, are to some extent originated and always accompanied and ensured by formation. The latter makes possible and stimulates a "fidelity capable of restoring to the present life and mission of each institute the ardour with which the Founders were inflamed by the original inspirations of the Spirit",<sup>18</sup> the same charismatic authenticity, alive and ingenious in its initiatives, which was present in Don Bosco.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Religious and human promotion*, CRIS Rome 1980, 30

<sup>19</sup> Cf. MR 23(f); PC 1-2; ET 11



## CHAPTER VIII

### GENERAL ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATION

Formation is a permanent obligation, a constant collaboration with the Holy Spirit for a greater conformity to Christ, a process carried out in response to God's invitation.

Chapter VIII presents the "*General aspects of our formation*", i.e. the principles, criteria and conditions which define and make possible the formative plan offered by the Congregation to those who feel called to the salesian life.

The *first section* of the chapter comprises 6 articles (96-101), and deals with the general aspects of salesian formation in a wide and comprehensive sense; the second section has 7 articles which are concerned with general aspects of the initial formation.

The following are the important points from the first section, which must be verified throughout life to ensure formative experience and vocational growth.

1. Commitment to formation is the first responsible expression of a response to God's call, or (to put it the other way round) to the call there corresponds a reply, and this reply (taken seriously) is called formation. It is the primary vocational demand. Hence *art. 96* sets out the basic *theological principle* underlying formation: God's call.
2. Called by the Lord (vocation), we commit ourselves to be salesians (formation). It is vocational identity that determines the specific orientation of formation. *Art. 97* indicates its *charismatic principle*.
3. *Art. 98* answers the question: What is formation and in what does it consist? *It is a lifelong process* and consists in *learning by experience the values of the salesian vocation*. *Art. 99* will add that this experience is gained by living and working for the common mission. This is a very clear indication of the *methodological principle*.
4. *The confrere* himself is the one primarily responsible for his own vocation and therefore for his own formation, a responsibility which

is referred to several times in the Constitutions. *The community*, which preserves and manifests the presence of the charisma by its life and work, is the natural setting for this experience, and hence itself becomes the subject of formation: it must continually progress and be renewed (*art. 99*).

5. Salesian formation in the world is both one and diversified at the same time. This perspective is presented in *art. 100* which refers back to its origin: the charismatic identity. Because of the latter, formation is one in its specific and permanent content; its fertility, on the other hand, generates diversity in its practical expression: it is a case of one and the same salesian heart behind many different facades, one spirit with many ways of responding to needs.
6. The perspective of *art. 100* gives the fundamental reason for the unavoidable obligation and principal *responsibility of the provinces* which, on this account, have a recognized autonomy with suitable organisms and the possibility of concrete realization. This is dealt with in *art. 101*.

In addition to these elements in the first section, the *second section* considers the "specific" general aspects to be attended to in order to ensure a real experience of initial formation. They are the following:

1. The *objectives and basic perspective* are the different aspects (human maturing and deepening of the consecrated life), blended into a vital unity, referred to in *art. 102*.
2. The *setting*: communities specifically structured for the purpose, dealt with in *art. 103*.
3. *Those responsible*, i.e. the formation personnel and the confrere himself who is in this stage of initial formation; *art. 104, 105 are dedicated to them*.
4. The *formative process (art. 106-108)*: a curriculum with similar content and goals at corresponding levels, distributed over the different periods and successive phases, and characterized by assimilation into a growing obligation of discernment.

## Section I

### SALESIAN FORMATION

*"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15).*

Because of the historical background of the Covenant, Scripture provides motives for growth, for religious improvement, for faith, by analogy with human development. It will be useful to sum up their specific features in the light of the New Testament: the act of justification by baptism is the beginning of salvation, but not yet its fulfilment; for the latter it is necessary to pass beyond the infant stage and become spiritual men (cf. 1 Cor 3,1f; Heb 5, 12 ff.); in other words *christian life is subject to a law of progress*; perfection is a goal surpassing human possibilities; it is strictly eschatological and the fruit of grace (Phil 2,12 ff.); growth has an ultimate aim which serves also as a model: it is the relationship with Christ.

In the Gospels it is easy to discern the influence of Jesus on the growth of his disciples. The quotations from Mk 3,14 and Jn 16,13 in art. 96 of the Constitutions are very appropriate, but there is another text of the NT which is perhaps a more complete expression of the significance of christian maturity and the maturing process: Eph 4,7-16, of which the opening verse forms a part.

This part of the Letter to the Ephesians has as its theme "the building up of the Body of Christ" (4,12) by means of many charismata and services. The source and objective of this process is the "perfect man", i.e. Christ in his fullness, the Son of God (4,13). On the negative side this implies a state of watchfulness against spurious models (4,14). Positively it means following out a process of growth by living the truth and bearing witness to it through charity, i.e. the Gospel heard and put into practice in the style of a Church marked out by brotherly love.

But "growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" does not mean that christian growth is to be bottled up in a sterile and inward-looking concentration on what is sacred. If anything, it means that, recognizing (as does Paul's letter) that Christ represents the plenitude of the universe and its destiny, every type of growth needed for the historical development of humanity should be pursued, and at the same time proportioned, purified, directed and lived in reference to Jesus Christ and the cause of his Gospel.

From this standpoint the work of formation, which is a characteristically educative theme pervading all this part of the Constitutions dealing with formation, readily takes on the responsibility for pursuing the dynamic process naturally

called for by progress in human sciences, linking it with the still more radical responsibility of seeing that it is inspired, sustained and directed to its objective by the "grace of Christ". This is what the Constitutions say elsewhere (C 31), when they speak of our educative and pastoral service being "directed to Christ, the perfect Man".

\* \* \*

## ART. 96 VOCATION AND FORMATION

Jesus called his Apostles individually to be with him, and to be sent forth to preach the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Patiently and lovingly he prepared them and gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them into the fullness of Truth.<sup>2</sup>

He calls us too to live out in the Church our founder's project as apostles of the young.

We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation, for which the Lord daily gives us his grace.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Mk 3,14

<sup>2</sup> cf. Jn 16,13

Against a gospel background we have here a very fundamental statement: *To respond to God's call means to live in an attitude of "formation", of attention to the Spirit and to life.*

### Jesus calls and forms

The first reference in the Part of the Constitutions dealing with formation is to the christian baptismal vocation, to our following of Christ (C 3), and it is made by recalling the model of every apostolic vocation, that of the Twelve. It is an echo of what was said in the first articles of our Rule of life: we belong to the baptized, we are disciples of Jesus and consecrated apostles (C 2,3), formed by the action of Jesus and his Spirit.

"Jesus called his Apostles .... he prepared them": two moments of the same act, not separated or following on each other but simultaneous and complementary, which indicate certain perspectives for every salesian. We shall be able to understand them quite easily if we reflect on the different statements which make up the article.

— "*Jesus called his Apostles individually*": the vocation was a personal matter, and therefore one calling for personalized formation.

Art. 22 begins: "Each one of us is called by God". The accent is not so much on the manner of the invitation, but rather on the fact that the call is a personal one to each individual, and on the formative process to be undertaken. The Apostles, the first salesians, and we ourselves with our individual history behind us, are so many living expressions of God's individual calling, which requires the response of a formation which takes account of and reaches the reality of the individual.

— *"To be with him"*: formation is the sharing of an experience.

We recall what was said before the election of Mathias in the Acts of the Apostles (1,21-22): "We must therefore choose someone who has been with us the whole time that the Lord Jesus was travelling around with us". This expression, simple but packed with meaning, recalls another one which for us is nearer home and was so familiar to the first Salesians: *"To stay with Don Bosco"*. The invitations of our Father are well known: "I'd like to make a deal with you... Would you be willing to remain here at the Oratory and stay with Don Bosco for good?"<sup>1</sup> In art. 97 we read that the first salesians lived at the very heart of his community in action: Don Bosco, following the example of Jesus, formed his followers by sharing his life with them.

"Staying with" him meant that they were more available for his teaching; they could share his vicissitudes, his commitments, his internal experience, his criteria and style and spirit. And sharing meant formation.

— *"And to be sent forth to preach the Gospel"*, to enable them to live as consecrated persons, apostles of the Father, evangelizers.

The nature of the vocation determines the specific orientation of formation (cf. C 97), its objectives, content, methods, roles and instruments, and even its demands and choice of an intellectual setting (cf. R 82).

The ideas of being sent, of being "fishers of men", of proclaiming the Kingdom, were all concepts that Jesus kept frequently before the

<sup>1</sup> BM VI, 246; cf. also BM XI, 268; MB XV, 569; MB XVI, 301

minds of his Apostles and towards which he helped them to mature.

Don Bosco too often talked to his youngsters, to the novices and to the confreres about the perspectives of his mission; they served as a stimulus and met a need in providing a formative criterion. We read in the Biographical Memoirs: "Don Bosco constantly strove to kindle his pupils' interest in anything concerning the Oratory, because he wanted them to consider it as their own home. He kept them informed on matters which he believed they should know. He followed the same policy even after establishing the Society of St Francis de Sales, hoping that many of his pupils would see in it their ideal of christian life, the goal of their studies, the safe harbour of their vocation, and their opportunity to share in the undertakings and glorious destiny promised by the Madonna".<sup>2</sup>

— *"He prepared them and gave them the Holy Spirit"*. Jesus prepared his followers so that they would learn to carry out the mission he was going to entrust to them, and especially to become docile to the Spirit.

This is a reference to two points in the formative process:

- to initial formation as a specific time of preparation. It is not just a period of waiting but a time of work and holiness (cf. C 105); it leads to well defined objectives and commitments by means of a process which includes discernment, maturing and the making of motivated choices (cf. C 102, 109).
- to formation as a permanent attitude of docility to the Spirit, the first formative agent and the one Teacher, whose action is for the professed member "a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts" (C 25).

The evidence of the New Testament, and especially of the Acts of the Apostles, read in this way and taken as a model by Don Bosco, shows us the process of ongoing formation of the Apostles animated by the Holy Spirit. It was lived with constant reference to Christ's teaching, in research made together in common, and frequently

<sup>2</sup> BM IX, 265

rendered difficult by the need to respond to widely differing religious and cultural situations. It took place at a time when a dramatic transition was taking place from the Old to the New Testament, between the people of Israel and the Church, and all this accompanied by a patient and progressive effort to understand their vocation and ministry.

The Spirit accompanied the Apostles so that they would never lose their ability and the gift of "learning from life's experiences" (C 119).

— *"Patiently and lovingly"*: this indicates the attitude of one who understands those with whom he is dealing and makes demands on them in proportion to their degree of maturity; he is able to wait and put pressure on them a little at a time, he is able to challenge them while still encouraging them, he can put great ideals before them and also confront them with the cross. This was the kind of pedagogy frequently used by Jesus in providing formative experience for the Apostles, both individually and in groups. St Mark tells us: "Lastly he showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And he said to them: 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation'" (Mk 16,14-15).

Don Bosco too on more than one occasion spoke of his own experience so as to encourage his followers in fulfilling what the Lord had indicated he should do. From this point of view we can better understand what he wrote in the introduction to the "Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales": "It will serve as a norm for meeting future difficulties by learning from past experience; it will show how God himself arranged everything in his own good time".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> MO, p. 16; cf. BM VIII, 396 (Don Rua begins to gather together a chronicle of the Oratory "for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls")



## Our response: commitment to formation

In line with the initiative and formative action of Christ, the second part of the article deals with our reply, which is made practical in commitment to formation.

Like the Apostles we too have been called, individually and in different ways, "to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3); like the Apostles we prepare ourselves through the initiatives and action of the community and of those who are in a special way "instruments through whom the Lord is working" (C 104).

The particular nature of Don Bosco's plan, with its charismatic depth and practical implications, for which we share responsibility, demands that *"we respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation"*.

For this task *"the Lord daily gives us his grace"*. He himself "patiently and lovingly" accompanies us in the process, and each day gives us the grace of his Spirit to help us along (cf. C 25). Although the formation process calls for personal responsibility (cf. C 99), generosity and fidelity on the part of the salesian, the chief agent is the Holy Spirit who inspires and guides it, sustains it and brings it to fruition.

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
you called your Apostles  
and prepared them with patient love  
for their evangelical mission,  
by the witness of your internal experience  
and the strength given by the Holy Spirit.  
You have called us too in the same Spirit  
to continue the work you inspired in Don Bosco  
for the benefit especially of poor youth.  
We praise and bless you for this great gift.  
We ask you to support us daily by your grace  
in the constant task of our formation,  
that we may fully correspond to your call.*

## ART. 97 SALESIAN ORIENTATION OF FORMATION

The first salesians found their true guide in Don Bosco. Living at the very heart of his community in action, they learned to model their own lives on his.

We too find in him our model. The religious and apostolic nature of the salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take, a direction necessary for the life and unity of the Congregation.

In the commentary on art. 96 the strict relationship was noted that exists between vocation and formation, and the consequent need for formation itself. Art. 97 contains a second fundamental principle, comprising two statements:

1. Don Bosco is the model and constant point of reference in the formation process. In him the salesian identity is embodied, internalized and made an active presence which makes an appeal to others and is open to communion.
2. "The religious and apostolic nature of the salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take". This is the charismatic criterion of formation: our vocation is salesian, and so our formation must be salesian too.

### **Don Bosco the Founder: "model" and "true guide"**

The relationship with Don Bosco is considered here from the standpoint of formation.

He is *a presence* who lives the values of the vocation, with a wonderful capacity for radiating them around him. The GC21 expressed this idea in convincing fashion: "For us Don Bosco is not just a memory of the past, but a charismatic and living presence, active and stretching out to the future. In him we reach a better understanding of

ourselves and we find the true sense of what it means to belong to the Congregation".<sup>1</sup>

The discovery of the vocational identity begins with the discovery of the Founder himself as the living depositary of the original nucleus of the Institute's charisma. We, who are called to share his spiritual experience and his style of life and activity centred on "da mihi animas", find in him the expression at a specific point in history of a certain form of heart and mind, of evangelical sensitivity and of pastoral outlook. In this sense he has been given to us as a "model", as an efficacious sign of our vocation and formation. Those who have received the Spirit have received him as light, and they therefore give rise to a certain attraction, a shared feeling, an intimate awareness of values and ideals.

Art. 97 emphasizes this handing on of the charisma through the Founder *by recalling our tradition*.

— Alongside the supreme example of the Apostles who were formed by the Lord himself (cf. C 96), is recalled the familiar example of the *first salesians* who enjoyed the unique good fortune of having the Founder with them as the living salesian identity and their formation guide: the "model" says the article, and their "true guide". We find vivid evidence for this in the Biographical Memoirs: "During those years when Don Bosco was constantly at the Oratory, because as yet there were no other salesian houses, we lived a family life. Our love for him, our desire to please him, and the hold he exercised over us — unforgettable but indescribable — made us vie with one another in the practice of virtue... The way we looked up to him and the regard we had for his authority, saintliness and learning — to us he was the symbol of moral perfection...".<sup>2</sup>

— Don Bosco was not a remote and isolated model of static perfection, separated from his followers and not communicating with them. He involved the salesians and youngsters in his own experience. Both

<sup>1</sup> GC21, 163

<sup>2</sup> BM V, 486

boys and confreres felt that they shared the responsibility for a missionary plan worldwide in its extent. Communion in activity and life led to comparisons, to a common kind of outlook, and to imitation. Living and working with him led to understanding and appreciation, to the desire to stay with him, to pass on to others what they experienced at "the heart of his community in action". An indication of this conviction is the subtitle given by Fr Joseph Vespignani to his book "A year at the school of Don Bosco", quoting the first Letter of St John: "This is what we proclaim to you: what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched" (1 Jn 1-2).

Applying all this to present-day conditions, art. 97 inclines us:

- to go back to Don Bosco, because he is "the point of reference in a new understanding (according to his spirit) of Christ's Gospel in response to the new challenges of modern times";<sup>3</sup>
- to become participants in a "living" community which, at its various levels (local, provincial, worldwide), permits and promotes contacts, knowledge, commitments and their communication. When this takes place in true and authentic fashion, the community (with its many models available) becomes the natural setting for formation, a manner of living which stimulates a vital knowledge and assimilation of vocational values.

### **Vocational identity as the criterion for the orientation of the formative process**

The first part of art. 97 has described from a historical standpoint how the salesian identity, personified in Don Bosco, is assimilated through a living experience in an active community. In the second part this fact is formally proposed as the *criterion for the direction formation should take*: "the religious and apostolic nature of the salesian

<sup>3</sup> GC22, RRM, n. 305

calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take". This is the general norm applicable to the whole of our formation.

The gift we have received must become our spiritual physiognomy, the 'talent' entrusted to us must be developed in such a way as to overcome any generic meaning it might otherwise have, because "every Institute exists for the Church and is bound to enrich her with its distinctive characteristics according to its specific spirit and particular mission".<sup>4</sup>

This gift and this talent are like the target at which we aim, the goal recognized as ours, which shapes and directs by virtue of its truth and charity the whole formation process and our own commitment to it.

And so while "aside from legitimate social and cultural differences, vocational identity constitutes the essential unity and most profound reality of the Congregation",<sup>5</sup> formation, which has the function of developing this identity, is "*necessary for the life and unity of the Congregation*" (C 97).

This statement cannot be overemphasized: formation, which fosters the growth of both individuals and communities in accordance with the single vocational model of Don Bosco and his apostolic project contained in the Constitutions, is an essential foundation for the unity of the entire Congregation. The "Ratio fundamentalis" (FSDB), which aims at "safeguarding the unity of its essential content in the diversity of its concrete expressions", which it does "by an experience of vocation understood as 'sequela Christi' lived according to the spirit of Don Bosco",<sup>6</sup> is the document which codifies the above-mentioned criterion and the requirements connected with it.

<sup>4</sup> MR 14b

<sup>5</sup> GC21, 242; cf. ASC 272, (1973), p. 6

<sup>6</sup> Cf. FSDB, 1

*Spirit of God,  
you never cease to raise up in the Church  
believers who in various ways  
manifest the living Christ and collaborate with him  
for the building of the Kingdom.  
We recognize the gift you have given to us and the Church  
in Don Bosco, our Father and Teacher,  
in his predilection for the young,  
and in his witness of holiness.*

*Grant that every salesian may find in the Founder  
the model for his own vocation,  
and may continue his presence and activity  
among youth of the present day,  
moved by the zeal of the "da mihi animas"  
of his oratorian heart.*

## ART. 98 THE FORMATION EXPERIENCE

Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit, the salesian commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in other ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him.

With the help of Mary, his Mother and Teacher, he gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young in the lay or priestly state which he has embraced.

What does formation mean in actual practice? What does it consist in, and what is it aiming at?

Art. 98 offers a first response to these questions, and condenses it into three statements: formation is a process; it consists in experiencing vocational values; its objective is the specific vocation of the salesian.

### **Formation is a lifelong process**

It is a matter of following a route or process, which will differ in rhythm from one phase to another but which goes on throughout life; it has a constant point of reference in the person of Jesus Christ, perceived with the spiritual sensitivity of Don Bosco.

The reality of the individual, of christian life and of vocation is seen in a dynamic perspective: it is a process, the following of a route which gives a permanent response to the Father in following Christ and in collaboration with the Spirit.

This, however, is not to be understood in such a way as to imply a state of continual change which would deny any real consistency to a definitive form of life indicated by perpetual profession.

It is rather a way of looking at the matter, an attitude that follows naturally from the nature of the vocation and its authenticity, "constantly open to the just demands of the innovations observable in the life of the Church and in the history of cultures, especially in the sectors of the young and the poor".<sup>1</sup> Formation goes ahead like a story, with particular internal things happening in the context of external events.

The article calls it a "process", i.e. an ensemble of elements and formalities which characterize and influence the development of the individual and his relationship with the continually changing realities which surround him.

The text is quite specific about the duration of this process: it lasts *all through life*: a clear reference to the fact that formation is of its nature "permanent" or ongoing, in the sense already pointed out in the introduction to chap. VIII,<sup>2</sup> in such a way that ongoing formation is the organizational principle of the whole formation process, and everything that the Constitutions will say will be stated against the background of life, the whole of life.

## Experiencing vocational values

The first two articles of this third part of the Constitutions (C 96, 97) look back to the formative experience of the Apostles with Christ, and the experience of the first Salesians in the Oratory community with Don Bosco, and they enable us to understand in a concrete manner *what it means to "experience vocational values"*.

It is the acquiring of a characteristic interior knowledge which is gained by contact with persons and reality. It is the result of that "being with him" of the Apostles. The sharing of life in all sorts of different situations, interpersonal relationships, the challenges and reflection

<sup>1</sup> FSDB, 1

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Introduction to chap. VIII, 2.2, p. 731-733



prompted by Jesus with regard to ideals, hopes and expectations and the way indicated by the Father for achieving them, all these things combined to inculcate in the Apostles the heart and mentality of Christ himself, to let them experience the unprecedented values he was putting to them.

In Don Bosco's case too the formative experience which he offered to those who were willing to stay with him was an experience lived in a setting rich in human and gospel values, a setting of communication, of contacts and of commitments.

The document "Mutuae relationes" describes in existential terms the "charism of the Founders" as "an experience of the Spirit transmitted to their followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed".<sup>3</sup>

The experience of the first Oratory was lived in a spontaneous and almost improvised form, but was attentively followed by Don Bosco with his pedagogical wisdom and became progressively converted into a unified organic process.

Today the constitutional text, when it speaks of salesian vocation, indicates the contents to be assimilated, the aptitudes to be acquired and possessed, and the attitudes to be lived. It is a matter of changing these from something theoretical to something practical, from values which are understood to values which are lived by the salesian "as he lives and works for the common mission" (C 99). This is the *method. Work* and, in and through work, *relationships* (i.e. multiple direct contacts of a constant and not just occasional kind) with people and real situations, associated with activities and daily events, combine to free the individual's capabilities and give rise to an active and energetic response.

The vocational response is first and foremost *sustained by the action of the Spirit* and the Lord's daily grace (cf. C 25, 96), but it also requires an *ascetical effort*.

<sup>3</sup> MR 11

The relationship with God is an area where man's freedom is completely and continuously involved, and where the lived relationship can never be taken for granted; it is neither obvious nor prompted by spontaneous instinct. It requires of the salesian an ascetical effort which, however, must be integrated with grace in order to become an effective virtuous experience. Nothing but the strength of grace can succeed in rooting out and deeply renewing our fallen nature, instead of just superimposing on it an external veneer.

There is therefore a reciprocal integration between the ascetical life and the life of the Spirit, a point frequently recalled by the Rule. The spiritual life very much wants to impress its transcendent values on ascetical efforts, and at the same time the purpose of ascesis is to render the salesian fully docile to the Spirit's gift.

On the ascetical path there stands the *cross*. The salesian, in fact, follows Christ, and stays with him for the building of the Kingdom (cf. C 3). Now the "Kingdom of God" is the supreme fruit of Christ's paschal experience; it is the fruit of his love, which is manifested in decisive form on the cross.

The salesian therefore, who forms himself ever better at the school of Jesus and follows Don Bosco's example, knows what the paschal experience demands of him. How could he forget the goal he must reach already here on earth as a result of willingly accepting the cross in his life? "The evangelical counsels", we are told by the Constitutions in art. 63, "fashioning his heart entirely for the Kingdom, help him to discern and welcome God's action in history; in the simplicity and hard work of daily life they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young 'new heavens and a new earth' (Rev 21,1), awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise."

**The objective of formative experience is the specific vocation**

*"A pastor and educator of the young"*: this is a typical expression which sums up Don Bosco's charismatic experience, the salesian vocational plan, and our identity in the Church.

The response to God's call lies in the effort to be educators and pastors of the young, and to live this task in a continually renewed form. This intention determines the validity and consistency of the experience of values.

The question is not therefore one of forming monks, ascetics or great professors, but of producing able educators and "good shepherds" imbued with salesian spirit.

This is a unique perspective of capital importance, which was without any doubt that of Don Bosco himself. As the Council points out in connection with the specific formation of future priests,<sup>4</sup> such a perspective involves not only unity in the content of formation so that all its aspects are in complete harmony and directed to the educative and pastoral objective, but also unity among those responsible for the formation: rector, director of novices, confessors, teachers, must all be in agreement so that their different activities are all directed in the same sense: to form salesians committed to the principle of "da mihi animas" and competent in their educational and pastoral service.

The constitutional expression recalls at one and the same time the single vocation and single objective referred to, and the different forms in which it is realized. The Salesian Society is composed of clerics and laymen who live the same vocation in complementary fashion as brothers.

Never at any time does a generic salesian exist, and the different forms of the one vocation constitute a permanent perspective which determines the experience of the values of the vocation itself in its various aspects.

<sup>4</sup> The decree *Optatam totius*, speaking of the formation of future priests as "shepherds of souls after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd", says: "Hence, all the elements of their training, spiritual, intellectual and disciplinary, should be coordinated with this pastoral aim in view, and all superiors and teachers should zealously cooperate to carry out this programme" (OT 4). This perspective, with the nuances that are proper to us and taking into account the presence in our communities of both clerics and lay confreres, can be applied also to us as regards the unity of the formation process

The mission, community life, practice of the counsels, prayer, and hence the formative experience, are lived by each one in line with the dimension proper to him.

Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit and ... with the help of Mary, Mother and Teacher

Of these two expressions, inserted in the text as parentheses, the first points to the living Christ, the centre of formation, and the second to Mary, who is the *teacher in all formation*. Her life, so deeply docile to the Spirit, predisposed her to conceive Jesus in virtue of the same Spirit (Lk 1,35), to bring him up and let herself be educated by him in turn, according to the Father's will. The Marian dimension pervades the whole text, because Mary was always at Don Bosco's side as he went ahead through personal commitment, ascetical ability, and especially through the grace of God, this too manifested through Mary's presence.

She steers us to Christ, because *the living Christ is at the centre of formation*. One cannot overemphasize this perspective of faith, nor the advantages that derive from giving to it a concrete, vital and personal aspect, avoiding all dry abstractions. In this we are perfectly in line with the mystery of vocation. It is a matter of fixing one's gaze on a Person, on the perfect Model, on Christ consecrated to the Father through his mission.

But a look at Christ of the past, so as to be enlightened by him, would be insufficient. We have to be *enlivened* by the glorified Christ of the present day, and so live in close touch with him through the Holy Spirit.

This implies the affirmation of a mystery of grace: Christ himself continues in the Church to form his own disciples and apostles through his Spirit. Formation must be maintained at this depth, cost what it may: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15,5). It is an appeal to all, both those in formation and their guides, to maintain an attitude of listening and docility to Christ's Spirit.

To live according to the spirit of Don Bosco is to assimilate Christ in a salesian manner, if one may put it that way. Is it not the same thing to draw one's inspiration from Christ, and to become a good salesian shepherd or pastor? We recall what was said in art. 2 of the Rule: our vocation is that of being "signs and bearers" of the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd, for the young and especially those who are poor.

If a salesian has been well formed, he is able to do this. The most characteristic comment on this perspective is art. 11, which explains that pastoral charity, the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit (cf. C 10), "finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father". Like Don Bosco, in "reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord".

And so the first phrase of our article indicates its basic message: if the Gospel is to be studied and lived in all salesian communities as the "supreme Rule", all the more must it shine forth in the formation communities; but it must be the Gospel as understood and lived by Don Bosco.

To round things off it should be said that the two basic books for the salesian in formation are *the Gospel and the Constitutions*; and that his living central reality is the Eucharist.

*Lord Jesus, you gave to Don Bosco  
the Virgin Mary as Mother and Teacher,  
and led him through the experience of joy and suffering  
to understand your design for the salvation of youth.  
Grant that we too may live to the full,  
under the motherly guidance of Mary,  
the values and commitments of our vocation.  
Help us to conform with untiring generosity  
every moment of our existence  
to the light of your Person and your Gospel,  
so that among those to whom you send us  
we may be, in faithful and creative fashion,  
educators and pastors in the style of Don Bosco.*

## ART. 99 PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Each salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation. Docile to the Holy Spirit he develops his talents and his gifts of grace in a constant effort of conversion and renewal, as he lives and works for the common mission.

The natural environment for vocational growth is the community which the confrere joins with trust and in which he gives his responsible collaboration. The very life of the community, united in Christ and open to the needs of the times, is itself a factor in formation, and hence must continually move forward and be renewed.

Who is the subject of formative activity? Who carries the responsibility for the vocational process, and how is the responsibility expressed?

There are numerous articles of the Constitutions (cf. in particular those of chap. III) which refer to the personal responsibility of the individual salesian and the shared responsibility of the community. The call is given to the individual, but at the same time it forms part of the gift that the Lord wants to see alive in the Church and which he has entrusted to the disciples of the Founder, gathered together in unity by his Word. This is a "general aspect of formation", i.e. a condition for its success and a principle of its validity.

### **Every salesian is personally responsible for his own formation**

Every salesian, from the moment in which he replies "yes" to the Lord who calls him and sends him (cf. C 24), chooses to take on personally and permanently in every circumstance the obligation to foster his own vocational growth. It is a responsibility which is part of his identity; he can neither avoid it nor renounce it.

Perpetual profession is not so much a sign of "having arrived", as an ecclesial expression of a commitment to permanent collabora-

tion with the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is the protagonist and chief Teacher. But after him and with him the person called is another direct term of this Covenant (cf. C 23). Each one therefore is called personally, and is obliged to give a personal response to the call.

### Attitudes and methods for a responsible course of action

To give each one's responsibility a definite content, the text asks us to cultivate certain attitudes and adopt a practical method.

— The *fundamental attitude* proposed is to *live in docility to the Spirit*, who right from the first articles of the Constitutions appears as the great animator of the salesian vocation in Don Bosco (cf. C 1, 21), in the community (cf. C 2) and in the process of sanctification of each confrere (cf. C 25).

Being a disciple of the Spirit implies a constant reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus is truly "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col 1,15). He is the image of both the Father communicated to men, and of the Son of man who returns to the Father to sing his glory. Spiritual life means being constituted with Christ in a single existence, becoming in our turn an image which reveals his love, especially to youth, and renders to the Father the response of their freedom conformed to his own.

— The *method* is to "*live and work for the common mission*". It is in work and personal relationships that we discover the needs around us and hear the invitations of the Lord. Taken together these two experiences are in fact the sources for the release of a person's energies and for developing in him a living awareness of the needs around him and for responding to them. Not every activity, however, and not every relationship leads towards docility to the Spirit, but only those sustained by true and authentic motives. The Constitutions assert that the development of aptitudes and gifts of grace comes about only through a "constant effort of conversion (purification and deepening of motivations) and renewal (the discovery and progressive assimilation of values)".

As can be seen, the responsibility for the formation of oneself and others demands spiritual dynamism, concrete pedagogical applications, and the practice of ascesis.

The horizons of the salesian's responsibility, therefore, are on the one hand Christ's will in his regard, and on the other young people to be served and the pastoral commitments of the province to be provided for. Each one "develops his talents and his gifts of grace", but clearly not for self-affirmation. The gifts of God are not only, nor especially, for the individual. The latter came to "serve" and he enriches himself so as to be of greater service.

The Constitutions, by indicating with a certain insistence the personal obligation of the individual, remind also all those working in formation structures of the clear awareness they must have of the central position of the person who asks to begin a process of growing responsibility and to give a response to God who is calling and leading him, sustained by the intelligent work and charity of his brothers. But if their help is to be effective, it is essential that they work consistently and follow an appropriate pedagogical method.

## **The community, the setting and the subject of formative experience**

### *The setting and subject of formative experience.*

"We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life" (C 2). This opening statement of the Constitutions expresses a principle which defines and covers the totality of our vocation.

One cannot speak of vocational experience without speaking of the community as the setting and subject of formation.

The Rule says, in fact: the community is "*the natural environment for vocational growth*". "The very life of the community" becomes a constant promotional element: brotherly sharing, and especially the apostolic thrust embodied in a consistent common project, the cen-



tral position of Christ which is lived and celebrated, the genuine style of evangelical life, all become a vital communication of the salesian ideal and a vocational criterion and stimulus. This is true all the more because often this vocational ideal is perceived in the community not primarily through the sum total and quality of the virtues which circulate in it, but rather in individual "models" who through their relationships make it easier to identify the values themselves.

The community therefore is the setting, but it is also the *collective subject* which interacts with the individual and has a special and efficacious formative grace: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18,20).

### *Conditions for an efficacious formative setting.*

Art. 99 is concerned to point out in a general way the conditions and attitudes which must be fostered by both the individual salesian and the community so that by their life they may willingly promote formation. These attitudes and conditions are also found more completely and in greater detail in chap. V which deals with the community in general, and in the articles which describe the formation communities for initial formation (cf. C 103, 110).

1. *The salesian* is asked to *join the community with trust and give his responsible collaboration.*

— *Trust* implies openness and confidence, esteem for the community to which he belongs, for the qualities it has and for its potentialities, which make him feel that it is the place to which the Lord has called him to build his own life and that of his brothers. "Every salesian, through prayer and personal witness, contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brothers" (C 101). Naturally this trust is greatly facilitated when it is reciprocal. Everyone knows how much the attitude of the community towards a confrere can augment or depress his ability to become truly part of it and contribute to its life and work.

— *Responsible collaboration* obliges him to seek all the information he can about his own field of work, to play his part in the drawing up and realization of formative plans, checking periodically on his own life and activities to see to what extent they are useful and meaningful as regards the young people we meet, the society in which

we live, and the Church which makes her own the urgent problems of mankind. One may be living in a restricted situation, but responsibility requires that the wider Kingdom of God be always kept in mind.

2. *The community*, to be a true setting for formation, is asked to *become a living community* characterized by being:

- *"united in Christ"* the apostle of the Father, called together by him, sharing responsibility for the mission he has entrusted to it, animated by his Spirit of communion, where interpersonal relationships are inspired by "the model of the first apostolic communities and the homely community of Valdocco";<sup>1</sup> where it is possible to communicate in an atmosphere of consideration and attention, of understanding and corroboration, the pastoral and spiritual experience of each member; where there is concern on the part of all for the building up of the vocation of each one, through friendship, example, advice, fraternal correction and forgiveness.
- *"open to the needs of the times"*, sensitive to historical change, to the needs of the young and the poorer classes, to cultural characteristics. The kind and extent of the relations of the community with the life of society and with its culture and demands are shaped and determined by the overall vocation perspective (cf. C 7) and by the needs of the Church's pastoral work, and in the case of formation communities by particular requirements related to the different stages of formation which call for a different timing of presence and separation. The community helps the member to accept with a sense of responsibility the openings and withdrawals implicit in the following of the Lord in his particular way of life: these too are a way of loving God and young people.

*God our Father,  
you have called us by name  
and united us in a spiritual family*

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 672

*for the benefit of the young.  
May each of us be fully docile to your Spirit,  
so that by living and working for the common mission  
we may be renewed each day  
in the generous service of you and of our neighbour.*

*Grant that our community,  
united in Christ and open to the needs of the times,  
may become an ever more suitable environment  
for experiencing the salesian life and mission  
after the example of the first community of Valdocco.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 100 UNITY OF FORMATION AND DIFFERENT CULTURES

The principle of unity in the Congregation is the charism of our Founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one salesian vocation. Formation is therefore one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions; it accepts and develops whatever is true, noble and just in the various cultures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. Phil 4,8

Among the People of God the Holy Spirit is at one and the same time the principle of unity and the seed of universality. He is the Spirit of Pentecost: many nations but one people; many cultures but in the single Body of Christ.

With regard to the salesian charism too, the Spirit who brought it into being renders it fruitful, and while giving to it its own specific character by means of his gifts, he multiplies its presence among different peoples; he plants it and causes it to grow in different ecclesial situations. In virtue of its mission, therefore, the Congregation is called to live in the various cultures the experience of the one Catholic Church. God calls salesians from specific cultural milieux from which they draw their own individual identities and to which they will then be sent to be both "signs and bearers of God's love for young people, especially those who are poor".<sup>1</sup>

This is a fact that can be deduced from our history and also, in a synthetic and symbolic manner, from the dream of the ten diamonds, which is the dream of our identity. The various diamonds on the garment, with the relative importance indicated by their position and lustre, provide an organic and dynamic presentation of the spiritual characteristics of the salesian and together outline our distinctive spiritual profile. Don Rinaldi, the most perspicacious interpreter of this dream, invites us "to bring to life in ourselves this living personage in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FSDB, 19

minutest details"<sup>2</sup>, so that the Society may shine before the whole world in its true form.<sup>3</sup>

### **The charism, principle of unity and rich source of diversity**

"The principle of unity in the Congregation is the charism of our Founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one salesian vocation": this is the first statement of art. 100, and it recalls a reality and a vocational characteristic already amply indicated, because they correspond to the very significance of the constitutional text which is meant to be the symbol of this unity and the foundation and criterion of an authentic diversity. "We strive everywhere to bring to life and render incarnate the spirit of our Father and Founder Don Bosco, the one model for all".<sup>4</sup>

This is important for the continuity and development of the charisma and of the cultures themselves: "A charism which is not open and adaptable to the values of different cultures will become fossilized; it can have no future. But any culture closed against the challenge of the signs of the times, interchange with other cultures and the transcendence of Christ and his Spirit, risks becoming nothing more than a museum piece or a watered-down interpretation of universality. This makes it clear just how delicate and exacting is formation activity in the Congregation".<sup>5</sup>

### **Formation: one in its content and diversified in its expressions**

The strength of unity of the Congregation and its deepest reality lies in its identity.

<sup>2</sup> ACS 55, 24 December 1930, p. 924

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 39

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 40

But unity is realized at the present day in decentralization, and a genuine decentralizing process implies an explicit and concrete commitment to unity. Formation, which is specifically determined by the nature of the vocation, draws its inspiration from an underlying principle and takes on corresponding characteristics: *it is at the same time "one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions"*.

The FSDB, as the practical guide to formation at world level, "sets out in an organic and instructive way the complexus of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, general Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation".<sup>6</sup> "The service it aims at rendering is that of ensuring the solidity and efficacy of this formation...; and consequently of safeguarding the unity of its essential content in the diversity of its concrete expressions".<sup>7</sup>

It is the task of the Provincial Directory (formation section) to apply all this to the local reality.

Both of these (i.e. the FSDB and the Provincial Directory) aim at fostering and ensuring the realization of formative experiences which respond to the demands of our times while remaining faithful to Christ, to the Church and to the genuine thought of Don Bosco.

## Requirements and steps of a process

The final expression of art. 100: *"it accepts and develops whatever is true, noble and just in the various cultures"* recalls the need to be open to cultures which the Constitutions referred to as early as art. 7: not only decentralization, but the transmission itself of the gospel message and the salesian charism require that they be incarnated in the culture of a specific people: it is the law of "incarnation", which derives from the very origins of the christian mystery.

<sup>6</sup> FSDB, 1; R 87

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

But the article also presents directly and in a positive manner a step in the process which implies attention and discernment. The Rector Major writes: "The process of inculturation requires at one and the same time that both the values to be embodied are clear and well understood and that an accurate and just discernment can be made of the demands of local cultures".<sup>8</sup> This implicitness points to other criteria and requirements that are easily deducible. They are:

- a knowledge of the culture of origin and of that of the place concerned, obtained through contact with those who live it;
- the identification of anything in the culture which is not compatible with the evangelical and charismatic patrimony of the Congregation. If the incompatibility is absolute, a process must be begun for the transformation of mind and heart; if it is only relative it will be a question of correcting, redirecting, extending and perfecting its values.
- the explicit declaration of absolute innovations contained in the evangelical and charismatic patrimony, from which every culture can benefit, as from a grace.

We must remember that only in the light of transcendental values is it possible to assess the value of any one culture. The way in which the manifestation of the "signs of the times" has grown in the last ten or twenty years, and the near-universal interchange between different cultures, puts the spotlight on each one of them. The truths too of the mystery of Christ and the creative vitality of the charisms of his Spirit bring about an agitation for revision, for purification, and for a new drive that can benefit the cultures themselves. We must maintain one of the characteristics of the Kingdom, which is its location above or beyond every culture, in the fraternal unity of the People of God which should know neither race nor frontier.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> AGC 312 (1985), p. 39

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 39-40

*Almighty God,  
your Wisdom fills the universe  
and holds all things together  
in a strong yet gentle manner,  
sowing in all peoples and cultures  
the seeds of your holy presence.  
You have made the gifts of unity and universality  
shine forth also in our own Society:  
many countenances, many peoples and different cultures  
in a single family with a single "oratorian heart".*

*Give us attention of mind and generosity of heart,  
so that we may remain faithful  
to the charism you gave to our holy Founder;  
help us to preserve our unity of spirit,  
and perceive "all that is true, noble and just"  
among the gifts you have bestowed  
on the people to whom you send us,  
so that we may bring them back to you,  
the source of all goodness,  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*



## ART. 101 THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY AND FORMATION

The provincial community welcomes and follows up the vocation of every confrere, sees to the preparation of formation personnel, provides formation structures, and makes each local community aware of its obligations in the formation sector.

It is the duty of the provincial community, through the various organs of animation and government, to lay down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context and in conformity with the directives of the church and the congregation.

In the exercise of this common responsibility every salesian, through prayer and personal witness, contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brothers.

From the time of the SGC the provincial community has been accorded particular importance as regards the shared responsibility and participation of the confreres and in the realms of subsidiarity and decentralization, so as to promote the development and growth of the Congregation in its many different situations. At the present day a lot of elbow room is given to the provincial community and to its responsibility also in the formation field, both for the possibilities it presents ("with the autonomy that belongs to it", C 157) and for the service it is called upon to provide: part of its task is that of "promoting the life and mission of the Congregation" (C 157).

It belongs to the Rector Major with his council to promote "the constant fidelity of the members to the salesian charism" (C 126) and their integral formation (C 135); the corresponding duty of the individual confrere is to accept responsibility for his own formation in the measure that is left to him to decide, and of the local community to make itself both a setting and the subject of formation; but the primary and direct responsibility for salesian formation in its various aspects and in its overall practical realization belongs to the provincial community.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FSDB, 156

## The fundamental and specific task

The provincial community has the obligation for salesian formation in its own context. This is a task which follows from the very definition of its significance and function: the promotion of the one salesian vocation and the mission of the Congregation in a specific juridical circumscription (C 157).

It must therefore provide for what was stated in art. 100 and is now taken up again in art. 101: to combine unity with pluriformity, charismatic identity with cultural pluralism, "to lay down the method of formation" according to the requirements of the culture to which it belongs, in conformity with the directives of the Church and the Congregation (C 101), and express this method through practical guidelines in the formation section of the Provincial Directory (cf. R 87).

This perspective governs all formative activity in the province: "It is an arduous task, and is particularly intense in the period of initial formation, though it is always pressing and relevant all through life".<sup>2</sup>

## Practical expression of the provincial service

Art. 101 brings to an end the section which presents the general aspects of formation, and the principles and conditions which make possible the salesian formative experience. And it does so by specifying the service to be rendered by the provincial community to individuals, to local communities, and in the organization of the formation process, keeping in mind its basic task we have already spoken of. We could sum it all up in the expression of art. 58: the province "shows a loving concern for new confreres, and is solicitous for the formation of every member".

a. *It willingly accepts the vocation of every confrere and follows it up.*

<sup>2</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 39

It offers to anyone who is thinking of becoming a salesian an environment and suitable conditions to enable him to discern his own vocation (cf. C 109); it accompanies him in the delicate periods of the initial formation and especially at the more significant moments, the admissions; it promotes various ordinary and extraordinary activities (cf. R 101, 102) which foster the process of ongoing formation and stimulate an active spiritual life, theological and pastoral updating, professional competence and apostolic inventiveness (cf. C 118).

The task of "accepting and following up vocations" is not expressed only in service and activity. It implies in the first place that the provincial community, which lives with a spiritual flair and competence the various obligations of the salesian vocation, shall be itself a valid model and permanent stimulus for every confrere and especially for the younger ones.

*b. It sees to the preparation of formation personnel and formation structures.*

This is a task which applies especially to initial formation. Two particular responsibilities need to be pointed out:

- that of providing the formation community with a rector and formation team specially prepared for spiritual direction (cf. R 78), to ensure a valid formative experience. The province is therefore asked to make a careful and timely choice of capable confreres to be prepared, and requalified if need be, for this "specific and necessary role" (C 104);
- that of ensuring the formation structures, i.e. the ensemble of conditions (buildings, communal environment, social context, study curriculum, pastoral experiences) which will allow of an authentic formative experience under its various aspects (human maturing, intellectual preparation, consecrated life, insertion in pastoral and educative activity), the attainment of the objectives of the different phases and of the whole formative process.

*c. It animates the formative commitment of the local communities.*

The provincial community fosters fraternal communion among local communities and supports them in their mission (cf. C 58). The local community, in fact, shares the responsibility for the development

of every confrere (cf. R 81), fosters his growth to maturity and sustains him in moments of difficulty (cf. C 52), it provides a stimulating vocational environment (it has an obligation to do this!) and, above all, offers an experience of a formative life. "Hence", as art. 99 says, "it must continually move forward and be renewed".

Animation by those chiefly responsible, particularly the provincial and his council, the ordinary and extraordinary activities planned and realized for this purpose (cf. R 101), the formation of a fraternal provincial community (cf. C 161) which actively promotes the salesian life and mission (cf. C 157) on the basis of an educative and pastoral plan (R 4) which is constantly evaluated and brought up to date, all these are the clear signs of the continuity of this formative commitment.

### **The responsibility of every single member of the provincial community**

From the beginning of this section dealing with the general aspects of formation, the Constitutions have emphasized the responsibility of the individual member for his formation, understood as a personal response to the Lord's call (cf. C 96). The section now ends by pointing to the obligation of every single member of the provincial community.

This is an illustration of the fact that always and insistently the role of the individual and that of the community are stressed as functioning together. If the provincial community has a specific and fundamental task to perform in the matter of formation, it must be emphasized that it is itself made up of individuals: every salesian takes on the responsibility for his own formation (cf. C 99); every confrere collaborates to make the local community a formative setting (C 99); every salesian lives his responsibility for formation also at provincial level, and "through prayer and personal witness contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his brothers".

*Lord our God,  
we have been given the charism of your Spirit  
so that we may pass it on in our turn  
and make it grow in others.  
You want us to be responsible  
for the fertility of your gifts,  
and the multiplication of your talents.*

*Enlighten, we pray you,  
the Superiors and all the confreres  
of our provincial community,  
so that with the strength of your Spirit  
and the warmth of your love,  
they may be able to direct the work of formation,  
dedicating themselves to it by prayer and example,  
so as to sustain, confirm and renew in every confrere  
the grace of your call.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

## Section II

### INITIAL FORMATION

*"Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears" (1 Sam 3,9).*

In its brevity, clarity and density of meaning, this has become a classical text in connection with vocation. The context can help to make its aspects more precise, showing in the first place how the vocation develops in terms of a dialogue with the Lord, and how the call is not always so evident that a process of discernment of God's voice and hence a climate of prayer is unnecessary.

The account of the vocation of Samuel, in the deuteronomical setting to which it belongs (from the Book of Joshua to the 2nd Book of Kings), seems to be intended to exalt the rebirth of prophecy in Israel, the grace of the presence of the Word of God among the people. In fact at the beginning of chap. 3 it says that "the word of the Lord was rare in those days" (v. 1), but at the end we are told that Samuel was a true prophet (v. 20). God's silence, caused by the bad conduct of the priestly house of Eli (1 Sam 1-2), was broken during the night through divine communication when "*the Lord called Samuel*" (v. 4). It is the same formula as that by which Moses (Ex 3,4) and Isaiah (Is 6,8) were called. As with Moses, and later with Jeremiah (Jer 1), a process of discernment was necessary, for which purpose Samuel went to Eli for the recognition of God's voice. The threefold repetition of the call makes this quite clear. Samuel entrusts himself totally to the Lord: "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*" (3,10).

Immediately after the call comes the prophetic mission of gigantic proportions (3,19-21). Between God and Samuel a pact of reciprocal fidelity is established: to the complete docility of the youth he has called, who from the outset would not let God's voice be lost even when questioned by Eli (3,16-18), and then in the dramatic story from Shilo to Saul, God responded by "letting none of his words fall to the ground" (3,19).

The story brings to mind another story, that of the vocation of Don Bosco. He was so completely open to the voice of God and attentive to the interpretation of its sense and directives, that because of his fidelity he later became the prophet of the call of God for countless young people.

Although he commits himself personally, the salesian who wants to become an apostle of the young entrusts himself with docility to the Spirit and willingly accepts his inspirations.

In this context the second section of chap. VIII presents the general aspects of the *initial formation*, i.e. those indispensable elements needed for a valid experience in the process which leads to perpetual profession for all, and for some to priestly ordination. In this more specifically defined process the contents of the chapter's first section still apply.

The text presents in seven articles the various aspects which complement each other in harmonious fashion:

- the objective of the initial formation (*art. 102*);
- the setting (*art. 103*);
- those responsible and their tasks (*art. 104-105*);
- the curriculum (*art. 106*);
- the stages of formation (*art. 107*) and the admissions (*art. 108*), as times of synthesis and the beginning of deeper and more specific commitments.

It is evidently a question of the foundation on which will be built the process of initial formation which is dealt with specifically in chap. IX.

## ART. 102 COMPLEXITY AND UNITY OF THE INITIAL FORMATION PERIOD

The aim of initial formation is the human maturing of the young confrere, his intellectual preparation and the deepening of his consecrated life, as he is gradually introduced to educational and pastoral work.

In the formative experience these elements must be harmonized into a living unity.

Initial formation takes place in view of the general purpose of salesian formation. What specific contribution does it make to the attainment of this objective? This is the first of the general aspects dealt with by the constitutional text.

Initial formation aims at fostering an experience which brings the young confrere to develop those attitudes and values which are proper to the salesian vocation. They are indicated and summarized from four points of view, each of them in turn the result of the convergence of various other elements (this is the complexity referred to in the title of the article): human maturing, intellectual preparation, the deepening of the consecrated life, and gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work.

### **Human maturing**

Human maturity has been attained when a person is capable of making free choices in the light of true and interiorly assimilated motivations, of authentic human relationships and objective judgements on people and events, and of an open and personal love for others in an attitude of mutual acceptance and unconditional esteem. These values are more easily attained by one who is in good physical condition with, as far as possible, good health, ability to work, and undisturbed willingness for sacrifice; one who knows himself and accepts himself for



what he is; one of mature affections and a well balanced sexuality which is given its proper place among human values.

## **Intellectual preparation**

Intellectual preparation is called for and determined by the vocation and its implications. These specify the objectives aimed at, and shape the choice of cultural settings and the relations between the separate disciplines: "the programme of studies", says art. 82 of the Regulations, "must preserve a balance between serious and scientific reflection and the religious and apostolic dimensions of our way of life": intellectual preparation is, in fact, an integral part of the life plan.

This requirement and guideline pervades the whole of the long process of formation, though the emphasis varies (cf. novitiate: C 110, R 91; postnovitiate: C 114, R 95; specific formation of the priest and brother: C 116, R 97-98; ongoing formation: C 118-119, R 99).

The mission, in particular, through the service of integral development which it is called upon to render to youth, "orientates and characterizes at all levels the intellectual formation of the members" (R 82). It asks that "those branches of study shall be cultivated with special care which deal with the education of and pastoral work for youth, catechesis and social communication" (R 82).

Studies are a necessary component, in their own way (cf. C 98, 102), for knowing Jesus Christ, feeling with the Church and the Congregation, maturing in awareness and professional competence, and passing on the message of salvation, especially to the young.

As can be seen, intellectual preparation implies the development of one's own intelligence, but also an openness capable of reflection and judgement, attention to people and situations, maturity in discernment, and willingness to learn.

## Deepening of consecrated life

This is an expression which in a wide sense comes under the heading of "salesian religious values". It includes the sense of God and of his presence in history, which is manifested in us particularly by the gift of pastoral charity and by the sense of Church; it includes the ability to "live and work together", overcoming individualistic ideas and styles of life in the conviction that communion is itself the best safeguard for diversity and originality; it includes the practice of the evangelical counsels, which manifest a style of life recollected in God, so as to reveal the definitive nature of its religious value and its divine fruitfulness in the service of one's fellow men; it includes living in dialogue with the Lord, something which involves the whole of vocational experience and moves from God to youth work and back from youth work to God in the celebration of a life consecrated by him for the Kingdom.

## Gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work

In the whole process of initial formation, educative pastoral work is particularly concentrated in the pastoral experiences (cf. R 86) and during the practical training period (cf. C 115). Gradual insertion into motivated and programmed activity, subsequently followed up and evaluated, is in itself a formative element, distinguished from and complementary to intellectual formation.

Pastoral educational practice, based on wisdom and belief, is central to the formation of every salesian, even though in initial formation the demands of time and methodology require that theoretical activities and the acquiring of qualifications be given priority. These develop pastoral sense and abilities, and lead to the formation in young salesians of the necessary skills and aptitudes which will later enable them to carry out fully and efficaciously their apostolic and formative pastoral work. This was the thought of Don Bosco who, in the Italian edition of the "Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales" of 1875, wrote in chap. XII: "The members, whilst attending to the studies prescribed by the Constitutions, should not apply themselves more than

is needful to the works of charity that are proper to the Salesian Society".<sup>1</sup>

### Harmonized into a living unity

The terms used in the text of the Constitutions to describe these various aspects: "maturing", "preparation", "deepening", "gradual introduction", stress the dynamic nature of the experience and lead to the idea of ongoing formation. They give prominence too to the perspective of the formative process, of which the following chapter will emphasize the gradual nature and continuity, the specific and complementary character of the different phases, and the criterion of synthesis and unification.

In the formative experience these various aspects must always be cultivated simultaneously and not successively, because they interpenetrate and sustain each other. No one should ever forget this, even though the different phases contemplate a greater emphasis on one or other of them according to the specific objective of the phase concerned: on spiritual efforts during the novitiate; on intellectual and professional training during the postnovitiate; and on practical experience during the period of practical training. The same unity and continuity of formation is involved all the way through, and so therefore is its successful result.

"*A living unity*" says the text, because formation is not a matter of bits and pieces. It is a living reality which continually links its different aspects together in harmony. One of the great tasks of initial formation, its first and characteristic general aspect, is the individual's experience of himself as a person called to unify his own life. This unity comes from his progressive concentration on his plan of life, which he finds authentically presented in the Constitutions, and in which Don Bosco himself found the secret of his unity as a person who loved the young in loving God and who loved God in loving the young. He

<sup>1</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, XII, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 181)

said himself, as he handed the book of the Constitutions to Fr John Cagliero: "I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place" (cf. Foreword to the Constitutions).

*Lord Jesus,  
it was your will to take upon yourself  
the task and challenge of growing  
"in wisdom, in stature, and in grace with God and men".  
You personally accompanied your Apostles  
in the process of the purification of their humanity  
and their efforts to re clothe it with grace  
in view of their future mission.*

*Grant to the young men you have called to serve you  
in the Salesian Society  
the joy and generosity of applying themselves  
to their own formation,  
so that they may live in fruitful unity  
the maturing of themselves as persons  
and the spirit of "da mihi animas"  
at the school of Don Bosco.*

## ART. 103 FORMATION COMMUNITIES

Initial formation is ordinarily carried out in communities specifically designed for this purpose.

In accordance with Don Bosco's style of education these communities are open and keep in mind the aspirations of the young for a more personal and fraternal life style.

In them our spirit is lived in a more intense manner; together the members form a family founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ, united in mutual esteem and common endeavour.

Those in formation and their guides contribute according to their different roles to the creation of an atmosphere of shared responsibility, and work with the aims of formation clearly in view.

The lines of growth which constitute the general objectives of initial formation have been indicated. In what kind of setting can this characteristic experience be realized? The Constitutions answer: ordinarily in chosen and specialized communities, in which there is:

- a life style open to the aspirations of the young;
- a family spirit lived in a more intense manner;
- an atmosphere of shared responsibility.

### A particular setting for a specific purpose

Every salesian responds to the Lord's call in the community and with the help of the community. The latter, said art. 99, is in every circumstance the natural setting for growth in his vocation.

This principle is all the more valid for the salesian in initial formation. The special situation of discernment and of vocational identification, the particular phase of human maturing and deepening of the consecrated life, and the formative significance of being inserted

in educative pastoral work while the salesian is being gradually formed, all mean that normally only communities structurally designed for the purpose can provide conditions suitable for realizing the desired environment.

All communities are formative, but not all are able to offer a service adapted to the different phases of the formation process.

### **The style of life of the formation community**

The article points out *three requirements or characteristic elements* of the style of life proper to a salesian community for initial formation. We shall examine them one by one.

#### *a. A style of life open to the "aspirations of the young".*

The salesian vocation wants to be open to cultures and to the needs of the young and of working-class areas (cf. C 7), and to the values of the world (cf. C 17). It is said explicitly of the local community that "it is open to the world's values and attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work" (C 57). Normally the salesians live a particular capacity for openness, friendly reception and harmony with the young (cf. C 14, 15, 39).

The text asks that this attitude, proper to Don Bosco's style of education, become a particular characteristic of the environment of the formation communities. They must live and structure their relationships according to a style of life which is more personal and more fraternal:

- more personal, in the sense that it respects the individual and his needs and fosters his interior life;
- more fraternal, so that relations are marked by simplicity, joy and mutual service in which there is real authentic communion.

b. *A family atmosphere lived in a more intensive way.*

This is the second characteristic of formation communities: a style of relationships, an intense spirit which animates them and which fosters encounters, communion and sharing between the members.

These statements are based on experience. More than being an abstract definition of a series of qualities, they evoke a climate, an environment of fraternal life, of the true family spirit, which is felt and experienced in a house of Don Bosco. It was the experience of those who found their way to the Oratory: "I came to realize that the Oratory was a big house with ever open doors and hearts open wider still", wrote Fr Joseph Vespignani.<sup>1</sup>

The motives and conditions which make possible these encounters between people who are naturally different and which constitute the bond of unity in the formation community are:

- *faith and enthusiasm for Christ.* The fundamental motivation is the common salesian vocation: our "coming together" is based first and foremost on the conviction that "God calls us to live in community" (C 50), that "God brings our community together and keeps it united by his call, his Word, his love" (C 85);
- *mutual esteem, welcome, recognition,* the valuing of each individual in his personal reality. Don Bosco, speaking of "this matter which is so essential to our Society",<sup>2</sup> told his salesians: "So that this community life may be pleasant, we must rid it of all envy and jealousy; we must love one another as brothers, help one another, assist one another, respect one another, be understanding with one another. Each of us must guard against belittling our Society; rather, each must strive to make it respected by all";<sup>3</sup>
- *convergence of efforts.* The feeling of being committed to a common project, consistency in our activity, "working together":

<sup>1</sup> G. VESPIGNANI, *A year at the school of Don Bosco*, San Benigno Canavese 1932, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> BM IX, 269

<sup>3</sup> BM IX, 268.

this is a basic factor in the communion of those living an apostolic vocation.

The relationship with Christ in faith, the brotherly relationships between the members, the practical convergence of endeavours in the mission, which presuppose a mature and docile mentality, constitute the bonds of unity and make the community a family.

*c. An atmosphere of shared responsibility.*

A concrete expression of the "convergence of efforts" is the ability to generate an atmosphere of shared responsibility, which allows and stimulates the contribution of each one to the formative objective; i.e. that makes for a life that is more responsible, individually and collectively; in which initiative is possible, dialogue is real, important questions are studied as far as possible in common and realized in collaboration.

Shared responsibility must evidently be practised to the extent and in accordance with the role that obedience has entrusted to each one.

The specific tasks of formation personnel and the confreres in formation are dealt with in articles 104 and 105; but the general Regulations ask that "those in formation should play their part in practical ways in the running of the community" (R 78). And the same article specifies two of the more important moments in which they are asked to express their shared responsibility: the planning and evaluation of their work in the light of the formative objective to be attained. In their common search for the will of God also, both one group and the other must develop in themselves the attitude of spiritual discernment, which is like the soul and delicate internal structure which moves towards its goal all research that is made together and every practical decision.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *"The Rector's Manual"*, Rome 1986, analytical index: shared responsibility, discernment



*Let us pray for our formation communities,  
and implore for the confreres working in them  
wisdom, intelligence and largeness of heart,  
that they may fulfil joyfully and efficaciously  
the vital mission entrusted to them.*

*Lord, you have made your Church  
the house and family of the Father,  
where the life of each one  
comes into being, develops and bears fruit  
through the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Grant that our formation communities  
may be a faithful reflection of your Church  
in their solicitude for the confreres in formation.*

*You called your apostles  
and formed them with patience and strength,  
offering your life for them  
and flooding their souls with the gifts of your Spirit.*

*Grant that  
the formation environments of our young brothers  
may be animated by your Gospel  
and enlivened by your Spirit,  
and become places of welcome, of encounter and stimulus,  
for a full and fruitful response to your call.*

*You gave your Apostles the example  
of your preaching to the poor and the little ones.  
Grant to all our confreres in formation  
the same yearning for the salvation of the young  
that you infused in the heart of Don Bosco.*

## ART. 104 ROLE OF FORMATION PERSONNEL

The guides in formation communities have a specific and necessary role.

They ensure that those in formation have the opportunities for a valid experience and for serious doctrinal reflection in an appropriate setting.

Aware of being instruments through whom the Lord is working, they make every effort to constitute with the rector, who is the leader of the community and its spiritual guide, a group that is convinced of its common responsibility.

Chosen for this task are men of faith and sufficient pastoral experience, capable of a living communication of the salesian ideal, and of genuine dialogue with the young confreres.

After describing the style of life of formation communities, the Constitutions go on to speak of those more immediately responsible for the formative setting: the formation personnel in the present article 104, and the salesian in formation in the following one, art. 105.

With regard to the formation personnel the article draws attention to three points: their specific task, their working together as a team, and the criteria for their choice and the qualities they should have.

### **The task of the formation guides**

The "specific and necessary" task of the formation guides is that of ensuring the conditions necessary for the attainment of the general and specific objectives of the respective phases of formation.

Their overall role is that of seeing to it that the formative experience and the reflection that must accompany it are valid and positive, i.e. they fulfil the purpose of the formation. This means that the lack of formation guides or their insufficiency will be seriously prejudicial to the young confreres.

Among the conditions, in addition to the suitable environment referred to in the commentary on art. 103, particular importance attaches to the "serious doctrinal reflection". For us this is a requirement that arises from the very nature of our vocation; it finds its first adequate response in a study curriculum which is complete and faithful to the guidelines of the "Ratio". Pastoral activity, in which are perceived the real difficulties, the problems and the calls of God, is a source of formation, but it needs periods of reflection and discernment so as to make a critical interpretation of the problems according to criteria of faith and science, and hence to prompt new projects and perspectives. The latter will always involve the subject directly and will keep salesian experience in mind. Teachers too, both those regularly on the staff and those who may be invited from time to time to present special matters outside the ordinary scholastic programme, guarantee continuity with the doctrinal patrimony of the Church and the charismatic heritage of the Congregation. In the present pluralistic atmosphere they ensure adherence to the truth and at the same time a proper balance in critical judgements and practical evaluations. They are therefore a unifying presence, indispensable for a complete and well ordered initial formation.

The text speaks of "formation guides" in the plural, not just a single one by himself. The task is, in fact, a complex one and calls for the complementary contributions of several persons. The text emphasizes the importance of them working together, on the basis of the awareness and conviction of their personal and common responsibility.

These considerations help us to understand more clearly that in the matter of salesian formation no one is self-taught, nor in the ordinary run of events is he a salesian who thinks he can do everything on his own, saving the possibility of charismatic exceptions which, however, need very careful verification. One of the biggest graces a young salesian can receive is without any doubt that of coming in contact with formation guides who are both competent and holy!

## A role to be lived in shared responsibility

The coherence and consistency among the formation personnel is based on the conviction of faith that they are people "through whom the Lord is working", i.e. servants of the unitary action of the Spirit, and responsible for following the criteria and directives of the Congregation in their activity.

Theirs is not an individual service nor an intermittent activity, but a task which provides a common and authentic response to different needs in view of the objectives to be attained. They are not there solely to provide a series of services, albeit valid ones, but to assume a common responsibility. The formation plan itself acquires greater authority when it is seen to be unified in content and evaluation, even though it reflects the originality of each of those involved in its presentation.

This coherence therefore is called for by theological and charismatic motives, as well as by pedagogical wisdom and by experience. The decree "*Opatam totius*" notes: "Superiors and professors should be keenly aware of the extent to which their mental outlook and content affects the formation of their students. Under the guidance of the rector they should cultivate the closest harmony of spirit and action".<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly not a case of a dull and unproductive uniformity but of a fundamental conviction, which places the efforts and qualities of all at the service of their common responsibility. It is an application of the spiritual and pedagogical criterion proper to one who is a mediator and minister.

The Congregation's guidelines in the field of formation help to express this unity of intentions in concrete form. The diversity of roles, structures and interventions renders simultaneously indispensable both the individual contribution of each one and his ability to work "in unum" with others.

The text refers explicitly to the role of the rector, who is described as "the leader of the community and its spiritual guide": the phrase

<sup>1</sup> OT 5; cf. SGC, 672

recalls the distinctive features of the salesian rector, expressed especially in art. 55, which take on greater importance in the period of initial formation. All our salesian tradition, going back to Don Bosco himself, sees in the rector the spiritual guide, proposed in the first place not only to the formative community as such but also to each individual confrere.

The text insists nevertheless that the different roles, grouped around the rector, must be harmoniously and creatively linked together (cf. C 66), so as to form a "group that is convinced".

## The requirements

The specific task assigned to the formation personnel requires in them the presence of the spiritual, intellectual and pedagogical qualities demanded by the Church and the Congregation. They must be:

— *"men of faith"*.

Since formation is a response of faith to a call accepted in faith, this perspective of life must be evident primarily in the witness of the formation guides. They are in fact animators of a community "founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ" (C 103); they must accompany and stimulate a formation process "enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit" (C 98); they must help the young confreres to develop their personal motivations of faith and attain a spiritual maturity proportioned to the definitive commitment of perpetual profession founded on a right intention.

— *"capable of a living communication of the salesian ideal"*.

"Everything about Don Bosco had a power of attraction", said Don Albera, "because from his every word and deed emanated the sanctity of union with God which is perfect charity... This singular attraction was the source of the conquering force that captivated our hearts".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ASC 3 (1920), p. 64-65; cf. D. ALBERA, *Circular letters* p. 373-374

Art. 85 of the Regulations tells us that "the assimilation of the salesian spirit is fundamentally a fact of living communication".

Formation personnel therefore must have the gift and ability of identifying fully with the salesian ideal so as to be able to announce it, bear witness to it and vitally communicate it more by their life and relationships than by their words. Tranquil possession of the salesian identity is the first condition for forming others, for inculcating in them a motivated and enthusiastic adherence to vocational values, and a love and taste for them.

— *"capable of genuine dialogue"*.

This is a characteristic quality of Don Bosco's style of education, a style which is prompted by sympathy, by the ability to listen, and also by the exchange of valid information, all of which create confidence and openness, foster communication and facilitate formation in depth. It is a style which presupposes a certain attitude of heart and more than a little asceticism.

— *with "sufficient pastoral experience"*.

This condition is directly linked with the fundamental objective of the service being given (to contribute to the formation of pastors and educators according to C 98), with the specific orientation of formation (the religious and apostolic nature of the salesian vocation referred to in C 97), and with the particular and original characteristics of intellectual formation (cf. R 82). It is a condition therefore which excludes the danger of a too abstract intellectual or spiritual approach.

Formation personnel are chosen on the basis of these qualities; in view of them they are prepared and are helped in a constant renewal and requalification process. Not all of them will satisfy these requirements to the same degree, and to ensure that the level reached is sufficiently high they will have to look continually to their own development and bring their professional ability and personal holiness to greater maturity.

In any case, what is particularly important is that the group of formation personnel, taken as a whole, be suitable for the adequate fulfilment of their formative mandate.

*Lord Jesus,  
you manifest your will for us in many ways,  
and through the confreres you have placed at our side  
you help us to know the way that leads to you.  
And so you willed that Don Bosco should be  
the instrument through whom you call many  
to serve you in serving the young.*

*Grant, we pray you,  
to those you still choose today  
to be at the school of Don Bosco  
teachers and guides of their younger confreres,  
a living awareness of the task they have received,  
the wisdom they need and ability for dialogue,  
together with kindness of heart and unity of purpose.*

*Make them docile instruments of your Spirit  
so that they may be able to transmit,  
in a true and joyous experience of faith,  
the genuine sense of the common vocation and mission.*

## ART. 105 THE SALESIAN IN INITIAL FORMATION

For the salesian the time of initial formation is not so much a period of marking time as already one of work and holiness. It is a time of dialogue between God, whose initiative calls him and leads him forward, and his own freedom as he gradually assumes responsibility for his own formation.

In this process of growing responsibility he is sustained by prayer, spiritual direction, personal reflection, study and brotherly relationships.

The first section of the chapter emphasized, among the general aspects of salesian formation, the importance of the personal commitment of each confrere, who bears the primary responsibility for his own formation. This obligation is now made more specific with respect to initial formation, indicating the young confrere himself as the first agent in the formative experience and pointing to the means which sustain him in this task.

### **Initial formation: a time of dialogue and vocational commitment**

Initial formation is without any doubt a period of preparation, a process of maturing, of discernment and of growing assumption of responsibility leading to the salesian spiritual maturity required for perpetual profession. It is a dialogue between the confrere and the Congregation, aimed at appraising his suitability and maturity in view of his definitive incorporation.

But in the perspective of ongoing formation, the initial formation constitutes the beginning of the salesian religious experience and not just a preparation for living it later on. It is already a progressive realization of that experience; it is already fruitful: it *"is not so much a period of marking time as already one of work and holiness"*.



This first point made by the article highlights the serious nature and the significance of this period:

- *a time of work*: the serious work of one who is totally dedicated, capable of self-sacrifice, with a sense of collaboration and tireless industry, so as to respond to the demands of the formative environment and of pastoral service;
- *a time of holiness*: the holiness which is found and which grows in the effort to collaborate with the action of the Spirit and his mediations, in the generous acceptance of the Father's plan for the confrere's life and for the coming of the Kingdom, as he becomes progressively more conformed to Christ through the Word, the sacraments and pastoral charity.

The words that follow: "It is a *time of dialogue* between God, whose initiative calls him and leads him forward, and his own freedom as he gradually assumes responsibility for his own formation", make more explicit and characterize still further the kind of work and holiness that are proper to the salesian in initial formation.

The "*work*" and the "*holiness*" consist in living this time of dialogue with complete docility. For the young confrere it is a matter of committing himself incessantly and with all his capabilities to discern and concretely accept God's initiative which he recognizes in the meditations, structures, processes and formative experiences. The Lord calls and leads, but he asks for progressively freer and more authentic response, or in other words, one that is radical and motivated.

The first article of this third part, dedicated to formation, has already described the formative commitment in its first and fundamental aspect: it is a concrete response to the Lord's call, the first "yes" said in the living dialogue with God (cf. C 96). This same principle is now put forward again in the period of initial formation of one who, by saying with all he has and is: "Be it done to me according to your Word" (Lk 1, 38), wants to dispose and fit himself for God's initiatives, for the fullness of the service of charity, and increase in himself the joy of his vocation.

## The means for sustaining the formative commitment

In the process of growing responsibility the young salesian does not go ahead haphazardly, nor must he think that everything will happen automatically. He must avail himself of all the means he is offered, and art. 105 indicates five of them:

### — *Prayer.*

This is the experience which invigorates his contact and dialogue with God through listening to his Word, sacramental and liturgical life, and personal contact. It enables him to express in the intimacy of a personal relationship his own way of being God's son, of showing him gratitude, of entrusting to him his yearnings and concerns (cf. C 93). It is primarily in prayer that is realized in depth the dialogue between God's initiative and the freedom of the salesian which is characteristic of this period of formation.<sup>1</sup>

### — *Spiritual direction.*

For years Don Bosco was the protagonist in an approach which brought together three elements for setting his boys and his Salesians on the road to holiness: direction of conscience, which normally took place in the confessional; community direction or that of the environment, which created an educative spiritual atmosphere; and occasional personal direction by means of a word, a short piece of advice or a brief note. All this succeeded in making him a "captor of hearts", as he used to put it. Education is a work of the heart, and if it does not reach the point of winning over hearts and working on consciences it is gravely compromised. This was his conviction.<sup>2</sup>

The Constitutions and Regulations recognize the importance of personal spiritual direction, especially in the period of initial formation, and link it with the task of discernment and verification of motivations and vocational suitability. They speak of it in the context of the im-

<sup>1</sup> On spiritual formation, and especially on prayer, cf. OT 8

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Collected letters*, IV, p. 209

mediate prenovitiate (cf. C 109), the novitiate (cf. C 112), and the period of temporary profession (cf. C 113).

Spiritual direction is recommended by Vatican II<sup>3</sup> and by the "Ratio institutionis sacerdotalis" which adds: "Each student should have his spiritual director, to whom he may humbly and confidently open his conscience, so as to be guided safely in the Lord's way".<sup>4</sup>

A process of personal and communal spiritual direction starts nowadays from the fact accepted by everyone, that it is a human and spiritual reality. Spiritual growth is possible within a life plan that is in a certain sense already programmed and conditioned by the personal nature and history of each one. Spiritual direction is not only a religious fact. Its object is the concrete man with his concrete problems.

While all this is an inducement to the formation guides to prepare themselves carefully for their task, it also prompts the young confrere to be more easily aware of it and (what is more difficult) to accept that at times he needs to be helped and guided by those around him, and more especially by a spiritual guide. The General Regulations say that according to our constant tradition the spiritual guide of this kind in formation communities is the rector (cf. R 78).

#### — *Reflection.*

This is born of the desire and willingness to learn and accept what is new, overcoming irritation caused by changes through the ability to distinguish the changeable from the permanent, without going to extremes; it is born of a capacity for dialogue without being hidebound and requires an aptitude for concentration and the constant willingness to practise it.<sup>5</sup> Every authentic experience presupposes a properly formed conscience which is keen and continually alert.

#### — *Study.*

Serious study of all the disciplines indispensable to the life and activity of the salesian apostle, so that he becomes almost a "specialist"

<sup>3</sup> Cf. OT 8

<sup>4</sup> RFIS 55; cf also *ibid.* 45, 56; CIC, can. 239 §2; can. 240; can. 246 §4

<sup>5</sup> Cf. FSDB, 61

in study, moves him in his humble search of objective truth; he aims at this by a constant purification of motives and by making use of scientific methods best suited to the purpose. This calls for presence and active attention at lessons which transmit not only knowledge but also a genuine tradition of life; it is a personal commitment which ensures the sound assimilation of cultural contents, their deeper critical analysis, their synthesis and their practical realization.

— *Brotherly relationships.*

There is no doubt that these are of great help because of the stimulus created by a friendly atmosphere for emulation and encouragement.

To all this we may add the content of art. 80 of the Regulations which refers to *normal discipline*. No "experience of life and action" can achieve its objective without perseverance in daily effort, ongoing conversion, a striving for purity of heart, and a sense of sacrifice in a paschal spirit. This is the price that has to be paid for spiritual freedom, a key element in every maturing process, and there is no one and nothing that can take the place of the young confrere in this service.

*Lord Jesus, every period of our life  
is a dialogue of salvation,  
a time for work and holiness.  
Such was your own experience at Nazareth,  
a prolonged preparation for your saving mission;  
such were the formation years of John Bosco,  
to whom you had shown his future field of work.  
We pray for our young confreres in formation:  
grant them the abundance of your Spirit,  
that they may be able to assume with serious generosity  
the responsibility for this period of their life  
so as to grow in vocation,  
sustained by prayer,  
by the interest and company of their brothers,  
and by love for the young who await their service.*

## ART. 106 FORMATION CURRICULUM

Lay salesians, future priests and permanent deacons normally have the same initial formation and follow curricula of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives.

The necessary differences are determined by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate.

The salesian vocational identity, which is common and fundamental for all, is the one purpose of formation.<sup>1</sup> But the forms in which it is expressed differ from one another. There is no such thing as a "generic" salesian;<sup>2</sup> every member lives the common aspects in a specific form, and during initial formation aims at becoming an educator and pastor of youth in the priestly or lay form proper to him (cf. C 98).

Art. 100 expressed as a general aspect of formation the principle of charismatic unity lived in a diversity of cultural contexts: a single vocational identity, common essential content, variety of concrete forms. This principle (unity in diversity and diversity in unity) is applied by art. 106 to the individual members, with respect to their formation. On the one hand there must be "curricula of equivalent level" and, on the other, attention must be given to the distinct vocational forms. This is a principle to be kept in mind throughout the whole of the formative process, because it forms one of its permanent perspectives.

We shall take a closer look at the statements in the article, which must be read and understood in the context of the salesian vocational identity already spoken of, and of the various forms in which it is realized: priestly, diaconal and lay (cf. C 4, 45).

The two complementary statements are as follows:

— Initial formation is one only, with curricula of equivalent level and with the same phases and similar content and objectives for all;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FSDB, 21

<sup>2</sup> Cf. GC21, 264

- Initial formation is diversified, because it takes account of the distinctions determined by the specific vocation of each one (layman, deacon, priest), by his personal gifts and inclinations and by his apostolic duties.

### **Initial formation is unitary**

This means that the curricula are at a common level for all, with the same phases and similar content and objectives. The statement is logical and self-evident. One need only recall that all Salesians have to attain the same vocational objective, and therefore they must live the same fundamental formative experience. The latter does not consist only in intellectual preparation; it also includes human maturing, deepening of consecrated life, and insertion in educative and pastoral work as a process of progressive identification with the salesian vocation.

The Constitutions and Regulations meet this requirement not only by prescribing that each one, before being definitively incorporated in the Society, must pass through the same periods of formation (immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself, and the period of temporary profession: C 107), but also by indicating the objectives and content of the individual phases and applying them in fact to all Salesians.

### **This unitary formation is diversified**

From the point of view of salesian formation, a salesian brother must be as well formed as a salesian priest, but in his own line as a lay religious and according to an appropriate cycle of preparation and studies.

This is a statement based on a reality which is both theological and anthropological. It is true that the Lord calls many to share Don Bosco's charism, but it is also true that each one lives it by incarnating it in his own personal reality, which is unique and different from that

of others. On the other hand it is precisely this personal reality which, when probed and understood, becomes one of the principal signs used by the Holy Spirit as a concrete manifestation of his will in respect of a particular person. One has only to look at the typical formative experiences referred to in the constitutional text at the beginning of the part dealing with formation: the experience of Jesus with the Apostles and that of Don Bosco with the first Salesians. Peter, James, John, etc. on the one hand, and Rua, Cagliero, Bonetti, etc. on the other are different forms and creative experiences of what is really the same vocation.

— The first distinction, which influences all aspects of formation and becomes a permanent standard and impression, is provided by the vocational form proper to each one: *lay salesian, salesian deacon, salesian priest*. "The different forms of the one vocation constitute a permanent perspective which specifies the experience of the values of the vocation itself (cf. C 98) under its various aspects (cf. C 113). The mission, community life, experience of the counsels, prayer and the spiritual life are lived by each one according to the dimension proper to him".<sup>3</sup> It is a distinction which in a certain sense pervades the whole curriculum and is expressed in different periods, experiences and particular items, as for instance in art. 116 of the Constitutions (and the corresponding articles 97 and 98 of the Regulations), which speak precisely of the formation of the salesian priest and of the lay salesian.

— Conversely it must be kept in mind that responsible formation implies the development of personal aptitudes and gifts of grace (cf. C 99). *Different talents and personal aptitudes* may call for different formative periods to foster preparation for a specific educative and pastoral service.

In this case too the apostolic mission, considered not so much in its direct relationship with the Congregation and its form as with the individual members, "sets the tenor of (their) whole life" (C 3) and dictates the specific direction their formation must take (cf. C 97). The tasks entrusted to a confrere, the concrete manner of his service in the

<sup>3</sup> FSDB, 44

mission, call for a formation and preparation at a level which will enable him to meet the demands of his apostolic work, and must therefore be specific and appropriate for this purpose.

— We are all salesians, but we are not all called to live the vocation in the same way nor to make identical contributions to the common mission. The personal way of living the one vocation depends on the Lord, on the *specific call He gives to each one*, by the gifts and aptitudes with which He enriches him, and on the particular contribution which is asked of him in view of the obligations He entrusts to him in the mission.

They are not therefore differences born primarily of personal choices and decisions. They come rather from him who through his Holy Spirit raised up in Don Bosco the salesian vocation with its manifold riches, and calls others to share it in different ways.

In conclusion, unitary and diversified formation is a service to God's plan for the community and each of its members, who are called to live "a special gift of God: predilection for the young" (C 14).

*Lord Jesus, you formed your Church  
and gave to it an infinite variety of gifts and tasks,  
grant to our communities  
the gift of unity in diversity,  
so that we may be able to grow, with all our confreres,  
brothers, deacons and priests,  
in the one salesian vocation.*

*Make us attentive and grateful to the Spirit,  
able to put to good effect  
the personal talents of each member  
in complementary respect and harmony,  
so as to express authentically among youth  
the richness of the charism you have given us.*



## ART. 107 INCORPORATION IN THE SOCIETY AND STAGES OF FORMATION

Before being definitively incorporated into the Society, each one passes through the following stages of formation: preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself and the period of temporary profession.

These steps are necessary for both the candidate and the community, so that they may work together to discern God's will and correspond with it.

The candidate gradually gets to know the Society, and the Society in turn can evaluate his suitability for salesian life.

This article presents the three periods of salesian initial formation: the immediate preparation for the novitiate, the novitiate itself and the period of temporary profession, and provides a synthesis of their implication.

To them and the phases they comprise is dedicated the greater part of the following chapter, and there is no point in anticipating here what will be explained more organically and at greater length in chap. IX. It would seem more useful here to take up some statements which show the significance of the process.

Following the paragraphs of the article this significance can be perceived:

1. in the perspective of a definitive commitment for which it is a preparation;
2. in the attitude of discernment which accompanies it:
  - to know and correspond with God's will
  - for a mutual understanding and evaluation by the candidate and by the Society he wishes to enter.

## In the perspective of perpetual profession and as a preparation for this definitive commitment

Initial formation has its permanent point of reference in perpetual profession. It must, in fact, lead to the salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step, which is a definitive commitment (cf. C 117) implying a knowledge of one's vocation (of one's own person, of the salesian identity and of the possible relationships between them), and maturity at a human and christian level (cf. C 109).

The perspective before one who is entering the Society is a radical choice, an entirely consecrated life, a definitive gift. He does not give himself "on loan" to God and youth for a few years. He "gives" himself completely with his whole being. This was Don Bosco's firm indication for the consecrated members of his family.<sup>1</sup>

When we look at the process of formation and recognize in it the gradual growth of vocational awareness, progress in commitment, the pedagogical significance and basic attitude of discernment which accompanies the unfolding of the experience, we must be careful not to consider the process as being in some way fragmentary, made up of partial commitments of a provisional, conditional or experimental kind.

The article synthesizes these two aspects, uniting the perspective of the definitive incorporation in the Society with the need for formative periods which permit, as the article says, the discernment of God's will, the responsible evaluation by both parties of the vocational suitability of the candidate and consequently whether or not he is ready for a definitive commitment.

The "gradual" element inherent in the process and the "definitive perspective" are not contradictory, but rather an expression of the awareness and respect which should accompany the making of fun-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*. The vows; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 228-229

damental human decisions, by giving proper importance to the spiritual significance of dialogue with the Lord.

Hence the serious nature, from a human and faith point of view, of a definitive commitment, and the need for an appropriate preparation for it. The perspective of perpetual profession brings home the fact that in the different periods, in the objectives proper to each of them and in the commitments they imply, what is at stake is the whole of life.

### **The significance of the formative "periods"**

The attitude of discernment which continually accompanies the process of vocational growth makes "periods" necessary in formation. The article emphasizes some of the underlying reasons for this:

— *to know the will of God and correspond with it.*

Commitment to formation is itself the response to the Lord's call to live Don Bosco's apostolic project in the Church (cf. C 96), but its first objective in order of time for the vocational process to be formative is that of discerning to what plan of life the Lord is in fact giving the call: "to discern his own vocation", "to deepen the vocational choice and verify his suitability" for beginning the salesian religious experience (cf. C 96, 109).

This discernment, realized in mutual collaboration between the candidate and the community, since the vocation is a gift which involves the responsibility of both, presupposes a process for recognizing the signs of God's will. It is a matter of discovering in the overall context of the life to which the candidate feels called, in its roots and practical expressions, in its perspectives and prospects, in its qualities and attitudes and in its motivations, what are the aspects through which the Holy Spirit reveals his presence and indicates the call to the salesian life. In concrete terms they have to work together to verify the presence of the "right intention", i.e. of the manifest will, decisive and well tried, to give himself entirely to God through motives of faith, with a genuine inclination and interest towards the salesian vocation.

Experience in the field of vocations recalls the importance of a serious discernment process which enables the candidate to know himself and make himself known. This is the purpose of those formative experiences, referred to as "periods", the use of which by the Church and the Congregation is considered necessary for understanding and accepting the will of God and for growing in ability to correspond with it.

— *for a mutual understanding and evaluation of the candidate and of the Society.*

"Profession is also the expression of a mutual commitment between the professed member who enters the Society and the Society which receives him with joy" (C 23).

The previous paragraph emphasized from the standpoint of vocation the relationship between God who calls and the candidate who responds. Now the accent is placed on the mutual commitment between the candidate and the Society, expressed in common responsibility as a service to the individual and to the charism.

In its double aspect this is a complex and diversified reality; it involves both the Society, of which the candidate must gain a better knowledge, and the candidate who has to be evaluated on the basis of positive and specific elements; neither of these can be anything else but a progressive experience.

The various periods taken together provide a gradual and continuous method of reaching a sufficient and well founded judgement, since each period is designed for furnishing the necessary elements for the purpose.

*God of infinite wisdom,  
you have disposed all things  
in proper measure, number and importance,  
and have assigned to every life  
its rhythm and periods of growth.*

*Grant to your servants who are being formed  
for the mission of educators and pastors of the young  
and to confreres who guide them,  
discernment and the spirit of collaboration  
so that they may know in depth your holy will  
and faithfully correspond with it.*

*Enlightened and supported by your Holy Spirit,  
may they persevere in following the formation process,  
in total dedication to you and to their brethren.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 108 ADMISSIONS

After the candidate has freely presented his application, admission to the novitiate, to temporary or perpetual profession, to the ministries and to sacred orders, is made by the provincial with the consent of his council, after hearing the opinion of the rector of the community with his council.

The superiors base their judgement on positive indications of the candidate's suitability, and keep in mind first of all the canonical requirements.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC. can. 642-645; 1019-1054

The process of initial formation is complex and vitally integrated into the unity of the individual (cf. C 102); it is carried out in appropriate settings-(cf. C 103), and on the basis of a curriculum of equal level for all (cf. C 104), which involves formation personnel (cf. C 104) and salesians in formation (cf. C 105) with shared responsibility. Its different periods are the organic expression of a pedagogy of research, of maturing and of encouragement.

The various periods are marked by times of synthesis and deeper analysis at the level of both knowledge and commitment: these are *the admissions*, which are dealt with in the present art. 108, the last article of chap. VIII.

The text gives prominence to two aspects:

- *the responsibility* and the part played by the provincial, the candidate and the local community respectively;
- *the criteria* which form the basis for the judgement on suitability.

The admissions are the important final moments of evaluation, choices and decisions; at the same time they offer a valuable pedagogical help in leading the candidate towards a response which is ever more concrete, consistent and mature. Although discernment is a constant feature of the formation process, especially in the initial phases, it is manifested more strongly at these times when the reading and synthesis of the vocational signs take place and an evaluation is made. These

signs become the basic motivation of both the candidate in making his application, and of those responsible for making a judgement on his vocational maturity in line with the requirements of the corresponding formative phase.

There is therefore a close connection between discernment and admissions. The application, freely made by the candidate, is based on the discernment he has made with the collaboration of the community, and he remains open to a sign which will be the indication of God's will, the judgement of those "through whom the Lord is working" (C 104). On the other hand, the judgement of the superiors is the fruit of the effort at spiritual understanding, enlightened by the criteria of the Church and the Congregation, which pervades all formative experience and has the purpose of serving both the vocation of the individual candidate and the salesian identity.

For this reason admissions should be seen in the perspective of a process with different levels of maturing and commitment.

### **The application, opinion, and responsibility in connection with admissions**

There are three persons or groups which share responsibility in the matter of admissions: the candidate who freely presents his application; the local community which expresses its opinion through the rector and his council, and the provincial who makes the decision with the consent of his council.

#### *— The application of the candidate.*

Admission takes place after the candidate has freely presented his application. It is not something which takes place automatically as the conclusion of a formation period or at a fixed date in the calendar. The initiative is taken personally by the candidate. He does so freely, i.e. "without any external or internal pressures" (C 109), aware of the

choice he is making (cf. C 109) and with the salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with such a choice (cf. C 117).

It is up to him to take the first step by which he expresses, as far as he is concerned, a first personal positive conclusion as regards the discernment of his vocation, reached together with those who can and must make their contribution to the evaluation.

— *The opinion of the rector of the community with his council.*

Vocational signs are revealed especially through personal contact and common life in the places and circumstances in which experience of vocational values is gained by living and working together. It is natural therefore that the local community should contribute information and its own evaluation on the basis of the life lived together. This is one of the concrete expressions of what is stated in art. 99, speaking of the community as the "natural environment for vocational growth", and is made more explicit in art. 81 of the Regulations: "The local community, since it shares the responsibility for the development of each confrere, is invited to express its opinion whenever one of its members seeks admission to profession or to holy orders. This will be done in the form most in keeping with charity".

Without prejudice to the importance and significance of the contribution and participation of all the members of the community, the juridical responsibility for sending an official opinion to the provincial rests with the rector and his council.

— *Responsibility for admission.*

The juridical responsibility for admission belongs to the provincial, the rector and their respective councils, and is deliberative or consultative according to the competence of each. Moral responsibility extends very much further, and attaches to all who live with the candidate and have some part in the formative process. A special responsibility is borne by the personal spiritual director and the confessor, who naturally remain bound to secrecy in virtue of the sacrament or their office.



For all admissions the Constitutions require that the application be examined and an opinion expressed at two levels: that of the council of the community where the candidate resides and that of the provincial council of the province on which the local community depends from a religious point of view.

The admission itself belongs to the provincial, and is a formal act of his personal authority and not of the council, though the consent of the latter is necessary.<sup>1</sup>

— *Proven suitability.*

The judgement of the responsible superiors is a judgement on the degree of suitability of the candidate in relation to the formative phase in which he finds himself at the time; it must be decided on the basis of criteria of discernment indicated authoritatively by the Church and the Congregation. It is a matter of those elements which permit the ascertaining of the presence or absence of the signs of God's call and the candidate's suitability for responding to it, always supposing that he has calmly and honestly made himself known in his true reality. The FSDB and also the "Criteria and Norms for salesian vocation discernment" provide an ample presentation of the common and specific positive criteria for the indication of basic suitability and the identification of the necessary qualities, in proportion to the age of the applicant and the commitment he is taking on (dispositions and aptitudes, motivations, right intention); they also indicate the negative criteria or contraindications which enable attitudes or modes of behaviour to be identified which exclude or diminish vocational suitability. The article makes it clear that the absence of contraindications is not sufficient. The presence of elements indicating positively an aptitude for salesian life is indispensable. Suitability, in fact, does not consist in the absence of obstacles, but in the presence of gifts which have been received, and have been cultivated and offered for the present and future.

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Criteria and Norms for salesian vocation discernment. Admissions*, Rome 1985

*God our Father,  
enlighten with your truth and your love  
those you have chosen for the delicate tasks  
of pastors and guides in vocational discernment.  
Give them faith and wisdom, trust and prudence,  
so that by appraising all your gifts  
they may be able to judge of the suitability  
of their young confreres  
and our Society may grow in numbers and quality  
for the extending of your Kingdom.*

*Grant also to the young confreres themselves  
a heart that is free and strong, but docile and generous,  
so that they may be able to respond in truth and charity  
to the obligations of their vocation.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FORMATIVE PROCESS

*"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1,6).*

Formation, like any other process, has a fixed goal. It belongs however to the context of christian revelation and differs, for that reason, from other processes: although it recognizes intermediate objectives it has its sights set on the definitive transforming outcome of the "day of the Lord". It is against this wider background that the introductory quotation from the letter to the Philippians invites us to see the constitutional text in a context which, from a human point of view, is never ending but is nevertheless highly encouraging when viewed in the light of the second coming of Christ.

We are at the opening of the letter Paul wrote from prison. It is autobiographical in tone, and very affectionate in its sentiments: "God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1,8). The community at Philippi is perhaps the one with which he had the most tender relationship. We know that from the very beginning it was always fully docile to the Apostle (Acts 16,12-40; 20,1-16). We know too of the great and generous help it gave in collecting for the poor (2 Cor 11,9; Phil 4,16), and in the other assistance it provided while Paul was in prison (Phil 2,45; 4,10 ff.).

Paul brings together all these christian qualities of the Philippians (financial help, missionary activity, maintaining the purity of the Gospel) under the general heading of "good works" (1,16). And on this basis, on this existence centred on the Gospel, he significantly projects a correct theological interpretation which has evident practical applications: *every "good work" is begun by God's grace, and by grace is developed and brought to a successful conclusion*. In 2,13 he makes the thought more explicit: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"; and in 2,12 he draws the practical conclusion: "Therefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". This is excellent advice for one who lives continually under divine inspiration in a process of ongoing formation.

In 1,6 Paul explains, as something close to his heart, that the "good works", which always call for real sacrifices, are never without their reward. This motive of reward, divorced from any mercenary ideas (which Jesus makes very clear in the Sermon on the Mount: Mt 6,1-18) is always in the forefront of the mind of Jesus and Paul — and we may rightly add, of Don Bosco — as a sign of the serious and at the same time human approach of God in our regard (cf. Phil 2,14). We must not overlook the warning implicit in the phrase "the day

of Christ Jesus" (or as it is called elsewhere "the day of the Lord"), in so far as it is also the day of judgement (1 Cor 3,10-15). Meanwhile, as Paul notes very realistically later on, "let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are" (Phil 3,16).

\* \* \*

## 1. Purpose and significance of the chapter

As a response to the Lord's call which invites him to live in the Church Don Bosco's plan as an apostle of youth (cf. C 96), the salesian "commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in other ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him" (C 98).

The *process* means the ensemble of periods, elements and characteristic ways of doing things which influence the development of personality and its relation with life. Within the process particular importance attaches to initial formation, which embraces everything from the first approach to salesian life (cf. C 109) to the definitive incorporation in the Society (cf. C 117).

Chapter VIII has presented the general aspects of salesian formation, including those of initial formation, so as to guide formative experience and ensure its validity. The purpose of chapter IX is different but complementary: it applies in consistent fashion the general aspects previously indicated to the formation process, i.e. to its different periods. Vocation and its formation move like a story within other stories, with which they live in a reciprocal influential relationship. Against the same continuous background there is a rhythmic sequence of periods, situations and different contexts, which evolves sometimes gradually and sometimes in a quite unforeseen manner; difficulties are met and faced up to, stimulating help is received, means are found for solving problems. It is a gradual moving forward step by step, as one situation follows another, as each period follows its predecessor.

Of decisive importance in this process is the initial option and the quality of growth during the various periods, as the confrere defines his project more clearly, identifies with his vocation, and trains himself to live it in an adult manner with ever increasing freedom and awareness.

## 2. Structure of the chapter

In the overall structure of the chapter, three principal nuclei can be detected, which correspond to three significant phases in the gamut of formation.

a. *Before definitive incorporation in the Society* the candidate passes through three PERIODS which follow one another without a break:

— Preparation for the Novitiate (*art. 109*).

— Novitiate:

considered separately are the formative experience and its objective (*art. 110*), its duration (*art. 111*), and the important role of the director of novices (*art. 112*).

— Time of temporary profession:

with its formative experience (*art. 113-116*), during the immediate postnovitiate (*art. 114*), time of practical training (*art. 115*), and with regard to specialized formation (which will continue even after perpetual profession) (*art. 116*).

b. *Perpetual profession* incorporates the salesian definitively in the Society (*art. 117*).

c. *Ongoing formation*:

The two *articles 118 and 119* do not describe this as though it were a "period", but present it rather as an attitude and perspective which animates the whole of life, recalling what was said at the beginning of the third part of the Constitutions: our life is an experience of an

ongoing dialogue between the Lord who calls and the salesian who responds. He does so by making the effort to discern the voice of the Spirit in daily events and by committing himself to an appropriate and continued formation. This he does to renew the religious and pastoral sense of his life, and to fit himself to carry out his work with greater competence (cf. C 119), together with Him who began this good work and will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 1,6).

## ART. 109 PREPARATION FOR THE NOVITIATE

To anyone who is thinking of becoming a salesian, an environment and suitable conditions are offered to enable him to discern his own vocation and to mature as a man and a christian. In this way, and with the help of a spiritual guide, he is able to make a choice with greater awareness of what he is doing, and without any external or internal pressures.

A period of special preparation is required immediately prior to the novitiate to deepen the candidate's vocational choice and verify his suitability for beginning the novitiate. This preparation is made through an experience of salesian community and apostolic life.

In several different places the Constitutions refer to vocations as a divine gift and remind us of the obligation we have of following them up. "The Lord continually calls some to follow him," said art. 28, "and enriches them with a variety of gifts in the service of the Kingdom". As pastors and educators, we help young people "to discover, accept and develop the gift of a vocation" (C 28). "This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction" (C 37).

Among the young people called there are some who are attracted to the salesian life, because the Lord, who "loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy" (cf. C 22). Before they begin in the novitiate their salesian religious experience, a formative period is offered them to prepare them adequately for such a step: this is the period of "preparation for the novitiate" which is dealt with in this first article of chap. IX.

The Congregation does not define the details for this stage, nor does it provide for it a specific juridical structure. It is up to each province to decide on the way it shall be carried out. The Constitutions merely point to the purpose and conditions of this time of prepara-

tion and refer to two phases which we could call "*preparation for the novitiate in a wide sense*" and the *special immediate preparation*.

## Preparation for the novitiate

The objectives for this particular time of formation are that the candidate may get to know himself better and see the salesian vocation as a deepening of his own baptismal vocation, to mature as a man and as a christian, so as to render himself able to make a free and generous choice in response to his feeling that God is calling him, a response that will translate into a living reality the project he has come to know.

Certainly it is a preliminary choice that is involved, but one nevertheless with all the conditions for being personal and validly motivated, yielding to neither fears nor mere superficial attraction, nor to pressures arising from affections or the environment. Only when the candidate has made his option for the salesian life can he begin his immediate preparation for the novitiate.<sup>1</sup>

For the service of young men who want to attain this objective the community offers a suitable environment and conditions (a programme of initiatives, experiences, aids, etc.) and especially the help of a spiritual guide. The importance and practical function of these methodological aspects have already been considered in the previous chapter. They are, in fact, general aspects of the formative experience which in varying forms and degrees are required in every case.

The realization of this vocational service is a task which presents a challenge to the responsibility and salesian youth sensitivity of the provinces and individual communities.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 267



## A "special immediate preparation"

Entrance into the novitiate presupposes a decision to want to begin, for reasons of faith, the salesian religious life in preference to any other form of life. The ability to make such an option requires a sufficient maturity of conscience and freedom so as to be able, with the help offered, to deepen the vocational choice and verify personal suitability for it.

From formation experience one can understand how important is the attainment of this objective for the individual and for the novitiate environment. Often the difficulties met with in the formation of novices seem to derive from the fact that the latter, when they were admitted to the novitiate, possessed neither the necessary maturity for making a choice, nor a clear understanding (at least in a general way) of the obligations they were taking on, nor the ability to accept the breaks which a vocation always implies with respect to persons, environments and things not compatible with it.

All this never fails to have its effect on the novitiate community itself, which is not sufficiently homogeneous in consequence, and is sometimes conditioned by attitudes which are unacceptable or by problems which should have been resolved during the period of preparation.

The method indicated by the Congregation as valid for an adequate preparation for the novitiate, so as to eliminate uncertainties and ignorance of various kinds, includes the following indispensable elements:

— an *experience of community and apostolic life* in a salesian community, normally for a period of not less than six months (cf. R 88);

— a *guide who follows the candidate personally*, leads him to an understanding of himself and of the plan of life he wants to make his own, and helps him to acquire the maturity needed to do so;

— *formation personnel* (whether the candidates are inserted in an already existing community, or form a community on their own), who have a constant understanding with the corresponding personnel of the novitiate, and are thus able to ensure the continuity in formative

content and criteria of evaluation which, without any doubt, facilitate the making of a judgement about suitability by anyone who is obliged to do so;

— an *intellectual formation* which, by exploiting the studies already done and integrating them with readings, communications and experiences of various kinds, sows the seed of a habit of study and leads to a first overall vision of the reality and vocation of man, of the christian and of the salesian, and makes it perceived as a concrete and up-to-date proposal for a commitment that is both possible and valid.

From the indications given in the Rule the importance can be seen of this time of preparation for the novitiate, and how indispensable it is that salesian communities render themselves suitable for offering this precious service to many young men.

*Lord God, you love our Society  
and never cease to enrich it with fresh apostolic energy.  
Watch over the young men  
whom you call to experience salesian life:  
guard in them the germ of a vocation  
against all temptation and doubt,  
and give them the courage and joy  
of deciding in their heart to follow you.*

*Grant also to our communities  
the grace to correspond with your gifts  
by the witness of a life given in joy,  
to offer to the young a suitable setting  
for the maturing of their vocation in life.*

## Art. 110-111 THE NOVITIATE AND ITS DURATION

### ART. 110

The novitiate offers the candidate the possibility of beginning the salesian religious experience.

For this reason the novitiate community must always provide an example of life founded on faith and nourished by prayer, in which evangelical simplicity, joy, friendship and mutual respect create a climate of trust and docility.

With the help of the director the novice examines carefully the motives for his choice, makes certain of his suitability for the salesian calling, and prepares himself to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco.

### ART. 111

In accordance with canon law,<sup>1</sup> the novitiate lasts twelve months; it begins when the candidate, after being admitted by the provincial, enters the canonically erected novitiate house and places himself under the guidance of the director of novices.

The novitiate is invalidated by an absence of more than three months, continuous or broken. An absence of more than fifteen days must be made good.

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 647,3; 648; 649,1

In three articles (C 110-112) the Constitutions present respectively the objectives and environment of the novitiate, its duration, and the role and requisites of the director of novices. To these must be added a further six articles of the Regulations.

The contents of art. 110 refer to the fundamental scope of the novitiate: the possibility of launching the salesian religious experience; they therefore indicate its specific objectives and the environment that makes them possible.

## Fundamental scope: launching the salesian religious experience

The word "beginning" in art. 110 has more than its ordinary significance. It implies also introduction and follow up: to enter gradually, to take the first conscious steps in a process in which one has become freely and vitally involved. In this sense the term "beginning" is linked with and derives its full significance from its proper objective: *"the salesian religious experience"*. It is a matter of "starting up" this experience of life, of trying out the values of this vocation (cf. C 98), by integrating its various aspects (cf. C 102) and ensuring their validity (cf. C 98-99).

It is a "salesian" experience, and therefore a specific one, marked by its distinctive charisma. In this connection it will be useful to read again what is laid down by the Code of Canon Law in connection with the formative experience of the novitiate.

The common elements are included in and taken up by the "divine vocation proper to the Institute": "The purpose of the novitiate, by which life in an institute begins, is to give the novices a greater understanding of their divine vocation, and of their vocation to that institute. During the novitiate the novices are to experience the manner of life of the institute and form their minds and hearts in its spirit. At the same time their resolution and suitability are to be tested".<sup>1</sup>

### The specific objectives of the novitiate

In an appropriate formative setting the novice begins his salesian religious experience, which will be lifelong. The specific objectives to be attained are suggested by the closing expressions of can. 646 and the third paragraph of art. 110.

<sup>1</sup> CIC, can. 646

They are three in number, and convergent and complementary in nature: to examine motivations, make certain of suitability, and prepare for complete self-donation to God.

The novitiate experience should lead the novice "*to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco*". He is preparing himself, in fact, for religious profession by which he "offers himself to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom" (C 3) "according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions"(C 24).

Two indispensable conditions are necessary if this gift is to be complete, true and really possible:

— *suitability for the salesian vocation must be ascertained*: this is the aim of vocational discernment, a process which employs natural and supernatural means suitable for detecting those aspects of the personal reality through which the Holy Spirit indicates that a certain person is called to the salesian life, i.e. that he has the requisite aptitudes and virtues, chief among which is the right intention. It is suitability that, in a certain sense, guarantees that the gift is a true one;

— *the motives underlying the choice must be examined*. The presence of the qualities which make a young man suitable for the salesian life and the absence of contraindications can certainly constitute a sign of God's call which is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient by itself for reaching a safe decision about it.

The person asking to be admitted is a gifted candidate, who feels attracted and called to be a salesian. He opts for a kind of life and a set of values which he perceives according to his reality and his aspirations. But it is necessary to know and assess the source of this inclination, this propensity, this leaning: what are the needs and desires and interests which galvanize his existence, or in other words what are his deep motivations.

The discerning of these motivations is one of the essential aspects of the formative process.

Motives never exist in an unmixed state. They are subject to gradual and continuous maturing and purification. Formation leads the can-

didate little by little to understand that it is the Lord who calls and is the reason for his choice and service.

Motives are as complex as is the person himself, in whom physiological and psychological elements combine with the spiritual and with grace to form a unit still capable of further development. They may be of many kinds and to some extent convergent as, for example, the desire to work for youth and the will to give oneself totally to God for the construction of the Kingdom. What is important is that the specific and primary motive (the "right intention") be able to weld together the secondary motives compatible with it which are inevitably present either consciously or unconsciously, and be able to overcome and eliminate those which are incompatible.

The detection of a particular motivation is always a delicate business. Ordinary meetings with candidates are not enough, just as by themselves neither psychological nor aptitude tests will suffice. What is needed is a deep contact for spiritual direction and guidance with someone who has a true sensitivity and ability for discernment, together with a willingness and determination on the part of the person being helped to join simultaneously in the same process.

## **The community environment**

The novitiate is a school of life, and for this reason the atmosphere prevailing in it is a fundamental factor in formation. What are the constituent elements in this climate which is so valuable for salesian life? Chapter VIII has already dealt with the community as a setting for formation: art. 97 recalled the first Salesians, who lived at the very heart of Don Bosco's community in action, and were intent on modelling their own lives on his; art. 99 presented the community as the natural environment for vocational growth; art. 103 described the characteristics of formation communities; and all this is naturally valid for the novitiate community as well. But at the same time the constitutional text points out some aspects more especially required for the novitiate setting. Two of these elements are emphasized: the climate of faith and the family atmosphere. The community must be:

— *an example of life founded on faith and prayer.*

"Example of life" is a phrase which introduces once again the perspective of experience. It is not a matter of learning theoretically about salesian life, but of a kind of life which enables a person to catch a glimpse of and feel for himself its foundation which is faith, the perceiving of a presence: Christ, his Word, his example, his call, his criteria, his mission; a presence which is felt and acknowledged in prayer, dialogue and friendship with the Lord.

— *a climate of trust and docility.*

How much our Rule of life insists on this characteristic aspect of the salesian spirit which is so typical of our communal style of living together! We may recall one or two of its statements in this regard: "the salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience. His love ... is able to draw out friendship in return; this is the loving kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco" (C 15). "Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments... In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness... relationships are governed... by faith and the promptings of the heart" (C 16).

There come to mind the simple and well known expressions of Don Bosco which, although not referring directly to formation communities, nevertheless describe the soul of an educative and formative atmosphere: "Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old; the days of affection and christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone".<sup>2</sup>

A "*climate of trust*" means a style of attention to people, of openness, dialogue and cordial encounter, which overcomes fear and pre-

<sup>2</sup> *Letter from Rome 1884; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263*

judice. A "*climate of trust*" implies a setting in which everyone is docile to the Spirit through commitment to discernment and the acceptance of his mediations, in practical fidelity to vocational criteria while respecting personal rhythm and the laws of gradual progress.

How is such an atmosphere to be built up and nourished? The text indicates four indispensable elements:

- *evangelical simplicity*, a deep simplicity which is not just a surface veneer but comes from within; it is a maturity which grows in unaffectedness and in daily expression;
- *joy*, as a natural expression of youth, and especially as an experience of vocational enjoyment;
- *friendship*: a deep encounter between persons who are called to live their vocation and their whole life in communion;
- *mutual respect*, which art. 52 characterizes in these terms: "The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity". This statement is valid in a quite special way at the beginnings of salesian experience, when there may emerge more easily and more strongly character differences that have not yet been worked on, clashes arising from differences of origin or preparation, vocational guidelines not yet well defined, and the exertions associated with new obligations.

Without any false idealism but with a clear awareness of its efficacy, the novitiate community, both the stable personnel and the novices who change each year, use these qualities to build the community's physiognomy so that the possibility of setting out on the salesian religious experience may be a happy reality for all.

### **Duration of the novitiate (art. 111)**

Art. 111 repeats what is laid down by the Code of Canon Law concerning the duration of the novitiate and how absences are calculated. Can. 648 §1 says: "For validity, the novitiate must comprise twelve months spent in the novitiate community, without prejudice to the



provision of can. 647 §3". And the latter adds: "A major Superior can allow a group of novices to reside, for a certain period of time, in another specified house of the institute".

Concrete details for the application of these dispositions, which are designed to ensure a continuous and sufficient experience, are given in the FSDB.<sup>3</sup>

The indications given in the article point to the three persons more directly responsible for the novitiate experience: the candidate, the provincial, and the director of novices.

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
to prepare your Apostles  
you took them away from others for a time  
"to a desert place"  
and taught them "the mysteries of the Kingdom".  
Enrich with the abundance of your grace  
our novitiate communities,  
so that with the zealous collaboration of the superiors  
and the assistance of your Holy Spirit  
they may become  
a cenacle of filial communion with the Father  
and admirable places for preparing  
for our mission among youth.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. FSDB, 379-381

## ART. 112 THE DIRECTOR OF NOVICES

The director of novices is the spiritual guide who coordinates and animates all the work of formation of the novitiate.

He must be a man of prudence with spiritual and salesian experience and an up-to-date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems. He should be able to relate easily to other people, to engage in dialogue, and to inspire confidence in the novices by his kindness.

He must be perpetually professed and is appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major. He remains in office for three years and may be reappointed.

The renewed picture of formation puts the figure of the director of novices in a new light. Art. 112 of the Constitutions is specifically dedicated to him. His presence and role have already been referred to in the two previous articles: art. 110 said that "with the help of the director" the novice attains the objectives proper to the novitiate, which begins, said art. 111, "when the candidate places himself under the guidance of the director of novices".

Although all the formation personnel have a "specific and necessary role" (C 104), that of the novice director is unique and distinctive. The rector of the formation community is "the leader of the community and its spiritual guide" (C 104), but in the novices' community this role belongs always and solely to the director of novices.

The three paragraphs of art. 112 reflect respectively:

1. his principal role;
2. the qualities required for its exercise;
3. the canonical requirements for his appointment.

## The novice director, a principal role

Articles 110 and 111 speak of the function of the director with respect to each individual novice; the first paragraph of art. 112 broadens the perspective to an overall and comprehensive view of his task: he is the "spiritual guide who coordinates and animates all the work of formation of the novitiate".

He is the "*spiritual guide*", in the sense that it is his function to welcome, accompany and precede as a guide ("father, teacher and spiritual guide" are qualifications of the salesian rector, according to art. 55); his function is to indicate the path to follow, and how to proceed along it so as to attain the goal, pointing out obstacles to avoid and means to use.

He is a "spiritual guide" because the path is one of a spiritual and charismatic experience. The term "spiritual" is used not to exclude other aspects of the personal reality but to indicate the particular perspective of an experience which involves the whole person in his response to the Spirit.

The director fulfils this service in a formative relationship with each novice, but also (and this is the point being emphasized) by coordinating and animating all the formative activity so as to ensure, as art. 104 says, the conditions for the validity of the experience.

"*Coordinates*" means that he brings about a convergence of the aspects of shared responsibility, functions, efforts, and all the other elements of the formation process on the principal objective.

"*Animates*" adds to coordination a deeper interior dimension, more sensitive to the pedagogical aspect and to the processes which start from the motivations.

To coordinate and animate all the formative activity implies a complex of initiatives and ideas, which foster the vitality of the formative experience by appealing to conscience and active participation through the exploitation of roles and personal gifts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GC21, 46

## The required qualities

Two series of qualities are required if the novice director is to fulfil his task in a salesian manner. The first could be called personal, and the second concern contacts with others.

*"A man of spiritual and salesian experience"*: this first requisite is explained by the very nature of the formation of the novices. If the director is to be their guide in beginning their salesian religious experience, it is both normal and necessary that he himself be a man of salesian spiritual experience. It is expected of a professor that he be well acquainted with the discipline of his competence, and that he be able to teach it by didactically efficacious methods. And of the novice director it is expected that he live and have lived what he is speaking of, and that he be able to introduce the young candidates to their self-giving, taking them as it were by the hand and leading them along a path that is well known to him.

The spiritual experience of a man of God is needed therefore, but so too is salesian experience, which implies a minimum of practical educative and pastoral experience in active communities, and a living knowledge of salesian values, particularly those which contribute to the salesian "apostolic sense".

Anyone who must formulate judgements, often delicate and decisive in nature, on persons and their situations evidently requires *prudence*, which supposes the ability to observe and interpret, using criteria of knowledge and faith. For this reason the text adds that the director should have "an up-to-date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems". The novices in fact are usually young and children of their time: their vocation and their spiritual life has not escaped the laws of nature and history. To understand them and build on a firm and realistic foundation, the director must have a sufficient knowledge of the dynamics of personal psychological and spiritual forces, and the influences normally exerted by every culture. He will therefore need an appropriate specific formation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SGC, 685

But knowledge and other qualities would be of little use without the relationship of mutual confidence which is part of the atmosphere of all authentically salesian education. This aspect has already been touched on in the commentary on art. 110, when speaking of the "climate of trust".

Rightly therefore it is required of the novice director that:

- he "*be able to relate easily to other people*", i.e. that he be of a welcoming disposition, with the ability to make the first approach and establish interpersonal relationships;
- he be able to "*engage in dialogue*", which implies more than simple human contact: it supposes the full acceptance of the other person, respecting him in his diversity, and the intention to make no judgement about him while dialogue is proceeding;
- he be outstanding in *kindness*, which is the great norm of salesian education. It is manifested in a fatherliness which does not create childish dependence, but fosters adult maturity and prompts that transparent and solid trust so much asked for by Don Bosco: "Let the master of novices show himself amiable, gentle and of kindly disposition, so that the novices may open their hearts to him and place their full confidence in him". This is a text which already appeared in the Constitutions of 1874.<sup>3</sup>

### Canonical norms for his appointment

These are clear and precise. Beyond what they lay down at a procedural level, they have a particular significance. As the "spiritual guide" in a period which is decisive for formation and consequently for the unity and growth of the salesian vocational identity, the novice director does not act in his own name only. His ministry is an expression of the responsibility of the whole Congregation, represented by the Rector Major and the provincial, in fidelity to the gift of the Spirit and in the commitment to live, preserve, deepen and develop it in har-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MB X, 912; cf. also *Costituzioni 1874*, XIV, 10 (E. MOTTO, p. 195)

mony with the Body of Christ <sup>4</sup> and with sensitivity in respect of different cultural situations.

He must therefore act with a sense of communion and shared responsibility, docile to the dispositions of the Congregation and the province, and concerned to ensure continuity in the formative experience, especially in the immediate postnovitiate.

*Grant, O Father,  
the light and strength of your Holy Spirit  
to our confreres whom you have called  
to be the directors and spiritual guides  
of those who are beginning  
their salesian religious experience.*

*May their ministry be fruitful and full of joy;  
enriched with the wisdom that comes from you  
and well endowed with patient kindness;  
may they be able to welcome, correct and encourage  
the young people entrusted to them,  
so as to lead them to give themselves wholly to you  
their one supreme Good.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MR 11

## ART. 113 PERIOD OF TEMPORARY PROFESSION

The first profession marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life. In this period the confrere, with the help of the community and of a spiritual guide, completes his maturing process with perpetual profession in view, and develops the different aspects of his vocation as a lay salesian or as a candidate for the priesthood.

During the first three years of this period, profession may be either triennial or annual; in the next three years it will ordinarily be triennial.

The Constitutions dedicate four articles to the third formative period, that of the time of temporary profession. Art. 113 explains its general sense, art. 114 refers to the immediate postnovitiate, art. 115 to the period of practical training, and art. 116 to the specific formation of the salesian, which usually begins before perpetual profession.

### Fundamental significance of this period

Two complementary statements reveal the essential perspectives of this period:

- on the one hand it is said that "the first profession marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life". It is not just a passing phase, but has its own proper significance and value (cf. C 105): the professed is already a true salesian religious;
- on the other hand it is said that it is a period limited in time which, as the text itself lays down, aims at completing the maturing process with perpetual profession in view. Temporary profession, in fact, is made only with the firm intention of making perpetual profession in due course.

The period is not just a time of waiting (cf. C 105). The temporarily professed confrere is a salesian vowed to God and the young, and a true member of the Society (cf. C 24). If he is not yet bound

to it in a definitive and official manner, this is not through lack of desire and generosity but because of a prudent norm of the Church and the Congregation, in the awareness that the definitive profession must be based on solid moral and spiritual foundations for the attainment of which he strives with shared responsibility in a community.

### **Commitment during the time of temporary profession**

The main points to be attended to during the period of temporary profession are described as follows: the confrere completes his growth process so as to reach the salesian spiritual maturity required for perpetual profession, and develops the different aspects of his vocation, especially those indicated in art. 102: human maturing, intellectual preparation, deepening of consecrated life, and introduction to educative pastoral work.

In this connection the text recalls *two general aspects* which, precisely because they are general, apply to the whole of formation and salesian life:

- Every confrere lives one and the same vocation *as a lay salesian or as an aspirant to the priesthood*, and hence carries out his formation too in this same perspective, particularly during the period of temporary profession.
- The young confrere is *sustained by the community and by a spiritual guide*. He is not left on his own. The community and the guide, who is normally the rector, share with him his formative task, ensuring for him "the opportunities for a valid experience and for serious doctrinal reflection in an appropriate setting" (C 104).

### **Frequency and duration of temporary profession**

The second paragraph of the article refers to the frequency and relative duration of temporary profession in the time that passes between first and perpetual profession.



For the first three years two possibilities are offered (triennial or annual), without indicating any preference for one or the other. For the second three years it is laid down that normally profession will be for three years, without excluding other arrangements that may be advisable for good reasons. To this should be added what is provided for in art. 117, i.e. that the time of temporary profession may be prolonged to nine years.

These different possibilities are chosen in sensible fashion only if the gradual and serious nature of the process is simultaneously kept in mind. Personal maturity remains the fundamental criterion which gives truth to the sign of profession, not the objective length of time. On the other hand, a too frequent repetition of profession (which of itself signifies a choice of life), unless it is sufficiently motivated at a psychological and pedagogical level, ends by weakening the sign as regards its human content and spiritual depth. It creates, in fact, a sense of impermanence and internal instability, which gives a weak appearance to a decision which springs from the very centre of the life of the one making his profession and refers to a project with which he intends to identify himself.

Great flexibility is needed, and a no less degree of prudence, for appraising in the service of the individual and the charisma all the relevant elements.

A real and sincere personal and communal responsibility in respect of temporary profession and its frequency is certainly shown at the moment of choice and decision, but it is manifested even earlier and more deeply when the attainment of the objectives of the preceding formation periods has been ensured: the preparation for the novitiate and the novitiate itself. The confrere should not allow problems and indecision to drag on which should have been resolved much earlier, and local and provincial councils should not pass on uselessly to others in later years the duty of making a decision which they should have fulfilled earlier.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. RFIS, 40

*Render fruitful, O Lord, in our young confreres  
the grace of first profession;  
may your Spirit accompany them in their path  
towards the definitive donation of their lives to you  
for the good of the young.*

*Grant that by daily growth  
in their friendship with you,  
in resemblance to Don Bosco  
and in brotherly communion,  
they may progress in the formation  
which will render their motivations more solid,  
and their educative and pastoral activity  
more competent and efficacious.*

*May they live with joy and responsibility  
the period of formation,  
a time of commitment and holiness.*

## ART. 114 THE IMMEDIATE POSTNOVIATE

The first profession is followed by a period of religious maturing which continues the formative experience of the novitiate and serves as a preparation for the practical training phase.

The deepening of the life of faith and of the spirit of Don Bosco, together with an adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture, disposes the young confrere to a progressive integration of faith, culture and life.

### **A phase of religious maturing between the novitiate and the practical training phase**

"Maturing" is a word frequently met with in the two chapters of the Constitutions which deal with formation. It indicates a process towards maturity (cf. C 102) and is called "religious" not so much to indicate a specific aspect but to indicate its final and distinguishing objective.

The commitment to religious maturing during the postnovitiate has two points of reference: the novitiate and the practical training phase. The experience of the first must be continued and that of the second suitably prepared for.

The novitiate, first of all, needs a further complement. The work of formation for a group of young people of different origins and varying levels of maturity always requires further effort and more time. Certainly by the end of the novitiate there are reasons for believing that a sufficient maturing has taken place, but it still needs further help and development in continuity and consistency with the work already done. In this way sudden changes in life style and a falling-off in commitment to vocational growth are avoided.

Furthermore the practical training period, with its objective which calls for a personal synthesis between activity and vocational values to be built up "in an experience of salesian educative and pastoral action"

(C 115), demands that the young confrere continue to make the effort to achieve this synthesis and should have acquired suitable means for living it.

The postnovitiate is therefore a delicate and important time because it provides this possibility and responds to these requirements.

### **A phase which has formative value in its own right**

But it can be seen without any difficulty that the postnovitiate is not exclusively nor even primarily a phase which completes an earlier one or provides "means" for a subsequent one. It has a value in its own right. The young salesian is not asked to live it merely to complete the formation of his novitiate or to be better able to deal with the problems of his coming practical training period. Both of these need to be done, but his first objective is still his own maturing.

He is called upon in fact:

- to "achieve a progressive integration of faith, culture and life";
- to make practical use of the means for attaining this objective, i.e.
  - a deepening of the life of faith and the spirit of Don Bosco;
  - an adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture (cf. C 114) and "an introduction to theology" (R 95).

Some of the means are derived from study and others from experience, and the former must help in living the latter at greater depth.

a. *The significance of "a progressive integration of faith, culture and life".*

"Daily life", "eternal life", "faith and life" are all frequently used terms which recall a series of contents.

"Faith" expresses the supernatural dimension of christian existence; "life" indicates the creatural values of this existence and the numerous daily realities in which it is immersed.

To live these two aspects in unity is to be spiritual men, while remaining men of the present day.

It is a matter of believing that the ultimate and decisive reason for all reality is the Incarnation, the expression of the love of the Father, or in other words of God's desire to communicate himself to men as Father in the deepest manner possible, in the Son. It is a matter of believing that this is the reason for his creational action.

There exists therefore only this order of reality which we call supernatural, but side by side with the supernatural elements it also includes natural elements which, if they are to have definitive value, call for completion through progressive participation in the paschal mystery of Christ.

By rediscovering the event of the Incarnation (*faith*), we shall approach life and history (personal and collective, *life* and *culture*), as places bearing all the signs of the Lord's presence: we shall see that ever since the beginning of time the world has been enveloped and penetrated by the grace of divine communication, present in it always and everywhere. Man is the place where God is present, daily life the context of the Lord's diaphanous appearance. To join together faith and hope means opening up a new ability to contemplate daily events marked by local culture, by seeing in them the signs of God's presence, which requires that one understand the situation, that one work and invoke his light and grace in prayer in order to build with him.

b. *The appropriate "experiential" means: deepening of the life of faith and of the spirit of Don Bosco.*

It would be better to speak of "deepening of the life of faith according to the spirit of Don Bosco". In fact Salesians live the synthesis of faith, life and culture "in pastoral charity" (C 10), which has its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father (cf. C 11). One cannot therefore experience this charity without deepening one's own faith which is always the recognition of a presence, that of the Lord, which we reach according to our own spirit:

- in "predilection for the young", a special gift of God, an "expression of pastoral charity", for whose welfare "we give generously of our time, talents and health" (C 14);
- by approaching them with the loving kindness of Don Bosco which "gives transparent witness to God's anticipating love" (C 15) in a family atmosphere of exchange of affection and of mutual trust and esteem. It is "a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of God" (C 20);
- through attention to the presence of the Spirit, accepting the values of the world and believing "in man's natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness" (C 17);
- by continually reminding ourselves of the divine dimension of his work (cf. C 12) and the union with God whose fatherhood we experience.

*c. The intellectual means: a philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture, and an introduction to theology.*

To achieve the intended objectives the postnovitiate fosters a serious and updated intellectual formation.

The FSDB specifies the ground this should cover, and goes into considerable detail about the various sciences and their relationship with formation.<sup>1</sup> It can all be summed up by saying that pastoral charity demands a mentality stemming from an active synthesis of the contents proper to the disciplines of faith (introduction to theology in the case of the postnovitiate), philosophy and the educational sciences (pedagogy). They are essentially autonomous but, being all at the service of existence (culture), they are not independent of each other. They are all linked with knowledge and personal development, with the complexity of man's world and ultimately with the mystery of Christ who epitomizes everything in himself.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FSDB, 210-236

Art. 21 of the Constitutions has shown us Don Bosco as a unified person with a splendid blending of nature and grace. The objective of the postnovitiate is manifest in him as a demand of the original charisma. It is indeed identified with his very person: "He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the *realities of this earth*; and he was just as deeply the *man of God*, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living '*as seeing him who is invisible*'. These two aspects combine to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young" (C 21).

*Father, ever merciful and faithful,  
assist with the grace of unity  
our young confreres  
whom you have introduced into the salesian life.*

*Grant that the postnovitiate environment,  
made up of experience, study and reflection  
and permeated by prayer,  
may help them to lay the foundation  
for a solid personal unity,  
so that they may become valid instruments of your love  
amid the young people to whom you send them.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 115 PRACTICAL TRAINING

Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission.

The practical training period provides opportunity for a deeper living experience of salesian educative and pastoral action. During this time the young confrere gets practice in the preventive system, particularly in salesian assistance.

With the support of the rector and the community, he is able to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation.

### Formation and pastoral activity

"Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission". This statement finds its truth and confirmation in numerous expressions scattered over the third part of the Constitutions. Educative and pastoral practice, based on wisdom and belief, is central to the salesian's formation. All through his life he experiences vocational values "as he lives and works for the common mission" (C 99).

In the initial formation, from a methodological point of view, because of the priority of what has to be done and the time needed, theoretical activities and training prevail. This was already Don Bosco's mind,<sup>1</sup> because these are the things that give to the young confreres in formation the skills and competence to live their pastoral work later with full apostolic efficacy. But even in this period the gradual introduction to educational and pastoral work (C 102) remains one of the fundamental factors in formation, which is present in varying degrees of intensity in every phase: preparation for the novitiate is made "through an experience of community and apostolic life" (C 109); the novitiate prepares the candidate "to give his all to God for the service

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, XII, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 181)



of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco" (C 110); the period of temporary profession commits the confrere to the development of "the different aspects of his vocation" (C 113).

The present art. 115 emphasizes the fact that in the practical training period the educative and pastoral aspect finds a characteristic expression.

### **Formative experience in the practical training period**

What is the objective of the practical training? What kind of formative experience is gained in this phase, which is perhaps the most characteristic of the salesian formative process?

According to the Rule the practical training period is an encounter, an exercise, an adequately guided integration into an educative pastoral experience. We shall examine its component elements.

— *"a deeper living experience".*

The practical training period is one which serves for both verification and maturing; it provides a first taste of salesian action, i.e. an encounter with salesian life in its common situations, in the ordinary daily vicissitudes of the mission, which are not always identical with those met with in the communities specifically designed for formation (C 103). Like the first Salesians who grew up while living at the heart of a community in action (cf. C 97), the young salesian who is heading for perpetual profession needs to try himself out in the real life, so as to know himself better (as regards suitability and motivations) and to get a better knowledge of the concrete form of the vocation to which he feels himself called and to which he is already committed. The experience of practical training offers important elements for discernment purposes and is an indispensable means of growth.

— *an exercise in the practice of the preventive system and particularly in salesian assistance.*

The "preventive system" and "assistance" are two expressions which identify educative pastoral experience of the first and original kind of Don Bosco, to which he himself gave the name "preventive system" (cf. C 20), and which called for "a fundamental disposition, an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them" (C 39) or, in other words, salesian assistance.

Practical training is above all else an exercise in this attitude lived in the context of the salesian educative project. It is so characteristic of this phase that in salesian tradition those involved in it were often referred to simply as "the assistants".

— *a personal synthesis of activities and vocational values.*

The salesian is called to live, as did Don Bosco, a strongly unified plan of life which is at the same time both apostolic and religious, and to combine its expressions in a single movement of charity towards God and his fellow men.

The rector and the community make possible and foster these experiences which, as asked for by art. 86 of the Regulations, should be programmed and followed up through the presence and guidance of formation personnel for their periodic evaluation.

The experience will be well programmed if attention is given to the following points when the programme is drawn up:

- it must overcome a spontaneous temptation to meet immediate needs, by a wise and critical application of the relevant sciences;
- it must provide for all the necessary elements (analysis of the situation, objectives, methods, procedure and criteria for verification, deadlines);
- it must define the objective to be attained after studying the initial situation and plans for dealing with it;
- it must ensure the active presence of guides who are witnesses of pastoral charity, have sufficient competence and are of recognized prestige.

The personal synthesis, as could be seen from the indications given in the previous article concerning the various stages, is not something static: it is a unity with a specific aim and the need to continually maintain a proper balance. The young confrere must mature simultaneously as a "man of God" and a "man for youth"; he must live the mission as a typical experience of God, accepting its mystique and ascetical aspect.

*Lord Jesus,  
through the Blessed Virgin, your Mother,  
you guided Don Bosco  
in the formation of the first Salesians;  
the apostolic experience of the Oratory  
was for them a source of spiritual enthusiasm,  
a stimulus and support  
in their personal maturing and in asceticism.*

*We ask you to be with our young confreres  
in the experience of their practical training,  
so that through contact with youth  
they may assimilate the attitudes  
proper to the preventive system,  
and by living and working together  
they may make a mature personal synthesis  
between vocational values and their activities.*

*Grant also that our communities,  
while sustaining the young confreres in their progress,  
may be the natural setting  
for vocational growth.*

## ART. 116 SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN PRIEST AND THE SALESIAN BROTHER

After practical training the salesian goes on to complete his initial formation.

The specific formation of a candidate for the priestly ministry follows the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation, and has for its scope the preparation of a priest who will be a genuinely salesian pastor and educator.

The specific formation of the lay salesian offers him the opportunity to deepen his knowledge of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation. He receives an adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status, and completes his formation with a view to his subsequent apostolic work of education.

*"After practical training the salesian goes on to complete his initial formation".* This is the time of the specific formation, which continues even after perpetual profession, and which for practical purposes began with the initial formation itself which is carried out in the perspective of the specific vocational form.

Of the different forms (priestly, diaconal and lay) in which the same unique salesian vocation is realized, the Constitutions have already spoken from the early articles (cf. C 4), they have pointed out their common and complementary responsibilities and have emphasized the contribution made by each to the mission (cf. C 45). By laying down that lay salesians and future priests receive the same basic formation (C 106), the Constitutions do not overlook the necessary distinctions determined by the specific nature of vocational form and its particular participation in the common mission. The same art. 106 also spoke of "curricula of equivalent level" and of the necessary and appropriate "differences".

The present article considers in more detail some of the requirements of the specific formation of clerical salesians and lay salesians.

## Specific formation of the salesian priest

For the formation of "*a priest who will be a genuinely salesian pastor and educator*" the Constitutions refer in general to "the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation". These norms and directives are fully contained in the FSDB.<sup>1</sup> The General Regulations specify some details and conditions in their turn: "Members who are preparing for the priesthood must receive, over a minimum period of four years, a more intense and specifically priestly formation in formation communities, preferably studentates. They must attend seriously to theological studies, preferably in salesian centres. During this period they must not undertake duties or other studies that will interfere with the specific purpose of this formative phase" (R 97).

It is a matter of a formative experience directed towards specific objectives. It supposes in the candidate a clear and decisive commitment for the priestly life. It is a progressive and gradual process during which the reception and practice of the ministries of lector and acolyte and the conferring and exercise of the diaconate provide occasions for verification, discernment and renewed commitment.

Particular objectives of this phase, some aspects of which apply in due proportion also to the salesian deacon, are especially:

- conformity to Christ the Shepherd in a life which is destined to be an existential expression of him, and in the priestly ministry because the person of the priest is a sign of him in the service of youth. This is the basis of a true priestly spirituality. The future salesian priest must be aware that his apostolate passes first and foremost through the love of Christ and of the Father, because in the last analysis there is only one Apostle and Saviour, Jesus, sent by the Father. It is in His name that the priest is called to work among youth and bring them into contact with Him;
- a deepening of the ecclesial sense of unity and of communion with the Church, and in particular with the Pope and the Bishops;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. FSDB, 457-473

- brotherhood with other priests; experience of the priestly ministry within and from within the local and provincial community, in a reciprocal and complementary relationship with the lay salesian;
- the development of a particular sensitivity and competence in announcing the Word of God to men and youth of the present day, especially through catechesis, liturgical animation, youth pastoral work, the sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual direction;
  - attention to personal intellectual preparation, following a model which in its general outlines refers explicitly to the figure of Don Bosco the priest. In point of fact, theological studies carried out seriously enlighten spiritual life and practice with solid principles and up-to-date knowledge, and with methods suited to the times and environments, in line with the emergence of the culture of the young and the working classes.

### **Specific formation of the salesian brother**

As was said earlier, the specific formation of the salesian priest basically follows the directives and curriculum laid down by the Church for all who are called to exercise the priestly ministry. The Church however does not give details for the lay salesian's formation, which therefore admits of more diversified expressions according to his talents and aptitudes and the tasks of his apostolate.

This in no way detracts from personal and communal responsibility, in a certain sense institutional, for ensuring and realizing the specific formation of the salesian brother. This is laid down explicitly in both the Constitutions and the Regulations, which call for the vocational requirements of this period of formation to be harmonized with a realistic consideration of different situations.

The Constitutions insist on particular attention to four areas:

- *a deeper "knowledge of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation";*

- *"an adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status"*, sufficient to permeate the whole culture of the brother and indicate the deep significance of his formation and instruction;
- the completing of his *technical and professional formation* "with a view to his subsequent apostolic work of education";
- the integration of the content of intellectual formation for the purpose of attaining these objectives.

All this is implicit in the text of the Regulations: "Lay salesians must be afforded the possibility of acquiring a serious theological, salesian and pedagogical preparation suited to their cultural level. They should be engaged also, according to their talents, in studies aimed at their professional preparation in view of the apostolic work they will later carry out" (R 98).<sup>2</sup>

*God our Father, through your Holy Spirit,  
you raise up vocations and distribute ministries  
so that they may contribute to the building  
of the one Body of Christ.*

*You have willed that in our Society  
salesian priests and brothers  
shall live the same vocation and mission  
in full brotherly complementarity  
for the benefit of youth.*

*Assist both priests and brothers by your grace  
in the preparation for their specific task.  
Infuse in them a love of the Church and her teachings,  
ability for reflection and generosity in dedication,  
so that they may become efficacious collaborators  
in the one work of your salvation  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. FSDB, 474-476

## ART. 117 PERPETUAL PROFESSION

A member makes his perpetual profession when he has reached the level of salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step.

The celebration of this act is preceded by an appropriate period of immediate preparation, and is marked by the fraternal recognition of the provincial community.

Perpetual profession takes place ordinarily six years after the first profession; if he considers it opportune the provincial can prolong this period, but not beyond nine years.

### Significance of perpetual profession

*"I make the vow for ever..."*, says the professed confrere, making his commitment before God and the Church (cf. C 24); art. 23 says: "Religious profession is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself *totally* to God and to his brothers and sisters".

The words "for ever" and "totally" express the significance of perpetual profession, seen as a response to God's initiative and grace. Their truth is built on, and to a certain extent ensured by, the initial formation, the purpose of which is precisely that of reaching by means of a living experience the "salesian spiritual maturity" called for by the importance of perpetual profession (cf. C 117). It is a maturity based on motivations and attitudes which bring together in a vital unity the various aspects of the formative process and reach their point of synthesis in the possession and authentic living of the salesian identity.

Perpetual profession is this point of arrival. The formative periods through which the candidate has passed were a necessary preparation for this definitive incorporation in the Society (cf. C 107): during the novitiate he prepared himself "to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco" (C 110); and in the period of temporary profession he completed "his maturing process with perpetual profession in view" (C 113).



Without prejudice to the value of temporary profession, which is itself made with the intention of offering oneself to God for the whole of life (cf. C 24), it is perpetual profession which synthesizes and celebrates, even liturgically, what the Constitutions declare in chap. III concerning the profession of the salesian: "It is the deepest expression ("for ever" and "totally") of our freedom, an expression which by God's grace has the effect of giving concrete witness to the fundamental option made at our baptism. It is rooted in our way of following Jesus Christ, and hence becomes the lens through which we read the Gospel and the point of departure for all our choices and commitments".<sup>1</sup>

Its public character is an authoritative assurance and proclamation of its ecclesial and communal significance of apostolic consecration. On the one hand it is a new and definitive bond with the Congregation, and on the other the young salesian enters a well defined ecclesial situation which is at the same time both spiritual and juridical, and assumes with his confreres the particular task carried out by the Salesians in the Church's sacramental dimension.

The fundamental importance of this choice, the christian and ecclesial significance it takes on, the relationship it establishes between the confrere and the Society, the kind of life-plan with which it identifies, all these determine the degree of salesian spiritual maturity (the salesian "adult state") which must be achieved if the gesture is to be truly authentic.

### **Preparation for this commitment**

While continually repeating that the whole process of formation is a preparation for perpetual profession, the Constitutions prescribe that it be "preceded by an appropriate period of immediate preparation", which completes the long work of understanding and assimilation and allows for a final reflection on the experience itself and on its overall synthesis.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 27-28; on the significance of perpetual profession cf. also AGC 295 (1980), p. 18-21

This final period is deliberately set aside as one of the most significant of the whole formation process. It must therefore be appropriately prepared, sufficiently long, passed in recollection and prayer with the help of persons who are skilled in the guidance of individuals and groups, and lived in a tranquil setting which makes possible a deep community life.

Both the immediate preparation for the perpetual profession and the celebration itself will be marked by the fraternal recognition of the provincial community which gladly accepts this gift of God, recognizes its fruitful nature and is enriched by it with new apostolic strength.

*God our Father,  
through the mysterious voice of your Spirit  
you attract some  
to follow Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd,  
and dedicate themselves after the example of Don Bosco  
to young people who are poor.  
Look upon our brothers  
who offer themselves to you for ever  
uniting themselves with the definitive "yes" of Christ.  
Pour out upon them your Spirit of holiness,  
so that they may fulfil with your help  
all that by your gift they have promised with joy.  
Grant that at all times  
they may be prompted by pastoral charity  
to seek souls and serve you alone, O Lord.  
Be for them, Father, their secure guide.  
May they find in Mary a motherly presence,  
in Don Bosco their model,  
in their confreres unfailing support,  
and in the young their stimulus and incentive.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 118 NEED FOR ONGOING FORMATION

In the context of a society characterized by pluralism and rapid changes, the evolving nature of each individual and the quality and fruitfulness of our apostolic religious life call for a continuation of our formation after the initial phases. We try to grow in our human qualities, to conform ourselves more closely to Christ, and to renew our fidelity to Don Bosco, so that we can respond to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor.

Through personal and community initiatives we nurture our salesian spiritual life, ensure our theological and pastoral updating, and develop our professional competence and our apostolic inventiveness.

As has been said right from the introduction to the third part of the Constitutions, ongoing formation is the perspective and organizing principle of the entire third part. What has been said so far about the general aspects of formation and the formative process finds its point of synthesis in ongoing formation. Initial formation is itself seen in this perspective.

The Constitutions therefore do not begin the consideration of this reality with the present art. 118; nor do they present it as a phase entirely separate from initial formation. Though it was considered as a new and necessary requirement at the beginning of the renewal period following Vatican II, ongoing formation is now present in the constitutional text as the organizing principle, as something necessary and as a permanent attitude.

The two concluding articles of the third part (to which correspond art. 98-102 of the Regulations) have the purpose on the one hand of taking up this principle and reasserting it, and on the other of highlighting the need for an attitude of ongoing formation to be lived all through life.

## Need of ongoing formation

Whence arises the need of ongoing formation? The Constitutions respond by pointing out the fundamental motivations of the salesian pastor and educator.

— In the first place the need arises from the *reality of the individual*: each person represents a call and a response, a project in process of realization at a human and christian level. "He calls... and we respond by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation". This call, referred to in art. 96, comes from within the person. Each individual is both its response and its permanent realization. "The dynamic and developing character of the human personality presents a constant opening up, whether on the level of doctrinal synthesis or of the plan of life."<sup>1</sup>

— Secondly, the need of ongoing formation arises from *our own specific vocation*: if apostolic religious life is to be fruitful and influential it cannot allow itself to be bogged down in mediocrity, superficiality or stagnation. Talents are meant to be exploited, not buried. A plant must be pruned if it is to give more fruit. Life must be kept open to the demands of the Spirit, because by definition it is "life in the Spirit", and the Spirit creates, animates and renews. "Watchful attention to the Spirit present in the events of history, which we have to decipher and which await from us a response of faith",<sup>2</sup> places us in a state of continual renewal.

— These two fundamental demands, which might be better classified as laws of life, are rendered more urgent and important by the *pluralistic context* in which we live, and in which multiple and rapid transformations produce and contrast with each other different plans for man and society, and present challenges at cultural, social and ecclesial levels. "These very transformations urge us to continuous renewal so as to maintain an intelligible witness and an efficient apostolic service"<sup>3</sup> in response "to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor".

<sup>1</sup> GC21, 309

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 310

## Lines of commitment

The article suggests three principal lines we can follow with good effect. They constitute three complementary aspects of the personal vocation of every salesian: *growth in human qualities, conformity to Christ, and fidelity to Don Bosco.*

This recalls, almost as though to emphasize the unity of the entire third part, what was stated in art. 98 when summing up formative experience as an ongoing process: "Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit, the salesian commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life". The human and personal reality, Christ and his Gospel, Don Bosco and his spirit form part of a unique experience which defines the salesian and makes it possible for him to live his identity as an apostle of youth.

Young people too, in their turn, are for us a need and incitement for ongoing formation; they oblige us to make progress and help us to do so: our fidelity, we read in art. 195, "is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent".

## Concrete aspects to be cultivated

The above-mentioned basic lines of commitment are rich in content as can easily be seen, but they may appear to be too wide-ranging. The text dwells on four of the more concrete aspects which the salesian, and the community too, must constantly cultivate: salesian spiritual life, theological and pastoral updating, professional competence, and apostolic inventiveness. Let us look briefly at each of them.

### — *Salesian spiritual life.*

By this is meant the sum total of the style of life and activity which distinguishes us from others in the Church: it includes all the Constitutions have indicated as making up our "identity card", and all that has been passed on to us by the living tradition of our Family. A

continually deepening knowledge of the Rule and the comparison of ourselves with our Founder and the first Salesians formed by him are among the most valuable means of ongoing formation.

— *Theological and pastoral updating.*

This is not merely a matter of a revision of previously studied treatises, "but also of a deepening of the primary disciplines which (the confreres) studied in the past, especially with regard to those questions of sacred doctrine which are of greater importance for spiritual life and pastoral work. (One should keep in mind) the progress of theological doctrine and new pastoral questions, especially as regards what has been specified by the living teaching of the Church. Finally there should be concern to connect pastoral discoveries resulting from experimentation with a solid doctrinal basis".<sup>4</sup>

— *Professional competence.*

Pastoral charity should also include pastoral "ability". The analysis and critical evaluation of a given situation according to criteria of faith and science; the planning of a service to meet a specific social, cultural and ecclesial context; the utilization of the means of social communication; the correct application of apostolic methodology, are all things that need competence, i.e. they require the discerning utilization of the results of the relevant sciences;<sup>5</sup> one of the aims of ongoing formation is to ensure up-to-date competence in these matters.

— *Apostolic inventiveness.*

Two quotations link the past with the present and indicate just how much apostolic creativity is a permanent feature of our spirit and must be cultivated at both personal and community level. Don Albera stated: "The spirit of personal initiative must be linked with due submission to the superior; this spirit gives to our Society that pleasing modern aspect which makes it possible to do the good needed by the

<sup>4</sup> "Inter ea", CEC, Rome 1969, n. 5

<sup>5</sup> Cf. FSDB, 78

needs of time and place".<sup>6</sup> And in his closing address to the GC21 the Rector Major declared: "Pastoral creativity, pedagogical imagination, enterprise and courage, holy guile — these are all genuine expressions of the oratorian heart of Don Bosco... We must take up (pastoral inventiveness) ourselves as the patrimony of every salesian community and as an expression of fidelity to Don Bosco".<sup>7</sup>

The General Regulations indicate still more aspects in the field of human maturity as suitable means for promoting ongoing formation: "Ongoing formation requires that each confrere develop his capacity for communication and dialogue; he should form in himself an open and discerning mentality and a spirit of initiative, and in this way conveniently renew his own plan of life" (R 99). In this line and to this end "each one should cultivate the habit of reading and the study of those branches of knowledge proper to his mission; he should maintain his openness to prayer, meditation, and to personal and community spiritual direction" (ibid.).

*Lord Jesus Christ,  
you recommended your disciples to be vigilant.  
You have called us to work in a world  
of upheaval and rapid change.  
Make us docile to your Spirit, and grant us,  
together with perfect fidelity to the charisma  
passed on to us by our Founder,  
the ability to renew ourselves each day,  
in a sincere and permanent effort of formation.*

<sup>6</sup> D. ALBERA, ASC 4, 15 May 1921, p. 201; cf. *Circular letters*, p. 499

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 573

*As we grow in our humanity  
and conform ourselves ever more deeply to you,  
may we follow the example of Don Bosco,  
and become better able to respond  
to the needs and challenges of our time,  
and be among youth  
authentic witnesses of your Love.*



## ART. 119 ONGOING FORMATION AS A PERMANENT PERSONAL FRAME OF MIND

Living in the midst of the young and in constant contact with working-class surroundings, the salesian tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the ability to learn from life's experiences. He sees his ordinary activities as effective means of formation, and he also makes use of any other means of formation that may be offered him.

Even when he is fully occupied he finds opportunities for renewing the religious and pastoral meaning of his life, and of learning to carry out his work with greater competence.

He also feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation.

"Every salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation". This statement of art. 99 is valid also for ongoing formation. After recalling the need, and indicating the lines of commitment and the aspects to be cultivated, we may put the question: And how is all this dynamic process to be ensured? What kind of attitude must the salesian display who wants to live his vocation in a renewed form, giving to the Lord an ever more authentic and consistent response, and offering an efficacious service to youth? Art. 119 answers this question by speaking of an "attitude" of ongoing formation.

The first article of the third part presented the two elements in the formative experience: the Lord who calls and gives his daily grace, and the salesian who responds with an adequate and continuous formation (cf. C 96). The final article of the same part endorses the same point: to live in an attitude of formation is to live in dialogue with the Spirit, to listen to his voice which makes itself understood, under proper conditions, in the events, ordinary activities and elements of everyday situations. To live as disciples of the Spirit is what this commitment comes to. Let us look more closely at the content of this article, of which the first and third paragraphs refer to formation as

a permanent frame of mind, and the second to the commitment to formation during the period of full activity.

### Ongoing formation as a personal frame of mind

To live in an attitude of ongoing formation means in the first place discerning the voice of the Spirit in everyday events, recognizing the formational efficacy of ordinary activities and using the means that come to hand.

Docility to the Spirit, attention to the signs of the times, a sense of reality, the Lord's message transmitted through urgent needs here and now, are frequently presented in the Constitutions as characteristics of the salesian spirit. On the other hand "spiritual discernment" is a fundamental law in the process of christian growth.

The context and result of this discernment is specified in a significant manner.

The subject doing the discerning is an apostle living among youth and in contact with working-class surroundings; a careful assessment of the associated realities will lead him to understand from them what the Lord is saying.

The result of this discernment is not a specific decision, but a permanent ability to "*learn from life's experiences*", to be an intelligent disciple at the school of life, to reach true wisdom through experience.

This first affirmation of art. 119, read in the light of Don Bosco's experience, gives us a better idea of its significance. It is not a question of a spontaneous attitude, but of a frame of mind that has to be formed and cultivated. It is not a matter of going in search of extraordinary occasions; what is necessary is to attribute formative efficacy to ordinary activities, to learn from everyday life, using the means that are offered, and they are plentiful (cf. R 101-102). All this can be achieved by living in depth and in dialogue with reality, but not in a superficial and hurried manner, as though we were more concerned about the particular action than about our responsibility for a whole project.

The principal condition therefore for a true process of ongoing formation is the attitude of the salesian, who in docility to the Spirit has learned to open himself to everything that daily life and the demands of the salvation of youth ask of him: this is the spirit of "da mihi animas" that moved Don Bosco so much. If this mentality were missing, the life of the salesian would become superficial, stagnant and withered.

### **During the time of full activity**

The Constitutions speak at length of the experience of initial formation, of the obligations it involves and the objectives it gradually achieves. Now the text refers more directly to the time of full apostolic dedication and activity.

The formative purposes emphasized and cultivated are those of the constant renewal of the significance of the vocation of each one and the updating of his capacity for service: or in other words, vocational consciousness and competence. Occasions must be found for the preservation of these two aspects at a high quality level. Any weakening of the religious and pastoral sense, any fading of the awareness of personal identity, any indifference or generic kind of approach extinguishes vocational joy and lessens the fruitfulness of self-donation: life then becomes closed to the animation of the Spirit and bogged down in an attitude quite opposed to that of ongoing formation.

For our vocation, which is entirely ministerial, it is also necessary to develop competence, to be better qualified to give to pastoral charity more adequate means for its expression. "Let every confrere", say the Regulations, "preserve that availability which is characteristic of our spirit, and be ready for periodic requalification" (R 100).

## Any situation is a favourable time for growing in vocation

The last paragraph re-echoes the fundamental themes present from the very first article of chap. VIII: the salesian "feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation".

The salesian is one who is "called", but he is not called just once for all time. He feels the call constantly and keeps himself alert and docile to accept the invitation and respond to it. The response is: "*to make the best formative use of any situation*" by an experience of salesian spirit. "We respond", said art. 96, the first article of the third part, "by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation".

"*Any situation*": the Constitutions recall nearly all of them, from the various periods of initial formation to that of full activity, in times of difficulty, sickness and old age. The salesian has offered to God his whole life and all his being, committing himself to live every vicissitude in accordance with God's will and the salesian project. "Totally", "for ever" and "any situation" are expressions which indicate the radical and all-embracing nature of our Covenant with God. The Lord has consecrated this entire commitment and offering.

"Any situation" is to be considered "*a favourable opportunity for growing in vocation*".

"A favourable opportunity" recalls the phrase of the New Testament, the "acceptable time", and is an invitation to recognize that God's action is always taking place, to discover the value for salvation contained in the present moment, which is not therefore to be lived in superficial fashion, is not to be put in parentheses, but exploited for "growing in vocation".

The word "growth" or "growing", always associated with vocation and formation, concludes the two chapters dedicated to formation and reaffirms the dynamic perspective of our life: a process, a project, a permanent commitment, an ever renewed response to the Covenant the Lord has established with us (cf. C 195). For us growth means maturing in vocation, in the project with which we identify ourselves, which calls for the commitment of the deepest dimensions of our being and makes manifest the will of God in our regard.

The formative process therefore is one which is open to the voice of the Spirit in whatever way it may reach us, and leads to docility on our part. This openness and availability in the salesian and in the community become translated into an attitude of ongoing formation of which the main lines and content were indicated in the preceding article: an attitude of collaboration with Him who, having begun a good work in us, will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 1,6).

*Lord Jesus, you formed your Apostles  
to be disciples docile to the action of the Spirit,  
and you taught Don Bosco from his childhood  
to recognize your voice in the midst of the young.*

*Give us clarity of vision and a docile heart,  
so that we may discover the signs of your presence  
in our life and amidst those to whom you have sent us.*

*Grant that by finding every event and situation  
a favourable time for growth in our vocation,  
we may respond with generosity to your continual call,  
so that "all things may work together for our good"  
and our life may become a complete offering  
for your glory and the benefit of our fellow men.*



## FOURTH PART

### THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN OUR SOCIETY

"It is of the very nature of the religious life, just as it is of the very nature of the Church, to have that structure without which no society, not even a supernatural one, would be able to achieve its end, or be in a position to provide the best means to attain it".<sup>1</sup>

These words of the Instruction "Renovationis causam" were echoed by the SGC which stated: "The religious life is of its nature charismatic; for this reason it has a spiritual dimension and here its vitality is to be found. From the very fact that religious are human and have specific goals to attain together there must be an organization as in any other society, and this has need of structures".<sup>2</sup>

For this reason we find in every part of the Constitutions elements which touch on institutional aspects of the Congregation: in speaking of activities, of the common life, of the practice of the evangelical counsels, and of formation.

These elements are naturally present in a particular way in the part which deals specifically with the organization of our Society, i.e. the structures of government at different levels. After the first three parts which have presented respectively the basic features of the salesian identity (part I), the constituent elements inseparable from this identity (part II), and the process of growth of each vocation (part III), the fourth part presents what can be called the "*book of government*". Its importance derives from the fact that it provides the Society with an organic and dovetailed structure to enable it to achieve its aims.

Its principal purpose is to indicate the norms and means for the effective functioning of all the internal structures of the Congregation, particularly with a view to the realization of communion between all the confreres and the fulfilment of the mission.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. RC Introduction

<sup>2</sup> SGC, 706

Its concrete objectives are: to establish the organs of government and consultation and their functions and to render effective the service of authority, so as to coordinate the duties, initiatives and activities of all Salesians.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Unity of treatment

Because of the matter it deals with, the fourth part is concise and juridical in style and language, and also somewhat extensive in its treatment (71 articles), as required by the points involved.

But its complete and authentic significance can be understood only if it is considered not as a part by itself, detached from the rest of the Constitutions, but in its relationship with the other parts and in unity with them. This unity results from the general structure of the constitutional text and indicates the perspective in which the fourth part on the service of authority should be read.

In fact the salesian identity described in the first part, and especially the chapter on the salesian spirit as an element which informs and permeates all salesian life and activity, are determining factors for both the setting up and codifying of the structures of government and the practical exercise of the service of authority in our Congregation. The six concluding articles of the Constitutions include also the fourth part as an integral element of the "apostolic project of our Society" (C 192) and of the "way that leads to Love" (C 196).

It should be noted too that the three constitutive elements of our vocation, indicated in the second part of the constitutional text, are specifically linked with the fourth part:

— *through the apostolic mission*: in the section dealing with shared responsibility for the mission, where emphasis is laid on the fact that the mission is entrusted to the community, and on the animating function of the provincial and the rector in pastoral

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SGC, 707



discernment and in putting into practice the apostolic plan (cf. C 44);

- *through the common life*: in the articles which describe the central place of the rector in the community (cf. C 55), and also the linkage between local and provincial communities, and the communion of all the confreres with the Rector Major and his council (cf. C 58. 59):
- *through the practice of the evangelical counsels*: in the section concerning the vow of obedience, which highlights the salesian style of obedience and authority and the common responsibility of all, confreres and superiors, in obedience to God's will (cf. C 65, 66).

In its turn the whole of the fourth part is strictly linked with the preceding parts of the text by the introductory chapter on general principles and criteria (chap. X), which indicates the main lines of animation of the whole organization: the configuration of the Society in communities at different levels with their respective structures of government (C 120), the nature of the service of authority and its objectives (C 121-122), the participation and shared responsibility of all the confreres, subsidiarity and decentralization (C 123-124).

## 2. The content of the fourth part

With regard to the content of the fourth part it should be noted that the Congregation, in the postconciliar revision, has rethought in depth the matter of our structures. It was not satisfied merely with bringing them up to date, but wanted to reflect explicitly, in the light of the doctrine of Vatican II, on the sense of the structures of government and on the general principles which inspire them.

These reflections, made by the SGC,<sup>4</sup> are summed up in chapter X of the Constitutions, which is almost completely new by comparison with the previous text of 1966. Both the GC21 and the GC22 endorsed the inserting into the Constitutions of this introductory chapter on

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, 706-709; 720-722

principles and general criteria of the service of authority, so that it might serve as a key to the reading of the entire fourth part.

It would be a bad mistake to consider this part as of less importance, or in some way reserved to those who exercise some kind of authority in the Congregation. Chap. X shows that the question of structures is one that not only touches the life of the whole Congregation and every member, but also calls for the shared responsibility of all. A precise juridical designation of the competence of the various office-holders is not enough; what is needed is a spiritual attitude of common and shared obedience, to which all the members contribute and in which they participate, each according to his own role and capacity.

In the work of revision a careful examination was made of all the structures of government at three levels:

- by applying the general principles and criteria indicated in the introductory chapter of this part;
- by evaluating each of the structures, according to the general criteria set out in the *Motu proprio* "Ecclesiae Sanctae" for the revision of Constitutions.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the particular nature of this part, particular importance attaches to:

- *the juridical and normative criterion*, so as to guarantee the presence, essential content and clarity of the norms: the GC22, in particular, took care to bring the particular law of the Congregation into harmony with that of the Church, promulgated in the new Code of Canon Law which came into force in November 1983;
- *the criterion of experience*: the definitive redrafting made by the GC22 took into account the practical results of all the experiments in structures of government that had been introduced by the SGC and tried out for practicability over the previous twelve years.

After all this process of revision, including the final verification on the part of the Apostolic See we can safely say: "The structures

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ASC 305 (1982), p. 40-44

of government appear to accord with the Church's norms and to be a practical reflection of the Spirit in which the Congregation exercises the service of authority".<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Title and arrangement

In the definitive revision the fourth part has been given the title: "*The service of authority in our Society*". For this material it was not possible to continue with the personalized titles of the preceding parts, which refer to the Salesians whose Rule of life they describe. On the other hand there was a general desire to avoid a title that would sound too juridical and abstract, like that which still appeared in the text of 1972 (where the part was entitled "Organization of our Society", and the successive chapters "Structures of government at world, provincial, local level").

The new title was chosen because it rightly emphasizes the nature of religious authority as a service (cf. C 121) and links the fourth part better with those that precede it.

For the same reason the title of the fourth part is repeated for the chapters which concern the structures at the three levels, adding "in the world (provincial, local) community" as the case may be.

The fourth part is therefore divided into five chapters:

- Chap. X      General principles and criteria*  
*art. 120-124 (5 articles)*
- Chap. XI     Service of authority in the world community*  
*art. 125-155 (31 articles)*
- Chap. XII    Service of authority in the provincial community*  
*art. 156-174 (19 articles)*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GC22, *Sussidi alle Costituzioni e Regolamenti*, Rome 12.5.1984, p. 81

*Chap. XIII Service of authority in the local community*  
*art. 175-186 (12 articles)*

*Chap. XIV Administration of temporal goods*  
*art. 187-190 (4 articles)*

The order adopted for the three levels is that of the preceding Constitutions: first the world structures are presented, then the provincial ones and finally the local ones. It is true that at the practical level of life and the more immediate realization of our mission, the local communities come first, but they always give effect to one and the same charism, the unity of which has to be ensured by the higher structures. The order adopted is meant to signify: the same universal salesian charisma functions in the context of the different provinces, and in any particular province the charism, as detailed for the circumstances of that province, functions in the local context of each community. It is well to emphasize too that government in religious institutes is intrinsically connected with the world of faith and the vocational response to God. The structures of these institutes reflect the very nature of the Church of which Christ is the Head.<sup>7</sup>

Within each level (chap. XI-XIII) the treatment starts from the personal aspect of authority and proceeds to the collegial aspect. The fundamental reason for this arrangement (which was followed also in the preceding Constitutions) is found in the vow of religious obedience. Religious life calls for a form of government and authority which expresses the value of the vow of obedience as submission to an authority which arises not from the members themselves but has its source in God through the Church, which confers it on the religious superior. Such authority is therefore personal and cannot be shared, even though it be not exercised in isolation, since the superior is assisted by a council and the supreme authority resides in the General Chapter when it is gathered in assembly.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Essential elements of consecrated life*, CRIS, 31.5.83, n. 49

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 49-50; cf. also CIC, can. 617-618

This arrangement is the same as that adopted by the Code of Canon Law itself, which deals first with superiors and their councils, and then with chapters.

*N.B. It should be noted that in this fourth part individual commentaries are given only for the articles of the introductory chapter and those of chap. XI which concern authority at world level: the Sovereign Pontiff, the Rector Major and members of the General Council. For the remainder an overall commentary by paragraphs or sections will suffice.*

## CHAPTER X

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA

*"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of man also came ~~not~~ to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10,43-45)*

The general content of this chapter well deserves this classic gospel text, which is a synthesis par excellence of the christian sense of authority. Its best exegesis is found in the life of Christ himself, in the way he lived the 'power' (exousia) he was acknowledged to possess (Mk 1,22; Mt 28,18) in a wonderfully balanced harmony between courageous proclamation of the truth (Mk 12,14) and encouraging respect for the little ones, the weak and the frail (Mt 9,12f; 12,20).

At a decisive turning point in his life, when the painful end he had foreseen was about to become a fact (Mk 10,32-34), Jesus revealed the sense of his life as service, as an autobiographical feature, a confession which was all the more impressive because so difficult to understand by the common people, and yet in perfect harmony with all the rest of his life.

The historical context for the gospel quotation is the somewhat impertinent question of the sons of Zebedee (Mk 10,35-45), but in it there is also a touch of the problem that had arisen in the christian community about the role of the heads of the community and what they did. We may remember especially that Jesus made as the dogmatic basis of everything the event of the cross (the "baptism" and "chalice", 10,38), in the light of which he said: "But it shall not be so among you" (10,43). In other words it should have been clear to the disciples that they could not follow the practice by which the "great men of the Gentiles" ruled over them, even to breaking-point; or to put it in positive terms, service alone (and therefore servants) was the only christian qualification for exercising authority in the community, combining with the practical act of love the little prestige that went with it (10,43-44); but to remove any doubt about the matter, it was the service of Christ the servant which made him the supreme criterion and model (10,45) He truly had the power of God, being the Son of man (Dan 7,13f), and yet as the Servant in Isaiah he exercises it in radical fidelity and full responsibility towards men. He serves man by redeeming him, and loves him by liberating him for God, accepting the fact that by doing so he puts his own life at stake. Hence authority is service if it draws its inspiration from the service of authority of Jesus Christ.

We have already spoken of this chapter when presenting the fourth part in its entirety: it should be seen as an *introduction and key to the understanding of the whole of the fourth part*.

It is meant to set out the spirit and the principles of authority and its exercise at all levels and will find concrete applications in the three chapters that follow, and in the corresponding chapters of the general Regulations.

It should be noted that the source of the doctrine contained in this chapter is found for the most part in the documents of Vatican II which reflected deeply on the nature of authority in the Church, but they are also found in our salesian tradition which has passed on to us Don Bosco's own way of exercising authority: a true father and servant of his brothers.

The five articles of the chapter are arranged as follows:

- *Those who have authority in the Congregation according to its threefold nature: art. 120*
- *Nature and purpose of authority:*
  - art. 121: authority as service*
    - purpose of authority
    - requirement of priestly character
  - art. 122: authority in communion*
    - guarantee of unity
- *Criteria for the exercise of authority:*
  - art. 123: participation and shared responsibility*
  - art. 124: subsidiarity and decentralization*

## ART. 120 BASIC STRUCTURE OF OUR SOCIETY

Our Society is made up of provincial communities, and these in turn are divided into local communities.

Government at world level ensures unity of life and action in differing environments and situations.

Central, provincial and local government is exercised with ordinary authority by a superior assisted by his council.

Supreme authority over the whole Congregation belongs to the General Chapter. Provincial chapters are granted specific powers within the domain of the province.

### The salesian community at its three levels

Art. 120 presents a brief compendium of the fundamental structures and the respective organs of authority in the Congregation.

It starts from the complex reality of our Society, of which the first article of the Constitutions recalled the foundation through Don Bosco, and of which the first part of the same Constitutions described the vocational identity and its position in the Church. The salesian Society is a world community (cf. C 59), present in different social, political and cultural contexts.

To the different presences correspond the provinces or provincial communities of which it is made up: the Italian term "*si configura*" (rendered in the English translation by "is made up of") was chosen to express the idea that every province is like a reflection in miniature of the whole Congregation in its fundamental completeness of life and mission in a particular territory (cf. C 157).

The province is in turn divided ("*si articola*") into local communities (cf. C 58), rather like different members which combine to constitute a living body, which is in this case the province.

In this way the three structural levels in the Congregation are clearly distinguished: the three communities are presented with a brief



reference to the correlation between them, which will be dealt with at greater length and made more precise by the various dispositions of the successive chapters.

In particular the article emphasizes the significance of the central government for ensuring unity of life and action in the Congregation, an urgent necessity because of its worldwide dimensions and the lawful pluralism and rich diversity of provincial communities spread over five continents.

While subsequent articles (C 122, 124) will further develop the theme of unity in diversity, the intention here is to stress with a certain insistence the fundamental value of unity, on account of which it would be no exaggeration to say that the structures at world level are the '*structures of unity*', of a "unity of ministry which must organically unite everyone in the same vocation".<sup>1</sup>

### Authority of the Superior

At every level (central, provincial and local) there is a superior, who governs his community with ordinary power. As was said in the introduction to the fourth part, his authority is proper and personal<sup>2</sup> like all authority in the Church, and this implicitly excludes government of a collegial nature.<sup>3</sup> Authority in religious life is, in fact, linked with the mystery of obedience which is realized through the mediation of a member within the prescriptions of the Constitutions.

But on the other hand the superior does not exercise his power in an absolute and autocratic manner. He is assisted, according to the Rule, by a council and is obliged to make use of it in the exercise of his own office.<sup>4</sup> The personal authority of the superior is thus

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 720

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 618

<sup>3</sup> A decree of the CRIS, 2 February 1972, gave a negative response to the question whether authority in religious life could be understood in collegial fashion (cf. AAS 69 (1972), p. 393)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 627

enlightened and strengthened by the help of his council and, in specific cases of particular importance indicated by the particular law, he cannot act without its vote, deliberative or consultative as the case may require.

This manner of exercising religious government, with on the one hand the personal authority of the superior and on the other the active participation of his council, was desired by Vatican II and endorsed by the Code of Canon Law and is explicitly affirmed at all levels of government in our Congregation.

### **Collegial organs**

While stating that the authority of the superior is personal, continuous and effective, and ensured in permanent form by the dispositions of our particular law (duration in office, temporary substitution by vicars, manner of succession), it should be noted that organs exist in the Congregation which enjoy authority exercised in another form in specific moments and circumstances. We are speaking here of the collegial authority of Chapters, once they have been assembled and are in session.

A Chapter is essentially an "ad hoc" organ, i.e. called together for precise purposes laid down by the Constitutions; it is composed of "ex officio" members and of delegates representing provincial or local communities, elected for a specific Chapter; its authority is limited to the time it is in session.

The General Chapter has supreme authority over the whole Congregation, in so far as it elects the Rector Major and the General Council and has the task of making laws for the entire Congregation (cf. C 147).

Within the domain of the province the provincial chapter has specific powers, particularly as regards the application of universal laws to its own territory (cf. C 171; R 167).

A more detailed commentary on these collegial organs is given in the individual articles which follow.

*God our Father,  
in your wisdom you have given to your Church  
among the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
the support provided by the service of authority.*

*Look with love on our Society  
and place at its head enlightened men,  
plentifully endowed with the spirit of prayer,  
capable of discernment and rich in kindness,  
so that they may safely guide us  
in the way of your will.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 121 NATURE OF THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY

In imitation of Christ and in his name, authority in the Congregation is exercised according to the spirit of Don Bosco as a service to brothers for discerning and fulfilling the Father's will.

This service is directed to fostering charity, coordinating the efforts of all, animating, orientating, making decisions, giving corrections, so that our mission may be accomplished.

According to our tradition, communities are guided by a member who is a priest, and who by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers.

He is obliged to make the profession of faith prescribed by canon law.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 833,8

This article is connected with previous parts of the Constitutions: it takes up again and completes the content of art. 55 on the rector in the community, who "represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father", and of art. 65 on the salesian style of obedience and authority, both of which "are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust".

### Authority as service

Our text defines authority with a statement dense in meaning: it is exercised at all levels *"in imitation of Christ and in his name ... as a service to brothers* for discerning and fulfilling the Father's will".

In the context of apostolic religious life the concept of authority does not evoke the idea of a power which distinguishes "superiors" from "inferiors" and puts the latter at the service of the former, as can easily happen at a simply human level.

The model par excellence of the religious superior is the Lord Jesus. On the day before his passion he washed the feet of his disciples and gave them to understand that if there be one who is called to serve the rest, it is precisely the one to whom authority has been given: the "Lord and Master" who called others to "follow" him became a servant (cf. Jn 13,1-17). And after the request of the sons of Zebedee, he taught his Apostles: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all".<sup>1</sup>

Vatican II took up this theme with a significant insistence and applied it among others to religious superiors. Their authority is real, but exists only in view of a ministry or "diaconia", i.e. a service, and a brotherly service. "Superiors should be docile to God's will in performing the task laid upon them and should exercise authority in a spirit of service of the brethren, thus giving expression to God's love for them".<sup>2</sup> The Code of Canon Law clearly draws its inspiration from the same text when it asserts: "The authority which superiors receive from God through the ministry of the Church is to be exercised by them in a spirit of service. In fulfilling their office they are to be docile to the will of God, and are to govern those subject to them as children of God".<sup>3</sup>

On this evangelical and ecclesial doctrine our own Constitutions are based. In fact for us this teaching has a particular significance because it is in line with the way we read the Gospel "in the spirit of Don Bosco": among the aspects of the figure of the Saviour to which we are more sensitive, art. 11 includes "the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion". These features should characterize in a special way the salesian superior: his authority is "pastoral", i.e. it proceeds entirely from a pastoral charity which finds

<sup>1</sup> Cf. commentary on biblical quotation at beginning of chap. X, p. 872

<sup>2</sup> PC 14

<sup>3</sup> CIC, can. 618

its model and source in the very heart of Christ, the Servant of the Father and the Good Shepherd of his brothers, even to the extent of complete self-donation. In this radical sense the superior's authority is a service available to his brothers and an obedience to the will of the Father free of self-interest.

### The purpose of salesian authority

The second paragraph completes the first and adds some details to it. It describes the purpose of the service of authority. Without pretending to be exhaustive it mentions two points in particular, recalling ideas expressed also elsewhere in the Constitutions:<sup>4</sup>

— the first task of authority concerns *brotherly communion*: it is directed to "fostering charity" among the members of the local community, the province and the Congregation, and to "coordinating the efforts of all", or in other words in ensuring unity of hearts and wills in communal life and in collaboration in the common plan (cf. C 55). In the community the superior is the sign and means of the communion of all the confreres in seeking and giving effect to God's will (cf. C 66); we may recall especially what the Constitutions say about the superior's role in fostering the family spirit (cf. C 55, 65);

— the second task concerns *the salesian mission*: this is a duty arising from our specific pastoral identity, and is one of animation for the choosing of objectives and giving guidance for their attainment; more concretely it involves the obligation of making decisions when a solution must be chosen, or for correcting a situation where there is risk of going astray (cf. C 44, 66).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Introduction to fourth part, p. 865 ff.

## Requirement of the priestly character

Since this article gives a general outline of the service of authority with specific reference to pastoral charity and the common mission, the GC22 considered it the best place for stating explicitly that a salesian Superior must be a priest, an assertion which in the text of 1972 had been included in the part referring to the apostolic mission.<sup>5</sup>

The text makes explicit an aspect of the form of our Society already indicated in art. 4. It appeals to salesian tradition which goes all the way back to Don Bosco the Founder and has remained uninterrupted down to our own days, and which moreover was explicitly confirmed by the last three General Chapters, which carried out the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions. We read in the documents of the GC21: "We are not dealing merely with a juridical or sociological question; nor is it a problem that arises from a consideration of religious life in general. It is a question of a specific religious ecclesial problem that can be termed 'salesian'. It is concerned with a particular mode of life, as found in the salesian community as started and structured by Don Bosco, and lived and approved by the Church with a view to the fulfilment of the concrete mission that the Holy Spirit entrusted to our Father and Founder".<sup>6</sup> "It is a point that concerns the very roots of our spirit and of our salesian life, both with regard to the internal government of the community and in respect of the pastoral method proper to our mission".<sup>7</sup>

It is a fact that the salesian community was built up around Don Bosco, the first "rector" of the Oratory, who gave to the figure of the superior all the marks of the fatherliness flowing from his priestly ministry. Even after the Apostolic See had prescribed that the superior of a religious community should not be the regular confessor of his confreres, the Successors of Don Bosco were tireless in pointing to the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, art. 35

<sup>6</sup> GC21, 199

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 200

salesian rector as the true "shepherd" and "director of spirit" of confreres and boys, according to the mind of the Founder.<sup>8</sup>

The General Chapters were firmly convinced that the priestly character in the superior is an element that belongs essentially to the salesian charisma. In his address of 24 January 1978 to the GC21 the Rector Major gave the following three motivations as determining the Chapter's decision:

- the explicit and verifiable will of the Founder;
- the approval and formal declaration by the Hierarchy;

<sup>8</sup> It will be useful to recall some significant interventions of General Chapters and Rectors Major concerning the authentic figure of the salesian rector.

An event which Fr Ceria described as a turning point in the history of the Society (cf. *Annali* III, p. 170-194) was the decree of the Holy Office of 24 April 1901 which prescribed that the religious superior should not be the ordinary confessor of the confreres. We know what concern this caused to Don Rua and the salesians because it seemed to conflict with one of the original characteristics of the rector in our houses. Against the background of this concern we must read what the GC10 of 1904 laid down in the Regulations in respect of the rector: "The GC10 made the rectors effectively responsible for the religious progress of their confreres, by constituting them their true spiritual directors, even though not their confessors. To this end it recommends them to make souls their principal concern; spiritual works, moral improvement, and religious progress their first care, so that 'formetur in omnibus Christus' and they may not have a community of mere workers or employees" (*Regulations 1906*, art. 135). Don Rua, for his part, in various letters to provincials and rectors insisted on the formation function that belonged to the rectors. In an important letter to the provincials and rectors of America he wrote that the rector is "the guide, and master of virtue and perfection" of the confreres, and especially of the younger ones (cf. D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 134-135).

Don Albera too has various interventions on the rector in his letters (cf. D. ALBERA, *Circular letters*). Very significant is an intervention in the GC11, made a few days after his election as Rector Major. He concluded a capitular session with these words: "It is essential for the life of our Society that we preserve the spirit of the rector according to Don Bosco's ideal; otherwise we shall be changing our method of education and shall no longer be salesians. We must do all we can to preserve the fatherly spirit. Especially through the *rendiconto* we can know our subjects and direct them... In this way we shall be able to maintain around the rector the aura with which Don Bosco wanted him to be surrounded" (cf. CERIA, *Annali* IV, 8-9). To Don Albera is due also the drawing up of the "Manuale del Direttore" which opens with this remark addressed to the rector himself: "This book contains the norms of conduct you should follow, so as to work efficaciously and preserve Don Bosco's spirit in the house entrusted to your care...".

Specially remembered of Don Rinaldi is his heart-rending appeal to provincials and rectors to preserve jealously the sense of spiritual fatherhood of Don Bosco: "My dear provincials-



— the harmonization of such an element with the methodology of the preventive system in the practical realization of our mission.<sup>9</sup>

The salesian superior is not primarily an administrator, nor an organizer, nor the manager of a particular work, nor a builder etc.; he is first and foremost the guide of a community which has been entrusted with a specific pastoral mission; he is in a certain sense the spiritual educator of a group of educators, the shepherd of a group of shepherds, the animator of their spirit, the one who gives direction to the "missionary" activity of his confreres, both priests and laymen, seen in all its aspects.

The significance of this service being provided by a priest can therefore be clearly seen, as also can Don Bosco's reasons for wanting it so. The sacrament of Order confers on the superior the fundamental capacity for his service, and pastoral experience provides the practical skill. His model is Don Bosco himself, priest and educator, superior and shepherd, spiritual director of his confreres and of the community of Valdocco.<sup>10</sup>

and rectors, I beg of you through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to revive in yourselves and all around you the tradition of spiritual fatherhood, which is unfortunately declining to the great detriment of young souls and of our salesian physiognomy. Be true fathers of the souls of your young people. Do not leave aside this fatherliness, but practise it... Leave to others the confessions of women and nuns; you yourselves should be the confessors of the youngsters of the oratory and outsiders" (ASC 56, April 1931, p. 939-943).

In the circular letters of subsequent Successors of Don Bosco can also be found frequent references to the figure of the rector. In the official teaching of more recent times before the SGC, the deliberations of the GC19 should be remembered; they dealt with the rector in chap. V of document I (structures), in doc. VII (entirely dedicated to the spiritual direction of the confreres), and in doc. XIX on the formation of the young. There are some significant passages in doc. I: after recalling the "uninterrupted tradition" that the rector constitutes "without any doubt the centre for unity and of initiative in all salesian work", the document adds: "The need of flexible unity, and on the part of the rector especially in the sense of spiritual and formative fatherliness, alive and active,... would seem to be in need of special emphasis at the present day". (GC19, p. 32-33)

<sup>9</sup> Cf. GC21, 220

<sup>10</sup> On this theme cf. Letter of the Rector Major: *The salesian rector and animation*, in ASC 306, 1982

*Jesus, Good Shepherd,  
give to the superiors of our communities  
the fullness of your grace,  
to enable them to foster unity of purpose  
among their confreres,  
and full agreement in their desires and activity.*

*Grant that, like Don Bosco,  
they may be shepherds full of zeal,  
and in animating, guiding, deciding and correcting,  
they may lead us  
to an ever more diligent and joyful fulfilment  
of our mission of salvation.*

## ART. 122 UNITY IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY

Superiors at every level of government share in one and the same authority, and exercise it in communion with the Rector Major for the benefit of the whole Society. In this way, while fostering the good of each individual community, they are solicitous for the unity, growth and perfecting of the whole Congregation.

In the definitive revision of the text of the Constitutions this article has been preserved, but has been transferred from the section dealing with the Rector Major, where it was found in the 1972 edition, to the chapter on the general principles and criteria to emphasize the importance of the unity of the Congregation spread all over the world.

Art. 59, in the chapter on the fraternal and apostolic community, had already opened to every confrere who becomes incorporated in the Society by religious profession its world dimension in communion with the Rector Major and his council (cf. also art. 24, on the profession formula).

This is truer still of those who are superiors at provincial or local level. They must be guarantors of the convergence of all the confreres in the charismatic and vocational unity of the Congregation, and must therefore exercise their office in close conjunction with the Rector Major, who is its centre of unity. "At the different levels", said the SGC, "the centre which in Don Bosco's mind guarantees unity is the respective superior. For the Congregation considered in its totality, this 'centre of unity' par excellence is the Rector Major with the Superior Council" (now General Council).<sup>1</sup> The Society as a whole is the heir and continuation of the spirit, mission and charism of Don Bosco (cf. C 1), and his Successor is the father who fosters the constant fidelity of all the members to the salesian charisma. We recall Don Bosco's words, already quoted elsewhere: "Let everyone help the Rector Major,

<sup>1</sup> SGC, 720

upholding and assisting him in every way; let everyone *rally about him as the sole focal point*".<sup>2</sup>

There are two statements of a fundamental nature in this article.

— The first emphasizes the concept of participation (and this will be further developed under a different aspect in the next article). "*Superiors at every level of government share in one and the same authority*", which "does not immediately derive from designation by the members, but has its origin in the act of the canonical erection of the Society. Therefore there exists in the whole Congregation only one nucleus, only one centre of authority. And this authority, received from the Church, comes through the elective will of the General Chapter to find its centre, according to the Constitutions, in the ministry of the Rector Major".<sup>3</sup> And our Founder himself reminds us: "What we have said about the Rector Major in reference to the whole Congregation applies also to each rector in his own house. He must be united to the Rector Major, and all the members of his house must be united with him".<sup>4</sup> Clearly indicated therefore is the deep communion that must exist between the Rector Major and all who exercise authority.

— A second important aspect, which follows immediately from the above, is also given prominence. It is the "preoccupation and interest which all superiors must have for the good, the unity and the increase of the whole Congregation, over and above their immediate concern for their own field of activity and for their own communities".<sup>5</sup>

This observation in no way weakens the personal and ordinary authority of superiors at the various levels, nor does it take anything from their task of "fostering the good of each individual community", even according to the criteria for a proper subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C 124), but is aimed at achieving the harmonious realization of two complementary elements, those of *unity and plurality*. In fact our structures should make possible the expression of the diversity of

<sup>2</sup> BM XII, 62

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 721

<sup>4</sup> BM XII, 62

<sup>5</sup> SGC, 721

personal qualities and the values of every community and region, and facilitate adaptation to the educative and pastoral demands of different social and cultural circumstances and of the local Churches. Pluralism of ideas, of opinions, of endeavour, of work, of activity, of the forms of concrete living, demand of our structures a greater spiritual and juridical unity, because our mission is one, our consecration is identical, as also is our spirit; and the diversity of abilities and duties ought to be directed towards the exchange of ideas, to collaboration, and to fraternal and ecclesial communion.<sup>6</sup>

*God our Father,  
you inspired Don Bosco to found  
a family of brothers united around their father.*

*Grant that all of us, confreres and superiors,  
may be united around the Rector Major,  
whom you have given us  
as our "father" and "centre of unity".*

*While we foster the good of each of our communities,  
make us solicitous for the unity,  
growth and perfecting of the whole Congregation.*

*This we ask through the intercession of Mary,  
and through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SGC, 706

## ART. 123 PARTICIPATION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Our common vocation requires the responsible and effective participation of all the members in the life and action of the local, provincial and world communities, not only in terms of implementation but also of planning, organizing and evaluating, according to their respective roles and competence.

This shared responsibility requires also the participation of the confreres, in the most suitable way, in the choice of those responsible for government at the different levels, and in the working out of their more important decisions.

It is the duty of those who exercise authority to promote and guide this contribution by means of adequate information, personal dialogue and community study and reflection.

This article and the one that follows are strictly linked with the two preceding ones: together they form a single block and lead to an understanding of some complementary aspects of authority and service.

To the specific and personal responsibility of superiors corresponds a shared responsibility on the part of all the confreres. The superior should not think that he is obliged to do everything himself or on his own authority. On the one hand he has to foster a responsible participation by all the confreres (art. 123), and on the other he must leave to those responsible at lower levels what they are capable of doing within the limits of their own competence (art. 124). These are criteria insisted on by Vatican II and which also inspired the new Code of Canon Law.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CIC, Introduction. The principle of the shared responsibility of each one, according to his own role, is part of the tradition which goes back to Don Bosco. His words are well known: "Let the rector be the rector; i.e. let him direct others as to what they should do..." (BM XIII, 258; cf. also BM X, 493)

## Responsible participation of all in communal life and activity

Art. 123 bases the responsible and effective participation of all the confreres on the "common vocation", which the first and second parts of the Constitutions described in its essential elements, and which each member, called by God to be part of the salesian Society, accepted on the day of profession.

Art. 22 stated that every confrere is "a responsible member" of the Society, who "puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks".

Then in dealing with obedience, the Constitutions emphasized the involvement of all: "In the community, in view of the mission entrusted to us, we all obey even though we have different tasks to perform... in matters of importance we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility" (C 66).

The concept of personal and communal co-responsibility for the common vocation is here taken up again and endorsed as one of the criteria for the governmental structures called for by the conciliar renewal and which must involve all members. All are asked to give their "responsible and effective participation ... in the life and action of the local, provincial and world communities ... according to their respective roles and competence".

All Salesians have the same vocation, and we feel the life and mission of the Congregation as our own; each one in his own environment feels that he shares and is responsible for the life of his community and of the province, and is open to the whole Society. This was the thought of Don Bosco himself when he said that all should form "a family of brothers around a father".<sup>2</sup>

The article indicates in particular some concrete methods by which this sharing and co-responsibility should be practised by the confreres and encouraged by the superiors. Three significant moments are

<sup>2</sup> BM VIII, 356

indicated at which the participation of all is needed; these are also pointed out elsewhere in the Constitutions, especially when shared responsibility in obedience is spoken of (cf. C 66):

- common research in programming and organization;
- common commitment in carrying out decisions;
- verification or revision of the communal project.

One of the best means for the exercise of the common responsibility is the Assembly of the confreres, which has among its precise duties "to draw up a programme each year covering the life, activities and updating of the community, and to review this programme" (cf. R 184).

### **Shared responsibility in the choice of superiors**

The second paragraph points out a form of participation which is particularly important, expressly indicated by the Council,<sup>3</sup> and codified in the Code of Canon Law: it is the active contribution that religious are called upon to give in the choice of members of chapters, councils, and of the superiors themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Our Constitutions adopt this criterion for the designation of both superiors and members of councils and chapters. The Constitutions themselves, in determining the structures at various levels, prescribe the concrete manner for participation in these cases, which we shall consider later at both provincial and local level (cf. C 162, 167, 177).

But taking part in the choice of superiors is not sufficient. The Rule urges a real sharing in the making of more important decisions by those responsible for government at various levels.

Art. 66, to which we have already referred, speaks of this explicitly in connection with the local community: even though at the end of

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PC 14; ES II 18

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 625, 633



the period of common research the decision belongs to the superior, the opinions of the confreres are first heard in a dialogue which aims at securing the greatest possible convergence of views.

At other levels, the following forms of participation are expressly indicated in the Constitutions:

- the possibility for provinces, local communities and individual confreres to send their proposals to the Moderator of the General Chapter (R 112; cf. can. 631 §3);
- on the occasion of the provincial chapter, the "common concern for the general problems" of the province on the part of local communities and confreres (cf. C 170);
- the ascertaining of the views of the local community concerned, before the provincial council makes a decision in its regard (cf. R 158).

### The superior fosters the participation of all

All of this should not be considered a kind of concession or act of condescension on the part of the superior. Indeed the one who exercises authority has the obligation of promoting and guiding the responsible collaboration of all, by three principal means:

- *adequate information*, so as to involve the confreres in reflection on important matters (the Regulations insist on this: cf. R 33, 180, 184);
- *personal dialogue*, which is indispensable if each confrere is to be treated as a "responsible member"; this is another indication of the importance of the talk with the superior (cf. C 70, R 49);
- *communal reflection*: i.e. the common search for the Lord's will (cf. C 66), especially at the level of the local community, for which the Regulations recommend the rector to make effective the shared responsibility of the confreres and to bring about an appropriate functioning of the Assembly of the confreres (cf. R 173).

The structures of government therefore are not something which concern only a limited number of confreres. All are asked to take an interest in them, to study problems, to make comments and offer suggestions, whenever the life of the community or its apostolic activity is involved. And each one is called upon to offer for the benefit of others his own experience, personal talents, and the responsibility attached to his particular work.

It cannot be overemphasized that this sharing and co-responsibility for the realization of the common vocation renders fraternal communion more vital, the mission more efficacious, and the decisions to be taken better thought out. But it does not simplify the exercise of authority, and demands of all a permanent commitment to the growth of human and christian maturity, expressed in the ability for communication and dialogue, in an open and discerning mentality, in a spirit of initiative (R 99), and even if necessary in not insisting on one's own point of view (C 66).

*God our Father,  
grant to all salesians  
zeal, generosity and the ability to work together,  
so as to take part with a sense of shared responsibility,  
in all the phases of study and realization  
of the apostolic work you entrust to the community,  
working actively and with humility for this purpose  
in charity and peace.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 124 SUBSIDIARITY AND DECENTRALIZATION

Authority of any kind and at every level leaves to the initiative of lower levels and of individuals whatever can be decided and done by them, according to their respective competence. In this way the worth of individuals and communities is recognized, and more real involvement is encouraged.

The principle of subsidiarity implies decentralization which, while safeguarding unity, recognizes a proper autonomy and consequently a right distribution of powers between the different organs of government.

Two other important principles for the government of the Congregation are dealt with in this article: they are subsidiarity and decentralization, two concepts which are mutually related and which sustain each other.

The principle of "*subsidiarity*", in its essential formulation, may be expressed as follows: a proper ordering of authority in such a way that decisions be normally made and carried out at the same level as the responsibility for them; for this reason "authority of any kind and at every level leaves to the initiative of lower levels and of individuals whatever can be decided and done by them, according to their respective competence". Subsidiarity is based on true brotherhood and sharing: it turns to account the talents and abilities of each one, putting them at the service of the communal project, and brings it about that every member feels personally committed to the fulfilment of the mission. Far from lessening the value of higher authority, which retains the responsibility (which indeed it cannot renounce) of safeguarding unity, subsidiarity leads to real collaboration in activity, and even in decision making itself, by respecting the attributes and competence of each level of authority.

Understood in this sense, subsidiarity requires an effective "*decentralization*". This provides a due and efficacious distribution of powers, with appropriate details concerning the spheres of competence of the various organs, and of the objectives and means proper to them, so as to exploit their possibilities in the best way.

These principles, recommended by Vatican II,<sup>1</sup> have been taken up by the new Code of Canon Law, which states in general: "On the basis of the same principle (of subsidiarity), the new Code entrusts either to particular laws or to executive power whatever is not necessary for the unity of the discipline of the universal Church, so that appropriate provision is made for a healthy 'decentralization' while avoiding the danger of division".<sup>2</sup>

As far as our Society is concerned, solicitude for unity, already affirmed in articles 122 and 123 and recalled also in the present article, does not detract from the value of situational pluralism, and so does not lead to the centralization of power.

Our Society is the bearer of a charism for the universal Church, spread all over the world, and which exists and works in diverse geographical, cultural, social, political and religious situations. Hence "unity of ministry requires as its indispensable, complementary and integrative element, decentralization, which is the concrete practical expression of subsidiarity".<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand provincial and local authorities must have appropriate authority and the necessary power for efficacious government in line with the demands of time and place. This implies decentralization, i.e. an adequate distribution of power between the various organs of government. Thus we have a more rapid and less complicated solution of problems, increased efficiency and a more comprehensive valuation of personnel and communities.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand higher authorities should not impede the exercise of this power, but should rather respect and encourage it. By leaving to lower levels what they can decide and realize on their own, the higher organs still have the possibility of intervening to see that any defects are made good or to correct deviations, as also to exercise those powers which are given to them by the Constitutions and can-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ES II 18

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, Preface; cf. also *Principia pro recognitione CIC* (1967), 5

<sup>3</sup> SGC, 720

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

not be left aside, for guaranteeing directly or indirectly the essential unity.

This is why in revising the Constitutions and Regulations the Congregation has provided in the various governmental structures an appropriate autonomy and adequate distribution of powers which correspond better to our particular charism. A glance at the various powers conferred by our own law on provincials and their councils, on provincial chapters, and also on rectors and their councils, will suffice to indicate the significance of the principles set out in this art. 124.

Here again, however, it may be well to point out that the acceptance of principles and their codification in the Rule is not sufficient; they have to be put into practice by authorities at the different levels.

And so we now have a panorama of the principles and criteria which underlie our government. Their very nature makes it clear to us that we are all involved: superiors and members, sharing responsibility in each community, in each province, in the entire Congregation.

These principles have now rightly "found their place in the renewed Constitutions. It is important that they be fully understood and put into practice for the realization of the purpose of religious government: the building of a community united in Christ, in which God is sought and loved above all else and the mission of Christ is generously fulfilled".<sup>5</sup>

In this way chapter X, in introducing the fourth part, illustrates the essential character of the structures very well: they are at the service of the individual members and the communities to help them to be faithful to their vocation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31.5.1983, n. 52

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SGC, 706

*Lord our God,  
may the unconditional seeking of your glory  
guide in their service  
those to whom you have given authority among us,  
so that the development  
of each individual may be fostered  
and the participation of all may be directed,  
in line with their ability and competence,  
to respond to the designs you make known  
for our community and our young people.*

## CHAPTER XI

### SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY

*"Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pt 5,2-3).*

The figure of the Lord, the one and only good Shepherd (Ezek 34,11,23), which opened chap. I of the Constitutions, now returns in connection with those who have a specific task of government at various levels of the Congregation, beginning with the Rector Major and his Council. All the rich content and power of the biblical "shepherd-sheep" motif are here taken up again and kept in mind.

To this the passage quoted from the first Letter of Peter makes an excellent contribution. The context is well known. The community has now been set up and so have its structures of government. Problems are not lacking, and not only those of suffering caused by persecutions. In the community itself the need is felt for better agreement between old and young, between those carrying responsibility and the others. Peter responds to the situation with a wonderful teaching about baptism aimed at generating truth and hope (1,6-9; 5,9-10).

Once again the mystery of Christ is presented as the first active element in the life of Christians.

The Apostle addresses the heads of the community (the elders or presbyters), and simply recommends to them a service as "shepherds", as though this classic biblical figure were already a model of conduct for those in authority (cf. Acts 20,18-35). His address begins once again with some convincing autobiographical details (5,1): Peter presents himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ and for Christ (without whom Christian service has no meaning: cf. Mk 10,40-45); the two following verses (quoted as the heading to this chapter) make clear the qualities of pastoral service. The basic conviction is that the flock belongs to God, and is entrusted to the care of the elders. This therefore calls for a willing service without any coercion, entirely free and without any mercenary element or bossy attitude, in a word as credible "models" (5,2-3). In the background there is clearly the figure of Christ the Good Shepherd (Jn 10,11), of whom the pastors of the community are a sacrament, i.e. a visible sign and instrument, from whom alone can be expected the "unfading crown of glory" (5,4).

The biblical text is an excellent programme for shaping and guiding government at world level, exposed as it is to all sorts of technical difficulties, and which nevertheless must be centred on the world of persons, not immune from problems and difficulties and hence in need of true and strong goals. After the unforgettable example of Don Bosco!

After the general principles and criteria from which the service of authority must draw its inspiration, the Constitutions go on to outline and give some details of this service at various levels, beginning with the world community.

The reason for adopting the order of succession of the three levels was given in the introduction to the fourth part. The choice makes it easier to see the Congregation as a *living unity*, and the structures of government at world level as '*structures of unity*'.

This perspective gives to the salesian a deeper sense of belonging to the world community, in which he is incorporated by religious profession which makes him, in the words of art. 59, "a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its (the congregation's) life in the universal Church".

In this way authority at world level is called to render first and foremost a service of ministerial unity, which must provide an organic foundation for all members in the same vocation.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter, dealing with the service of authority at world level, is arranged under the following subheadings:

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The Supreme Pontiff       | <i>art. 125</i>                |
| 2. The Rector Major          | <i>art. 126-129</i>            |
| 3. The General Council       | <i>art. 130-143; (154-155)</i> |
| 4. Three special assignments | <i>art. 144-145</i>            |

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 713, 720



- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 5. The General Chapter | <i>art. 146-152</i> |
| 6. Regional structures | <i>art. 154-155</i> |

The commentary on the chapter will follow this division, with art. 154-155 linked with those on the General Council.

## 1. THE SUPREME PONTIFF (ART. 125)

Reference has already been made to the place of the Pope in the life of the salesian in the chapter on "salesian spirit": among the latter's characteristics there is a living ecclesial awareness, expressed in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching (cf. C 13).

In the present article this loyalty is expressed in the fact that the Salesian Society has as its highest superior the Supreme Pontiff. The latter, in fact, because of his office as Vicar of Christ and Shepherd of the universal Church, has ordinary power which is full, supreme and immediate over the whole Church.<sup>2</sup> For this reason Don Bosco himself, in the first article of chap. VI of the Italian edition of the Constitutions of 1875 (from which our own article takes its rise), had written: "The members shall recognize in the Supreme Pontiff their arbiter and absolute superior, to whom they shall be in everything, in every place and at all times, humbly and respectfully submissive".<sup>3</sup> It is a submission "even in virtue of the vow of obedience",<sup>4</sup> a *filial submission*, full of love, of which Don Bosco has himself given us the example. Quoting many adjectives which showed his love for the Pope ("supernatural, zealous and conquering, filial and sincere, obedient and submissive, self-sacrificing and heroic"), the Rector Major writes: "These are not just pleonastic expressions; they correspond to different aspects of a solid witness lived out through many long years".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 332

<sup>3</sup> *Costituzioni 1875*, VI, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 113)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 590

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, AGC 315, p. 8

The Constitutions point out some attitudes of the salesian in respect of the Supreme Pontiff which are a consequence of the filial submission referred to above. They are:

- *availability for the good of the universal Church*, of which unity with Peter's successor is the visible sign; such availability follows directly from the "sense of Church" referred to in art. 13;
- *docility to the Pope's teaching*: it is this that shapes and animates all our educative and evangelizing activity;<sup>6</sup>
- *the task of helping the faithful*, and especially the young, *to accept papal teaching*: our "devotion" becomes an "obligation" to be fulfilled, and leads us to bring all together in unity around him whom Jesus willed to be the centre of unity.

In this way is outlined an emblematic experience of faith in Peter's ministry, which was lived so strongly by Don Bosco and is deeply rooted in our tradition as one of the three columns of salesian spirituality (the central position of the Eucharist, Marian devotion, and conscious and practical supernatural adherence to the Pope).

When the Pope expressed a request, or even a desire or explicit thought, Don Bosco's docility was immediate and of the highest degree, sometimes even heroic. Love for the Pope was for him an "element of life", and at the same time an inducement to make the Papacy loved by others. By his writings, the witness of his life, his activity as an educator, through widely varying interventions which went even beyond the immediate interests of the Congregation, he was a true servant of the Church in the person of Peter's successor. All this Don Bosco passed on to his Society, which from its first beginnings he had put at the Pontiff's service: "The special purpose of the Congregation and the Salesians is to sustain the authority of the Holy See, wherever they may be and wherever they work".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. AGC 315, p. 28-31

<sup>7</sup> MB XVIII, 477

*Lord Jesus, you chose the Apostle Peter  
to be in your Church,  
the foundation, teacher of faith, and universal shepherd.  
Grant to all of us, after the example of Don Bosco,  
a filial love and convinced submission  
to Peter's Successor.  
Make us able to cultivate in youth  
a living sense of membership of the Church,  
which will incite them to collaborate generously  
in the work of evangelization and advancement  
of those most in need.*

## **2. THE RECTOR MAJOR (ART. 126-129)**

Right from the first approved text of the Constitutions (1875) the Superior General of the Salesian Society has been called the Rector Major.

In the present text his figure is presented in four articles, which specify respectively:

- his identity and function (*art. 126*)
- his power and government (*art. 127*)
- the manner of his election (*art. 128*)
- the conditions for his election (*art. 129*)

### **2.1 The identity and function of the Rector Major (art. 126)**

The identity of the Rector Major, the Superior of our Society, is presented through three characteristics: the connection with Don Bosco as his successor, his pastoral role as father, and the bond of communion as the centre of unity of the Salesian Family.

— *Successor of Don Bosco.*

In Don Bosco's "spiritual testament" we read: "Before leaving this world for eternity I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart. First of all I thank you with the most ardent affection of my soul for the obedience you have given me... Your Rector is dead, but there will be another elected, who will have care of you and of your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him as you have done for me".<sup>8</sup>

These words provide the foundation and explanation of the tradition of seeing in the Rector Major, and calling him, the "Successor of Don Bosco": it is a concrete way of expressing the uninterrupted linkage with Don Bosco and rendering him present and active.

— *Father.*

If the Rector Major is called to be the "living Don Bosco" in the Congregation and the Salesian Family, his true identity cannot be visualized other than as the FATHER. "Our Founder", wrote Don Rinaldi, "was never anything else but a Father. His whole life was a complete reflection of the heavenly fatherliness of God... which he practised here below in the highest and even a unique degree. And since his life was always fatherly, so his work and his sons cannot exist without the same trait".<sup>9</sup> In the Rector Major fatherliness is an essential characteristic: it demands kindness, a sense of responsibility, the giving of guidance in fidelity, and commitment for the flourishing of the salesian vocation.

— *Centre of unity.*

The unity indicated in art. 122 as one of the general principles for the life of our Society needs a centre on which to converge and from which to radiate. This necessity was noted, emphasized and repeatedly and vigorously recalled by Don Bosco himself, who saw in it a basic element of life indispensable for his foundation.

<sup>8</sup> From *Spiritual testament of Don Bosco*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 267-268

<sup>9</sup> ASC 56. 26 April 1931. p. 940

Hardly had the Congregation been approved (1869) when Don Bosco, in a conference already quoted elsewhere in which he looked to the future, said: "If a Society such as ours is to prosper, it must of necessity be properly organized... Like the human body, a religious Congregation needs a head and limbs, the latter subordinate to one another and all subordinate to the head... But only one head is needed because our Society, like a body, would look monstrous with two or more heads".<sup>10</sup>

In a conference to the rectors on 3 February 1876, he explained: "Among us let the superior be our all. Let everyone help the Rector Major, upholding and assisting him in every way; let everyone rally about him as the sole focal point". And after recognizing the necessary autonomy in the fulfilment of each one's duty, he added: "but no one should be guided by his own whims but by the ideal of unity".<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted that each of these three aspects is presented in the renewed Constitutions with reference not only to the Congregation but to the whole "*Salesian Family*"; this is a perspective rooted in the history of our origins and connected with the resources and relaunching of the Salesian Family brought about by the SGC and expressed in art. 5 of the Constitutions.

The three characteristics taken together give to the figure of the Rector Major a characteristic originality which goes back to the thought, desire and example of the Founder.

After presenting the identity of the Rector Major, art. 126 indicates in its second paragraph the principal task attaching to his role: "*To promote ... the constant fidelity of the members to the salesian charism, so as to fulfil the mission confided by God to our Society*". It is instructive to see this task of animation and promotion in the light of the first article of the Constitutions, where fidelity to the Founder is based on fidelity to the Spirit, and of the second article which in the commitment to put into effect the Founder's apostolic project identifies the very nature of the Society.

<sup>10</sup> BM IX, 268

<sup>11</sup> BM XII, 62-63

## 2.2 The Rector Major's power of government (art. 127)

To carry out his mandate the Rector Major, as the supreme Moderator of the Society, receives from God through the ministry of the Church the necessary power of government.

Art. 127 first presents this power in terms of can. 622 of the Code of Canon Law: it is a question of a power which is *personal* (as explained in the commentary on art. 120); *ordinary* (i.e. connected by right with the office); *extensive* to all the circumscriptions, houses and members of the Congregation in both spiritual and temporal matters; *to be exercised* in accordance with the common and our particular law.

Then are indicated three important ways in which the ordinary power of the Rector Major is exercised: visits to the provinces and houses further specified in art. 104 of the Regulations; the convoking and presidency of the General Council; and the official representation of the Congregation before the Church and civil society.

## 2.3 Manner of electing the Rector Major (art. 128)

Can. 625 §1 prescribes: "The supreme Moderator of the institute is to be designated by canonical election, in accordance with the Constitutions". To this prescription of the universal law corresponds art. 128 of our Rule which entrusts to the General Chapter the task of electing the Rector Major. This is an arrangement which has been found in the Constitutions from the time of Don Bosco to the present day, and is founded especially on two motivations: the importance of the role of the Rector Major for the whole Congregation, and the supreme authority in the Society which belongs to the General Chapter.

But we find in the present text of the Constitutions a change with respect to the previous norm concerning the duration of the Rector Major's mandate. The SGC reduced this from twelve to six years, but confirmed the possibility of re-election.

This modification was introduced to give to each ordinary General Chapter, which meets every six years, the possibility of reflecting on

the needs of the Congregation at a particular moment in history, and also on the best way of meeting the situation by the election of the Rector Major, which in this way coincides with the election of the general council.

As well as specifying the duration, the article also prescribes that the Rector Major may not resign his office without the consent of the Apostolic See.

#### **2.4 Conditions for the election of the Rector Major (art. 129)**

For the first condition indicated — that he must be a priest — the reflections already made in connection with art. 121 apply.

The second condition responds to the prescription of can. 623: "To be validly appointed or elected to the office of superior, members must have been perpetually or definitively professed for an appropriate period of time, to be determined by their own law or, for major superiors, by the Constitutions". Art. 129 of our Rule sets this period, in the case of the Rector Major, at ten years. The condition concerning the minimum age (40 years), which was still present in the Constitutions after the revision of the SGC, has been suppressed. What is important is the "salesian age", and the GC22 considered that ten years of perpetual profession, which would ordinarily have been preceded by six years of temporary profession, was a proper and valid criterion.

The third condition is a collection of talents and qualities which are required by the identity and constitutional role of the Rector Major. As well as exemplariness of life and ability and prudence in governing — talents which were already indicated in the Constitutions preceding the SGC — there are now emphasized love of the Church and the Congregation, and pastoral zeal. They are two additions which fully correspond to Don Bosco's thought and to the ecclesial and pastoral slant of the salesian vocation, which is evident all through the constitutional text.

*God our Father,  
we ask you to bless, protect and guide  
with the strength of the Holy Spirit  
him whom in your Providence  
you have chosen as the Successor of Don Bosco,  
the Superior of our Society,  
the father and centre of unity of the Salesian Family.*

*That in his life and activity  
the Rector Major may be enabled to continue in our midst  
the fatherly presence of Don Bosco,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the Rector Major,  
with the collaboration of the general council  
may have the light of wisdom and richness of faith  
to promote full communion between all Salesians  
and to guide the Society with courage and security  
along the path traced out by Don Bosco,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the Rector Major may be efficacious in his work,  
and see our Society grow in quality and quantity,  
in faithful adherence to the Founder's charism  
and with great openness to the needs of the situations  
in which we must carry out our service,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

### 3. THE GENERAL COUNCIL (ART. 130-144)

In the commentary on art. 120, can. 627 §1 was recalled and briefly illustrated; it says: "Superiors are to have their own council, in accordance with the Constitutions, and they must make use of it in the exercise of their office".



And so the articles on the Rector Major are followed logically by the constitutional norms concerning his council.

From a historical point of view it may be recalled that from 1874 to 1965 the term used was "Superior Chapter".

In 1965 the GC19, to unify the terminology for all the organs of the Congregation, decided that the "Superior Chapter" should change its name to "Superior Council", and that the "House Chapter" should be called the "House Council".<sup>12</sup>

Finally the GC22, in the definitive drafting of the Constitutions, for greater juridical precision adopted the term "General Council".

The articles concerning the general council follow this order:

- nature and competence (*art. 130-132*)
- composition (*art. 133-140*)
- particular prescriptions (*art. 141-144*)

### 3.1 Nature and competence of the general council (art. 130-132)

The general council is a *college or group of persons*<sup>13</sup> which, throughout the period of the mandate of its members, constitutes a permanent organ, called to cooperate with the Rector Major in the animation and the government of the Congregation.

For the purpose of this cooperation three primary and indispensable tasks are assigned to the general council for the animation of the Congregation.

— The first is to identify and study the problems which concern *the common welfare of the Society*. Several times and in different contexts the Constitutions come back on the need for the salesian to have a practical outlook, to be attentive to the signs of the times, to the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church, in the conviction

<sup>12</sup> GC 19, p. 22

<sup>13</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 127

that the Lord manifests himself also through the urgent needs of the moment.<sup>14</sup> The identification of the problems that emerge with the passing of time, so as to study them with a view to finding solutions in harmony with our charism at the level of a Congregation of worldwide dimensions, is no easy task; it calls for knowledge, sensitivity and experience which mutually complement and enrich each other in a spirit of shared responsibility and a universal perspective.

— A second task is to *promote fraternal union* among the different provinces. After what has been said of the Rector Major as the centre of unity of the Congregation, the importance is clear of this aspect of cooperation which the general council is called upon to give him, in ways and with initiatives suggested by circumstances, so as to make more marked the union between the various provinces and hence the sense of the world community.

— The third task is organizational in nature: the development of an ever more efficient organization of the service which the Centre is called upon to render to the Congregation. Extending to all the work of the council what is said in art. 107 of the Regulations, organization of work implies structures for study, communication, programming, coordination, technical offices and consultant groups.

The article we are at present examining provides a pastoral criterion for the evaluation of organizational structures. The need for efficiency is recognized, but this is clearly for the purpose of the salesian mission in the world.

After setting out the principal duties of the general council, art. 131 goes on to indicate some of the *ways in which the councillors collaborate with the Rector Major*.

The first one is of particular importance: *by expressing their opinion and by voting*. From what has been said already about the nature of councils (cf. C 120, 123) and the details given in the present article, it follows that:

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for example C 7, 19, 41, 48

1. the Rector Major convokes and presides over the council, but strictly speaking he is not part of it: he does not vote, but receives the consent or opinion of his council;<sup>15</sup>
2. the council is not an organ of collegial government, because in itself it has no powers for making decisions; it can or must, in the cases foreseen by the general or our particular law, express its opinion or consent, but the decision is a juridical act of government performed by the Rector Major in virtue of his personal authority; when the consent of the council is required, the Superior would act invalidly if he did not seek the consent of the council or acted against its vote.

The second manner of collaboration specifies that the councillors fulfil not only the responsibilities entrusted to them by the General Chapter, but also those assigned them by the Rector Major. For this reason they have their domicile in the same house in which the Rector Major resides: this is necessary not only for the efficiency and coordination of their work, but also for communion of the councillors with the Rector Major and with each other.

Can. 627 §2 of the Code of Canon Law says: "Apart from the cases prescribed in the universal law, an institute's own law is to determine the cases in which the validity of an act depends upon consent or advice being sought in accordance with can. 127".

In the salesian Constitutions the indication of these cases is given in the places considered most convenient for the matters to which they refer. Nevertheless art. 132 provides, for ease of consultation, a complete list of the cases spread throughout the Constitutions in which the consent of the general council is required; they are divided into three groups:

the first paragraph lists the cases in which is required the consent of the council convoked according to law;

<sup>15</sup> In connection with the norm of can. 127 §1, the Commission for the interpretation of the Code replied, on 14 May 1985, that when the law requires that a superior have the consent of his council for an act, the superior himself may not add his vote to that of the councillors, not even to give a casting vote when the votes are equal; cf. AAS 77 (1985), p. 771

- the second paragraph lists the cases in which the consent is required of the councillors present at headquarters, even though they be fewer in number: these are cases of ordinary administration of frequent occurrence which cannot be delayed without serious inconvenience until the council's next plenary session (held normally twice a year) when all the councillors are present;
- the third paragraph contemplates the single case in which, in accordance with the universal law, the council and the Rector Major proceed in collegial fashion because they are acting as a "collegial tribunal", i.e. when there is question of the dismissal of a member from the Congregation.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that in this case the Rector Major votes too.

Other cases in which the Rector Major must have the consent of his council are indicated in art. 106 of the General Regulations.

Art. 132 ends with an indication of a general character: the Rector Major will consult his council in other important matters whenever he considers it opportune to do so. It was not thought necessary to specify the individual cases in which the "opinion" of the council should be obtained. Given the full and precise indication of the cases in which consent is necessary, the GC22 considered that any further specification would have contributed nothing to brisk and expeditious central government.

### **3.2 Composition of the general council (art. 133-140)**

In the course of time the composition of the council has undergone modifications, as regards both the number of councillors and the duties assigned to each of them. The worldwide expansion of the Society, attention to problems arising at different moments in history, deeper understanding of some aspects of the salesian mission, and criteria stemming from experience were the basis for the deliberations of various

<sup>16</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 699 §1

General Chapters in this connection. There is no point in going into details about all the changes that have taken place; the more significant of them will be pointed out in due course.

Art. 133 presents the composition of the council as it stands after the last revision of the Constitutions. Its members are: the vicar general, the councillors in charge of special departments (detailed in the second paragraph), and the regional councillors.

As regards composition there are two innovations of special importance.

In the first place, from the time of the GC19 the criterion applied for rethinking and defining the special sectors has no longer been that of "works" (schools, technical and agricultural institutes, oratories, aspirantates, printing works etc.) or of persons (salesians in formation, past pupils, cooperators etc.), but that of the *aspects and dimensions of the salesian life and mission* which apply to the whole Congregation.

The definition and description of these sectors was the object of progressively deeper analysis by the GC20, GC21 and GC22, with the purpose of clarifying the formal aspect which characterizes the "speciality" of each sector, and of defining the area of competence and interventions of each of them.

In this way was reached the present constitutional formulation of the different sectors and the councillors in charge of them.

The second important innovation was the insertion in the general council, alongside the councillors in charge of the special departments and with equal rights, of the figure of the *regional councillor*. This particular innovation dates from the GC19, which began a deep revision of the structures of central government and decided to experiment with the two kinds of councillor, without immediately inserting them among the constitutional norms, so that the experiment could be reviewed by the following General Chapter.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of the experience gained, the SGC recognized the substantial validity of the new figure and introduced it into the con-

<sup>17</sup> Cf. GC19, p. 21-22

stitutional text, where we now find it in the definitive version after the approval by the GC22.

The motivations underlying this important innovation were summarized by the Rector Major as follows: "The requirements of unity and decentralization, the promoting of dialogue and of shared responsibility, fidelity to the identity of the salesian vocation and its embedding in different situations, environments and cultures, the accelerated pace of history and the new problems continually emerging in a time of epoch-making changes which present a constant challenge to society, to the Church and to religious institutes: this is the context in which structures of government have to operate at the present day. The regional councillor in such a context has a role to play as a "vertical link" and "horizontal link" (to use the expressions of the SGC), which in the past eighteen years has given a very important service to the Congregation".<sup>18</sup>

### **The Vicar of the Rector Major, or Vicar General (art. 134)**

The present title was changed from the former one of "Prefect General" in the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions for greater uniformity at the three levels: local, provincial, world.

The specific identity of the Vicar General is found in the statement that he is "*the first collaborator of the Rector Major in the government of the Society*". For this reason he has power which is ordinary (i.e. not delegated to him by the Rector Major but connected with the office itself) and vicarious (i.e. exercised in the name of the Rector Major). According to the Code of Canon Law he is a religious Ordinary and a major superior<sup>19</sup>, with the powers and faculties attributed by the Code to these ecclesiastical offices.

<sup>18</sup> GC22 RRM, 136

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 134 §1; can. 620

The Vicar General "takes the Rector Major's place whenever he is absent or impeded"; but his authority is not limited to such circumstances because he always has ordinary vicarious power and, when necessary, stands in for the Rector Major in the government of the whole Congregation.

The Constitutions assign to him in particular the "*care of religious life and discipline*". By this it is not intended to assign to the Vicar General a special sector in the sense used of councillors for the various departments. What it does is indicate a particularly important aspect of the duties of the Vicar: as the first collaborator of the Rector Major and because of the power of government annexed to his office, he is in the best position to care for and promote overall religious discipline and to intervene, in appropriate ways and with due respect for the competence of provincials, in cases of special importance.

### **The councillor for formation (art. 135)**

The formation sector was formerly entrusted to three members of the council: to the spiritual director or catechist general for the aspects of salesian religious formation, especially of the novices; to the prefect general of studies for the sector of literary, scientific, philosophical and theological instruction for the whole Society; and to the prefect general of arts and trades for the care of the qualification of lay confreres.

The GC19 instituted the new figure of "*councillor for formation*", but left in existence also that of spiritual director general, with responsibility for the formation of the novices.

The SGC and GC21 gave particular attention to the problem of salesian formation, and gave further specification to the figure of the councillor for formation. The present art. 135 of the Constitutions embodies the reflections and conclusions of these last General Chapters.

In the first place the unitary dimension of salesian formation is emphasized. Human maturing, intellectual and professional preparation, deepening of the religious life and gradual introduction to the apostolate are all factors which formation harmonizes in the vital

unity of the salesian spirit. This is the unifying element which allows of the formation of authentic educators and salesian pastors.<sup>20</sup>

Another important point is the unity of formation throughout all the phases of the formative process. This requires that the different aspects of salesian formation be present in every phase.

A third element of importance is the fact that the formation process continues throughout life and therefore commits the salesian, and with him the provincial and local communities, to a continuous ongoing formation process, so as to respond to the ever new needs of the condition of youth and the working classes.

These three elements provide the key for the understanding of the task assigned by the Constitutions to the councillor for formation: to further the *integral* (i.e. in all its dimensions) and *ongoing* (i.e. throughout life) formation of the members. It is a task of wide extension and decisive importance, and makes of formation "an indispensable priority for the future".<sup>21</sup>

The concept of formation as a unitary and ongoing process does not exclude, but rather increases, the need for particular attention to initial formation in its various phases. The article we are examining specifies in the second paragraph the objectives of this particular care: to see to it that the various phases — as regards content, studies, methods and structures — guarantee the conditions for growth in the salesian vocation. For this reason particular importance attaches to the "*Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum*" referred to in art. 87 of the Regulations.

All this involves the councillor for formation and his department in tasks of information, study, guidance, contacts and meetings for coordination as regards formation communities, centres for ongoing formation, and formation commissions and groups for consultation at provincial and interprovincial level.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. GC21, 244

<sup>21</sup> Cf. closing address to chapter: GC22, 87



## The councillor for the youth apostolate (art. 136)

Before the GC19 there were three councillors concerned in this area, with distinctions based essentially on the criterion of "works" and "kinds of presence": to one was entrusted the schools of humanities (including the studies of confreres in formation); to a second were assigned the professional and agricultural schools (together with the care of the lay salesians); while a third was responsible for oratories and parishes.

The GC19, as already noted, distributed duties within the council using the criterion of "dimensions" or "areas" of the salesian mission, and assigned to a single councillor the whole sector of parish and youth pastoral work.

The SGC confirmed the figure of the councillor for the youth apostolate, but moved the parishes back into the sector of a "councillor for the adult apostolate".

Further experience and reflection led the GC21 to restore once again to the councillor for the youth apostolate the care of salesian work in parishes. And so it has remained in the definitive text of the Constitutions.

In presenting the content of art. 136 it is best to begin from a fundamental consideration. The special sector entrusted to the councillor for the youth apostolate constitutes the aspect which enters most directly into the identity of the salesian vocation: "The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer" (C 26). To continue the mission of the Founder "we educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man" (C 31).

This fundamental idea, which is present throughout the constitutional text is a guide to the understanding of the figure of the councillor for the youth apostolate.

*The field of his work is "salesian educative and apostolic activity in its different expressions".* Among this variety of expressions are included both the essential content and objectives of the Congregation's educative and pastoral service (cf. C 31-39), and also the activities and

works through which we carry out our mission, such as the oratory and youth centre, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties (C 42).

Among these works and activities the GC21 included also salesian parishes; it may be useful to know why the General Chapter decided to entrust their care to the councillor for the youth apostolate:

- the necessity and importance of community pastoral work is emphasized: the whole ecclesial community in fact, comprising young and old, is both the object and subject, the beneficiaries and the agents of pastoral work;
- the specific nature of our work for youth, which has to be realized in the parishes, is better guaranteed when one and the same councillor is responsible for both;
- the strict bond which should unite all our different forms of pastoral work in the ecclesial community is made more evident: oratories, youth centres, schools, parishes.<sup>22</sup>

This arrangement was endorsed by the GC22, which also confirmed the designation "councillor for the youth apostolate", to express the priority of the youth aspect of salesian activity in all our educative and pastoral work.

Within the area thus described, the article assigns to the councillor concerned the task first and foremost of *animating and giving direction* in a double perspective: ensuring that the priority of our commitment to youth, and the influence of the preventive system are both achieved in the various expressions of salesian pastoral activity.

A further important duty is also indicated: that of *assisting the provinces* in the development of their pastoral plans and undertakings, again with a double purpose: so that they may be faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, and that their activities may respond adequately to the needs of the times and of different places.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. GC21, 400

The three lines of intervention — *animation, orientation, assistance* — find throughout the constitutional text the contents on which to work: education, catechesis, group activity, liturgical initiation, vocational guidance, pastoral criteria and the preparation of workers (C 31-48), are all different aspects of one and the same task. The General Regulations point out some practical applications, among which particular importance attaches to the drawing up the provincial and local educative projects (cf. R 4-10).

It is evident that so vast and complex a work requires from the councillor and the department for the youth apostolate the carrying out of surveys and studies so as to know the youth situation of the different regions and be able to offer an appropriate salesian response; the suggesting of objectives to pursue for the greater pastoral efficiency of the works and the development of the provinces and for the creation of channels for periodic communication and means for coordination and verification; and the offering of aids and the possibility of meetings with the pastoral organisms of the provinces.

For all these purposes liaison with the other departments is indispensable, and especially with the regional councillors to ensure integration and coordination in the work.

### **The councillor for the salesian Family and for social communication (art. 137)**

The role of the councillor described in this article refers to the animation of two pastoral sectors. The commentary will therefore be in two parts, dedicated respectively to the salesian Family and to social communication.

#### *a. Obligations concerning the animation of the salesian Family*

In its reflection on the nature and mission of the salesian Society, the SGC stated: "The salesians cannot fully rethink their vocation in the Church without reference to those who share with them in carry-

ing out their Founder's will".<sup>23</sup> In this way the SGC opened the way for the relaunching of the "salesian Family" and turning it to good account, and to a greater awareness of the role of our Society in it, now formulated in art. 5 of the Constitutions. In the revision carried out by the SGC, this article nevertheless lacked an appropriate counterpart in the structures of government at world level. The person with responsibility for the plan of renewal was the councillor for adult pastoral work who, in addition to having charge of salesian work in parishes, had also the task of promoting the organization and activities of the Cooperators and the Past Pupils, and liaison with other movements of salesian inspiration.<sup>24</sup>

The GC21, after its verification of the preceding six years decided to make the then art. 141 more explicit as regards the task of sensitizing and animating the Congregation for the role entrusted to it in the salesian Family. It therefore modified in this sense the distribution of responsibilities within the general council by setting up a "councillor for the salesian Family" with the primary task of rendering operative art. 5 of the Constitutions.

We now find the same arrangement in the final version of the Constitutions, with the modifications and clarifications we shall see in due course.

For a correct understanding of the figure of this councillor, it will be well to clarify a point about his title. He is not the councillor "of" the salesian Family; the latter does not have, in the present state of things, a "general council" of its own, elected by groups belonging to the Family, and one cannot therefore speak of a councillor of the salesian Family. What happens is that a councillor "for" the salesian Family is elected by the SDB General Chapter as a member of the Congregation's general council with a mandate that is expressly linked with the responsibility that our Congregation has in the salesian Family (C 5).

And so art. 137, which we are at present examining, entrusts to the councillor as his primary task that of *animating the Congregation*

<sup>23</sup> SGC, 151

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, art. 141

*in the sector of the salesian Family.* This implies that he sees to it that the salesians:

- become ever more lively aware of this charismatic reality working in the Church as a result of Don Bosco's intuition;<sup>25</sup>
- deepen their knowledge of its historical, pastoral and dynamic dimensions;<sup>26</sup>
- respond efficaciously and in a practical manner to the responsibilities which by the desire of the Founder they have as regards the salesian Family.

But linked with this there is also another task entrusted to the councillor: that of *promoting communion* between the different groups, while respecting the specific nature and autonomy of each.

Communion is demanded by the charism, which characterizes the reality of the salesian Family (C 5).

Hence arises the obligation of the councillor for strengthening in all the groups the significance, sense of belonging and experience of the salesian Family by promoting practical initiatives for coordination, dialogue and collaboration "for a mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness", always showing respect for the specific vocational characteristics, statutes and autonomy of each group.

Finally the councillor is entrusted with the *task of guiding and directing* the provinces, with a specific objective in view: that the Association of the Salesian Cooperators and the Movement of the Past Pupils may develop in their territories.

It should be noted that the task of animation has for its object the Congregation (confreres and communities), the mandate of promoting communion is in respect of all groups of the Family, while guidance and assistance are for the provinces, which are already directly committed by the General Regulations to interest themselves in the Cooperators and Past Pupils (cf. R 36, 38, 39, 147). There is a reason

<sup>25</sup> Cf. GC21, 402

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SGC, 151-177

for the particular reference to the Association of the Cooperators and that of the Past Pupils. While all groups of the Family recognize in the Rector Major their centre of unity, the Cooperators and Past Pupils have him as their direct superior. The development of their Associations is therefore a particular and direct duty of the Congregation and of the provinces in their own territories.

b. *Obligations concerning social communication.*

We pass on now to the other sector assigned to the same councillor: that of social communication.

We know that the salesian Constitutions from their earliest editions have included among the purposes of the Society a wholesome press and the spreading of good books. But in the structures of central government a specific responsibility for the press (with which went the care of the Salesian Bulletin) was entrusted to a member of the then Superior Chapter only in 1948, after the GC16 had decided to increase the number of councillors from three to five.

In the GC19 the above-mentioned tasks were assigned to the "councillor in charge of the apostolate for adults" with a formulation more suited to the times and wider in content: "to take care of salesian propaganda and public relations, and mass media of communication in general".

The GC22 was a time of particularly deep reflection on the commitment of the Congregation in the sector of social communication. Art. 6 of the Constitutions, as we have seen, emphasizes its importance for education to the faith, which is one of the purposes of the Society; art. 43 puts social communication among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission, referring back to the intuition and example of Don Bosco.

This desire to relaunch and make effective our work in the area of social communication led the GC22 to consider this as one of the "special sectors" to be assigned to a member of the general council. It was however averse to increasing the number of councillors in charge of special sectors, and did not consider it an adequate solution to allot it to a central secretariate (in accordance with R 108). It therefore decided to entrust the sector of social communication to the councillor

having already the responsibility for the salesian Family. Of the various combinations possible, the GC22 considered this one the most suitable, even though the realities concerned are distinct from one another.

From this historical preamble and from what is said in the text, it is easy to deduce the principal tasks attributed to the councillor responsible for social communication.

In the first place he is called upon to *animate the Congregation* in this sector which has been assigned to him. This implies the development of a new awareness throughout the Congregation and a renewed cultural and apostolic commitment in the field of social communication, through the assimilation and realization of the constitutional articles already quoted (C 6, 43), with the further indications and integrations in the General Regulations (cf. R 6, 31, 32, 33, 82, 142). In these articles are found the lines of action for the councillor and his department so as to "*promote salesian activity in the social communication sector*". We mention some of them:

- the promotion of the selection and formation of animators and experts in social communication, and to stimulate the preparation and updating of salesians as communicators at the level of the ordinary people in the service of the mission;
- the preparation of appropriate aids for the renewal of salesian activity in the use of the mass media as cultural, educational and apostolic instruments;
- the offering of assistance required for the organization of provincial offices for social communication;
- the fostering of surveys and analysis regarding salesian presence in the mass media;
- the care of the central and provincial press-offices.

All these are fields of activity which require a constant understanding with other departments, the regional councillors and the provincials.

Together with this primary commitment of animation and promotion, art. 137 assigns to the councillor the specific task of coordinating at world level the centres and structures operated by the

Congregation in the field of social communication. The management of these structures is entrusted to the direct responsibility and competence of the provinces. But this still leaves appropriate, not to say necessary, a collaboration between the different centres for a reciprocal enrichment in ideas, techniques and initiatives, and hence for a more efficient salesian presence in the sector.

### **The councillor for the missions (art. 138)**

For a long time, and one might say even from the beginnings, the care of the missions at the level of the central government of the Congregation was entrusted to the Prefect (Vicar) General. There was no article of the Constitutions which prescribed this arrangement; the task was given to the Prefect General on the basis of art. 69 of the Constitutions of 1954 (which left the offices of each member of the Superior Chapter to be distributed by the Rector Major according to the need).

In 1947 the GC16 decided to increase the number of members of the Superior Chapter from three to five, and in the following year the Rector Major named two new councillors and assigned to one of them the specific care of the missions.

The GC19, nevertheless, in restructuring the Superior Council gave back the care of the missions to the Prefect General, with the introduction of two precise conditions: for the solving of local missionary problems the Prefect would be assisted by the regional councillor in charge of the region where the missions concerned were situated; and in his work of organization and coordination he would have a central missionary office to work under him.<sup>27</sup>

The SGC reflected on the problem once again, and in the renewed Constitutions included among the councillors in charge of special sectors the councillor for the missions, whom we now find in the

<sup>27</sup> Cf. GC19, p. 23



definitive version of the Constitutions in the article we are at present examining.

These historical vicissitudes call for comment: the continued rethinking and the different solutions of successive General Chapters were all concerned with finding the most suitable structure, by means of which the Rector Major and his council could best attend to and promote salesian missionary activity. But every General Chapter which studied the theme of the missions was always unanimous in recognizing that the Congregation must live and constantly renew the missionary ideal of Don Bosco, who "wanted the work of the missions to be the constant concern of the Congregation in such a way as to form part of its nature and scope".<sup>28</sup> This ideal we find clearly expressed in the present constitutional text among the objectives of the Congregation (C 6) and in the articles which speak of those to whom our work is directed (C 30).

The domain of this "special sector" is the missionary action through which the Church carries out a work of patient evangelization and founding of the Church in a particular group of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

In this area art. 138 assigns to the councillor for the missions four principal tasks.

The first is to *foster the missionary spirit and commitment throughout the whole Society*. Don Bosco, as we have seen, wanted his Congregation to be strongly missionary and considered missionary activity to be one of its essential characteristics (C 30). To preserve, deepen and give growth to the missionary spirit is therefore a dimension of fidelity to the original charisma. Through appropriate channels of missionary information, through the relevant history and the figures of the great missionaries of the Church and the Congregation, through a proper presentation of the missionary vocation, by means of meetings, contact with those responsible for the missions at provincial level, and the involvement of young people and members of the

<sup>28</sup> SGC, 471; cf GC19, p. 178 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. AG 6

salesian Family, the councillor is called to foster the missionary fervour which Don Bosco was able to arouse at the beginning of his work. This missionary spirit, if it is authentic, will lead to an extension of our missionary commitment; animation cannot neglect either aspect.

The second task is to *coordinate the initiatives* through which missionary interest is expressed and developed. It involves initiatives which, with respect to both the destination of new personnel and the financial and economic sector, extend beyond the boundaries of a province and call for a global vision of the salesian missionary presence.

The third is a *task of guidance* so that activity in the missions and the initiatives referred to above may meet in a salesian manner the urgent needs of the people to be evangelized. These two aspects are illustrated in art. 30 of the Constitutions, which sees in missionary activity a work which must mobilize all the educative and pastoral skills proper to our charism, and which require of the salesian the ability to assume the values of the people among whom he is working.

Guidance given by the councillor in connection with the above-mentioned aspects implies the need for a department which has at its disposal organisms for study, consultation and contacts with the other councillors in charge of different sectors, with the regional councillors, provincials, mission offices (cf. R 24) and with ecclesial organisms working in the missionary sector.

Finally a fourth task entrusted to the councillor is that of ensuring the *specific preparation and updating of the missionaries*. Initiatives in this sense may, as opportunity offers, be organized directly by the department in agreement with the provincials, or promoted at regional or provincial level. What is important is the promotion of valid means for a missionary pedagogy which will prepare the missionary to respond to the needs of evangelization at the present day.

### **The economer general (art. 139)**

From the first draft of the Constitutions right down to the present day the council has always included the economer. In the present version he is found among the councillors in charge of special sectors.

The word can be applied to the administration of temporal goods not so much as a practical area of the salesian mission as rather a dimension which is present in every area of our mission. The latter is in fact entrusted to a community of men which has to live, act, get organized, set up and develop apostolic activities, and hence has need of economic means.

Three tasks in particular are assigned to the economist general.

— In the first place he has the *direct responsibility for the administration* of those goods which do not belong to any particular province or house but to the whole Society. On the basis of art. 190 of the Constitutions the economist administers such goods under the direction and control of the Rector Major and his council to whom he frequently renders an account of his administration (cf. R 192).

— Secondly, the economist has the task of *coordinating and controlling* the administration of the provinces. Both these aspects aim at ensuring that economic and administrative management at every level is in harmony with religious poverty and at the service of the salesian mission. These are two aspects which must characterize our administration of temporal goods which, while borrowing structures and methods from the world of civil administration, is carried out according to criteria which can never neglect the norms and moral principles of a religious congregation. And the criteria which distinguish a religious institute from an industrial or commercial society are precisely personal and communal poverty and the administration of goods for the purposes of the Society's mission.<sup>30</sup>

For this reason the economist is called upon to provide appropriate guidelines, to coordinate initiatives which have as their purpose the proper formation of economists, to evaluate projects of building development and other operations of an economic nature, to check on the implementation of art. 188 of the Constitutions, and to examine the annual financial report which the provinces must submit in accordance with art. 192 of the Regulations.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. SGC, 726

— The third task envisaged by the constitutional article for the economer general is *vigilance* to make sure that the norms necessary for sound administration are observed. The criteria referred to above demand at every level an administration which is well ordered, transparently clear, easily checked, and drawn up using modern techniques in proportion to its importance.

The structuring of the economer general's department, with its administrative, technical, estate and property offices, and with other services of various kinds, must be a supportive organization which renders possible and efficient the central service in a sector which is both delicate and indispensable.

### **The regional councillors (art. 140, 154, 155)**

When speaking of the composition of the general council we have already referred to the important innovation made by the GC19 in introducing this figure into the council's membership (cf. C 133).

The role of the regional councillors is specified in art. 140.

They form the so-called "vertical link" in view of a constant and living communion between the centre of the Congregation and the provinces.

The first task of the regional councillors is in fact that of *promoting a more direct liaison between the provinces and the Rector Major and his council.*

Regional councillors are fully fledged members of the general council and habitually take part in the meetings of the council's plenary sessions which deal with more important problems, study matters of general interest to the Congregation, examine and assess reports on extraordinary visitations of the provinces, and take part in the appointment of provincials and the promoting of activities. As councillors they

live in communion of life and shared responsibility of work with the Rector Major and the other members of the council, and acquire a knowledge of the Congregation at world level. They are thus in a condition to perceive and animate the great values of unity, communion and fidelity to the Founder's charism in the provinces entrusted to them.

From another standpoint the regional councillors make a contribution of particular value to the plenary sessions of the council in the identification, study, orientation and decision-making in connection with fundamental aspects of the life of the Congregation. Because of their direct knowledge of the situations of their region and through their periodic personal contacts with the organs of government at provincial and local level and with the individual confreres, they are able to bring to the council a particular and specific sensitivity. One might say that the complementary relationship between unity and decentralization becomes in a certain sense personalized in the figure and role of the regional councillors.

The promotional work we have described does not imply in the regional councillors any power of government (except in the case of extraordinary visitations, for which they receive from the Rector Major delegated authority: cf. R 104): their task is one of *promotion, animation and liaison*, which does not place any limits on the constitutional competence of local and provincial superiors and their councils (R 137).

A second task of the regional councillors is listed in the Constitutions: that of *looking after the interests of the provinces assigned to them*. In addition to what has been said already about their first task, this means that matters concerning the provinces find in the regional councillor an intermediary who can throw light on the study of requests and speed up the giving of replies and decisions. The expression "interests of the provinces" is deliberately generic so as to admit of wide interpretation. Without prejudice to the possibility enjoyed by all superiors and confreres in the provinces of communicating directly with the Rector Major, the vicar general and the councillors in charge of particular sectors, the regional councillors have the precise task of interesting themselves in every aspect of the life and mission of the provinces and of bringing to the general council a sensitivity as regards certain problems.

The third task, which follows from what has been said and has already been sufficiently illustrated, is that of *fostering in the general council a knowledge of local situations*.

It would seem opportune to complement these reflections on the "vertical liaison" (i.e. between the centre and the provinces) by some considerations now on the "horizontal liaison" which the Constitutions assign to the same regional councillors in art. 154-155.

"Horizontal liaison" means *the linkage of the provinces with each other*. It will be clear to everyone just how necessary is such linkage or liaison, both because of the complexity and interdependence of problems and on account of the multiple ecclesial and civil structures which operate in the different sectors. Situations often exceed the possibilities of intervention by a single province and call for a full exploitation of personnel. These are all valid reasons for instituting a form of horizontal linkage, and it is precisely this that is entrusted to the regional councillors.

In this connection the distinction should be kept in mind between "*Groups of provinces*" and "*Provincial conferences*", two kinds of grouping, both of which foster exchange and sharing. In the "groups of provinces" it may be possible to bring about a certain horizontal liaison, but this is often conditioned by factors of a geographical, linguistic, cultural, social, political and ecclesial nature, which impose serious limitations. When on the other hand similarity of problems or parallel situations allow of a closer union between certain provinces, "provincial conferences" are established. One consequence of this distinction is reflected in the very constitution of the "groups" or "conferences". The constitution of the "groups" belongs to the General Chapter. This is readily understandable, because the number of groups affects the number of regional councillors and hence the composition of the general council, which is a very delicate matter and best left to the competence of the General Chapter.

The constitution of provincial conferences on the other hand belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, after consulting the provinces concerned. It is clear that within a group of pro-

vinces there may be one conference, or several, or none at all. The determining factors in this case are flexibility and the functional nature of the structures.

A reflection of this distinction between "groups of provinces" and "provincial conferences" is found in the Regulations: for the "groups" the tasks of the regional councillors, already referred to in art. 140 of the Constitutions are given in greater detail (cf. R 135-137); for the "conferences" on the other hand all that are prescribed are the frequency of the meetings (at least once a year), who presides (the regional councillor or his delegate), the orientative nature of the conclusions (except in special cases endorsed by the Rector Major and his council) the participants and the tasks of the conference (cf. R 139-142).

For completeness the disposition of art. 138 of the Regulations should be noted; this allows for the possibility of detaching certain provinces from one or more groups, without constituting a new group entrusted to a regional councillor. In such a case the General Chapter can unite them in a delegation for which the Rector Major, with the consent of his council and after consulting the provinces concerned, can appoint a regional delegate with the attributes and tasks which he may judge appropriate to assign to him.

This delegate may be invited by the Rector Major to be present at meetings of the general council so as to carry out his duties adequately, but he is not a member of the council and has therefore no voting rights.

### **3.3 Election of members of the general council (art. 141-143)**

After determining the composition of the council and the role of the individual members, the Constitutions dedicate three articles to the manner of their election.

First of all, art. 141 prescribes that the members of the general council *are elected by the General Chapter in separate ballots for each one.*

From the beginnings of the Congregation until the SGC the election of the prefect general, catechist general and economer general was made by a separate vote in each case, whereas the election of the other councillors (first three and later five) was made by a single ballot, with each member of the chapter indicating three (or five) names on the same ballot card; to the councillors thus elected the Rector Major assigned special tasks according to needs.

The SGC, in the light of the new criteria which had guided it in the restructuring of the council (a process already begun by the GC19), considered it necessary to revise also the norms for the election of councillors, arriving in this way at the arrangement given in art. 141.

There are two important innovations to note. The election, as already said, is made by a separate ballot in each case, which means that the General Chapter not only elects the members of the general council but elects each one for a precise task determined by the Constitutions.

The second innovation lies in the arrangement for the election of the regional councillors. They too are elected by the General Chapter by a separate ballot for each one, but the article says that each one is elected preferably from a list presented by members of the respective group of provinces concerned.

This is a solution which takes account of two elements. On the one hand, since the regional councillors are fully fledged members of the general council, who cooperate with the Rector Major in the animation and government of the whole Congregation, the SGC decided that they should be elected by the whole General Chapter.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand the duties entrusted to the regional councillors, as regards "vertical" and "horizontal" liaison, made it reasonable and opportune to adopt some form of special indication on the part of the groups of provinces entrusted to each of them. This indication, nevertheless, is not binding on the General Chapter but is merely a suggested preference explicitly provided for by the Constitutions.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. SGC, 723



*The required conditions* for a member to be eligible for election to the general council, set out in the second paragraph of art. 141, follow the spirit of what was said in the commentary on art. 129 concerning the Rector Major. It will be noted that for the vicar general there has been added the condition that he must be a priest, since he is a major superior (cf. C 4, 123).

*The duration in office* of the members of the general council is indicated for both ordinary and special cases by art. 142, which does not present any departure from the previous legislation.

Art. 143 on the other hand contains an innovation introduced by the GC22, as a result of which, in the case of the death or cessation from office of the Rector Major, the General Chapter will proceed to the election of the Rector Major (which must take place within nine months) and the new council. This implies that at the passing of the Rector Major the mandate of all the councillors ceases.

The new norm is based on two considerations.

In the first place it avoids the necessity of convoking two General Chapters within a possibly short space of time, one for the election of the Rector Major alone and another for the election of the councillors at the end of their term of office.

From another point of view it seemed to respond better to the nature of the mandate of the Rector Major and the tasks of his council that the election of the former should coincide with the election of the latter. The General Chapter is thus able, in electing the councillors, to take into account the person with whom they will have to collaborate in the animation and government of the Congregation.

### **3.4 Three special assignments**

After the articles on the general council, we find two articles which refer to three particular appointments of interest to the whole Congregation.

a. *The secretary general (art. 144).*

The secretary general functions at the service of the Rector Major and his council and, because of his work, in full communion with them.

His role is described in the Constitutions as that of a "notary", as a result of which his signature gives public authentication to all the official acts of the Rector Major and his council. This naturally implies on the part of the secretary general the responsibility for seeing that the acts are properly drawn up in form and substance, in conformity with what is required by common and particular law.<sup>32</sup>

His role requires that he be present, though without the right to vote, at meetings of the council: many of the official acts are, in fact, linked with the activities and voting of the council. To him is entrusted the drawing up of the minutes of council meetings. This is an important and delicate task, not only for ensuring the regularity of the acts, but because the minutes form a useful instrument of verification for the council, a source of documentation for matters in progress and a historical service for the future.

Of the various responsibilities connected with the role of secretary general, the article of the Constitutions refers to two in particular.

In the first place he looks after the offices of the general secretariate (office of statistics and data of personnel, juridical and protocol offices): these provide an indispensable service to the Rector Major, the council, the particular departments and the regional councillors, and through them to the whole Congregation. The organization, functioning, efficiency and continual updating of these offices are the responsibility of the secretary general.

The other responsibility specifically entrusted to him is the care of the central archives, in which are stored all the acts and documents which relate to the central government of the Congregation. They are divided into four sections: the historical archives (with the documentation classified and in order); the storage section (containing documen-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. by analogy, CIC, can. 484

tation from any source and not yet classified); the current archives (with protocolled documents from the different headquarters offices; and the secret archives (containing documents which, of their nature, must remain secret: cf. can. 489).

For completeness it should be pointed out too that art. 110 of the Regulations entrusts to the secretary general the responsibility for the publication of the "Acts of the General Council", the official organ for the promulgation of directives of the Rector Major and his council and for giving information to the members.

After describing the figure and role of the secretary general, the article specifies that he is appointed by the Rector Major with the consent of his council and remains in office 'ad nutum'.

Given the importance of his role he takes part in the General Chapter with the right to vote (cf. C 151).

b. *The procurator general (art. 145).*

Art. 145 confirms what was already laid down in the Constitutions previous to the revision of the SGC concerning the figure of the procurator general. His principal task is that of dealing with the Apostolic See is "ordinarily" entrusted to the procurator general. This belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, and he remains in office 'ad nutum'. Confirmed too is his participation in the General Chapter.

In the new formulation, which takes into account what is provided by can. 212 of the CIC, is added that the task of dealing with the Apostolic See is "ordinarily" entrusted to the procurator general. This means that he presents, explains, and follows up all the matters which, in accordance with law, the Congregation submits to the Apostolic See, and deals with business which arises between the Apostolic See and the Congregation. He is the ordinary channel for communication and relationships, without prejudice to the Rector Major's right to reserve to himself personally or to entrust to others particular matters (cf. R 109).

The new Code of Canon Law differs from the previous edition in making no reference to the procurator general<sup>33</sup>, and implicitly leaves any norms in this connection to the particular law. The Apostolic See does in fact recognize the office at the level of the world community in the *Annuario Pontificio*.

The procurator general fulfils his office under the direction of and in dependence on the Rector Major.

*c. The postulator general (art. 145).*

The second paragraph of art. 145 presents the figure and task of the postulator general. His figure has existed in the Congregation ever since the first steps were taken in the process for the cause of the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco, and he now finds for the first time a place in the Constitutions.

This recognition was considered right and proper because of the importance in the history and life of the Congregation of the causes of beatification and canonization of our confreres and of other members of the salesian Family, and also because this is an official appointment of the Congregation at world level with the confrere concerned juridically accredited to the Apostolic See.

The duties of the postulator general are defined in norms issued by the Apostolic See itself.

Details of appointment and duration in office are identical with those for the procurator general.

*Let us implore the grace of the Holy Spirit  
for the members of the general council and their work,  
that their efforts for the good of our Society  
may be fruitful  
and they may fulfil their duties with zeal and joy.*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CIC 1917, can. 517

*That the members of the general council  
may be able to collaborate in perfect unity  
with the Rector Major and with each other,  
seeking in everything the good of our Society  
and guiding it in ever more incisive apostolic activity  
especially in the field of the education of youth,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the members of the general council  
may be promoters of a constant dialogue  
with all the provinces and communities,  
carried out with respect and courage  
for a fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That salesians throughout the world  
may listen willingly to the suggestions and directives  
coming from the Rector Major and his council,  
and contribute to the unity of the Congregation  
in the necessary pluralism of situations,  
and that the spirit of the Founder  
may be preserved unblemished  
in its originality and universality,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

#### 4. THE GENERAL CHAPTER (ART. 146-153)

In the introductory chapter to the fourth part of the Constitutions great emphasis was laid on the fundamental importance of unity (cf. C 120, 122, 124) "to keep intact, side by side with legitimate plurality, the original project of our holy Founder and maintain the life and efficiency of the Congregation".<sup>34</sup>

The first and principal guarantee of this unity must be government at world level (cf. C 120). Now among the "structures of unity" priority of place goes to the general chapter. It is "*the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity*", as is stated in art. 146, which opens the section of the Constitutions dealing with the general chapter and describes its nature, mainly as regards its spiritual dimension.

##### 4.1 Nature and duties of the general chapter

The general chapter is not primarily an event to be observed at fixed times because of a prescription of the Constitutions, nor is it in the first place a juridical assembly mainly concerned with canonical questions or short-term practical organization. It is first and foremost a meeting of brothers (C 146), a "sign of unity in charity".<sup>35</sup> It is a time of the Congregation's strong expression and deep experience of being a "world community" (C 59), which brings together representatives of all the circumscriptions and structures throughout the world. This is what art. 146 is referring to when it says: "*Through the general chapter the entire Society ... seeks to discern God's will ... for the purpose of rendering the Church better service*".

<sup>34</sup> SGC, 720

<sup>35</sup> CIC, can. 631

The general chapter is a time when the ideal of the fraternal and apostolic community, described in chap. V of the Rule, becomes visible and can be experienced also at world level, not only for the members of the chapter itself but for all the confreres, since they are involved in its preparation (cf. R 112) and given timely information about its work (cf. R 124). All are therefore able to share in a practical way in the "communion of spirit, witness and service that is the life of the Society within the universal Church" (C 59).

This communion has, for the general chapter too, a spiritual foundation in the mystery of the Trinity (cf. C 49), as is recalled in the second paragraph of art. 146. The representatives of the Congregation gather together in the name of the Lord and are guided by his Spirit in discerning the will of God at a specific moment in history for a better service to the Church. They carry out a "*communal reflection*" which has as its terms of reference first of all the Gospel, our supreme rule (cf. C 196), then the Founder's charisma, "the principle of unity in the Congregation" (C 100), and finally the sensitivity to the needs of time and place which is characteristic of our spirit (C 19) and a criterion which shapes our mission (C 41).

The general chapter is therefore an assembly which is open to receive the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so as to enable the Society to bring its mission into line with the pressing needs of the time.

It may be useful to read again the recommendations made by the Rector Major in his letter convoking the GC22, which remain valid also for the future. The general chapter, wrote Fr Egidio Viganò, "must be totally aligned with the Holy Spirit; it must move the Congregation to take careful stock of the particular period of man's history we are traversing; it must inspire us with a practical sympathy for the needs of the world and the wants of the poor and the little ones; and it must proceed along the lines of Don Bosco's initial project with its transcendent values inspired by the Holy Spirit and destined to develop vigorously, sloughing off its merely transient guises. The Chapter must be characterized by certain spiritual aspects: a brotherly encounter of Salesians with the most diverse cultural and apostolic experiences; its members must be imbued with a radiant and radical *sequela Christi*, a pastoral predilection for the young, a united vocation-sense that bespeaks total fidelity to Don Bosco, a dedicated willingness to examine

and assess with spiritual freedom and collaboration, and a personal and communal docility to the Holy Spirit who is the true source of that unanimity for which the Chapter will strive".<sup>36</sup>

Every general chapter is a "gift of the Holy Spirit" to the Congregation and the Church. It is an "ecclesial event" that puts us before the People of God and at their service in our capacity as Salesians, and a "particular occasion for us to manifest our loyalty to our vocation".<sup>37</sup> "The celebration of the general chapter of an institute should be a moment of grace and of the activity of the Holy Spirit. It should be a joyful, paschal and ecclesial experience which is of benefit to the institute itself and to the whole Church".<sup>38</sup>

In this light we can read again what Don Bosco said in opening the first general chapter of the Society in 1877: "Our Divine Saviour tells us in the Gospel that where two or three are gathered in his name he will be there among them. *Our sessions have no other purpose than God's greater glory and the salvation of souls* redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And so we may trust that the Lord will be in our midst and will personally lead our discussions to his greater glory".<sup>39</sup>

Article 147 incorporates what we have said above, in presenting the nature of the general chapter in its juridical aspects: *its authority and competence*.

In the first place the text takes up again the point already made in art. 120 on the fundamental structures of our Society: "Supreme authority over the whole Congregation belongs to the General Chapter" (C 120): it is a principle which is confirmed also by the Code of Canon Law.<sup>40</sup>

*The authority of the general chapter* is distinct from that of the Rector Major. The latter, in his capacity of supreme Moderator, has

<sup>36</sup> ASC 305, p. 7-8

<sup>37</sup> Cf. ASC 305, p. 7

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31.5.1983, n. 51

<sup>39</sup> BM XIII, 183

<sup>40</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 631 §1



ordinary power of government over all the provinces, houses and members (C 127; cf. can. 622); during his term of office his authority is personal, universal and permanent; immediate succession, and his substitution by the Vicar General in case of death, ensures the uninterrupted presence of such authority in the Congregation. Since however the Rector Major is elected by the general chapter and is obliged to carry out his office "according to law", the universal law of the Church and our particular law laid down by the general chapter itself, he may be said to be subject to the higher authority of the general chapter. The latter, on the other hand, is essentially an "ad hoc" organ of government: it is convoked by the Rector Major for a specific period (even though it may have more than one session), and exercises its authority only in the period included between the official acts of opening and closing (cf. R 117, 134). Its authority is supreme, because from it depends not only the election of the Superior General, but also the formulation of our particular law. Only the general chapter has in fact legislative authority for the whole Society. To the Rector Major belongs the interpretation of laws for the "practical direction of the Society" (cf. C 192).

Concerning the *duties of the chapter*, the previous article has already spoken of its general task, that of reflecting together so as to remain faithful to the Gospel and to the salesian charism, and to respond to cultural changes and the new requirements of those to whom we are sent. The Code of Canon Law confirms the same thing in other words: the functions of the general chapter are "to protect the patrimony of the institute ... and to foster appropriate renewal in accord with that patrimony".<sup>41</sup>

Art. 147 gives details of this task and specifies three particular duties which belong to the general chapter:

a. *to lay down laws for the whole society.*

The general chapter, as we have said, is the legislative organ of the Society. From the time the Constitutions, drawn up by the Founder, were definitively approved by the Apostolic See in 1874, all the modifica-

<sup>41</sup> CIC, can. 631 §1

tions to the Rule have been made by subsequent general chapters. In particular we may recall the GC10 of 1904 (after the publication of the Church's new norms of 1901 for religious institutes), the GC12 of 1922 (after the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law of 1917) and, after Vatican II and by its mandate, the SGC (1971-72), the GC21 and GC22, which attended to the redrafting of the constitutional text in the light of the Council's directives. Further modifications are always possible in the future, but they can be made only by a general chapter with the subsequent approval of the Apostolic See (cf. C 148).

The general chapter has also exclusive competence in the matter of the general Regulations, which form with the Constitutions a single normative compendium and contain true laws of universal application.<sup>42</sup>

*b. to treat of matters of greater importance to the Congregation.*

The general chapter can give doctrinal guidelines concerning the life and mission of the Congregation (cf. for example, the documents of the GC19, GC20, and GC21), but it can also deliberate on particular problems and issue directives binding on all members, entrusting their faithful execution to the Rector Major with his council or to superiors at other levels. These deliberations must conform to the spirit of the Constitutions, as stated in art. 148, and be promulgated by the Rector Major to obtain binding force in the Congregation.

*c. to elect the Rector Major and the members of the general council.*

This is an act of the greatest responsibility before the Congregation, and one which must be prepared for by prayer and carried out in a spirit of faith (cf. R 127). The procedure is laid down in art. 153 of the Constitutions: an absolute majority is required and there can be a maximum of four scrutinies. Other procedural details are found in the Regulations (cf. R 126-133).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Introduction to general Regulations, this book p. 1039 ff.

## 4.2 Frequency of convocation

The general chapter meets ordinarily every six years (C 149), and the mandate of the Rector Major and of the members of the general council elected by the general chapter runs for the same period (cf. C 128, 142). This six-yearly rhythm may be modified in the case referred to in art. 143, i.e. when the Rector Major dies or ceases from office during the period of his mandate (cf. C 142), in which case it is necessary to proceed to a new election of both the Rector Major and his council.

The convocation of an extraordinary general chapter is possible whenever it is required by a grave reason recognized as such by the Rector Major, who must however obtain the consent of his council. The new Code of Canon Law no longer requires the approval of the Apostolic See.

## 4.3 Composition of the general chapter

Because of its nature as described above, the general chapter must be composed in such a way that *it represents the entire institute*.<sup>43</sup> What is laid down in art. 151 corresponds fully with this requirement.

The article lists first those who are members "*ex officio*" or by right: the Rector Major and members of the general council (both those leaving office and those newly elected during the chapter itself), the Rectors Major emeriti, the secretary general, the procurator general, the moderator of the general chapter, the provincials and superiors of vice-provinces (both of whom in certain circumstances can be substituted by their respective vicars); then come the *delegates elected* from among the perpetually professed members of the various circumscriptions of the Congregation.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 631 §1

This composition ensures first of all the presence of all the ordinary central government of the Congregation in the persons of the Rector Major and his council.

Furthermore every ordinary circumscription (province or vice-province) is represented by at least two confreres: the respective superior and a delegate elected by the provincial chapter. Other possible juridical circumscriptions have the right to send an elected representative to the general chapter, according to norms defined in their decree of erection (cf. C 156, R 114).

To ensure that the number of elected members exceeds those taking part in the general chapter by right, our own law provides for the election of delegates according to a quantitative criterion, i.e. on the basis of a certain proportionality with the number of confreres present in the provinces: a single delegate is to be elected by vice-provinces and provinces with fewer than 250 professed members, and two delegates by provinces with 250 or more confreres (cf. R 114). This procedure was introduced by the Rector Major with his council, and with the authorization of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, in view of the SGC. The positive experience gained led to it being maintained and confirmed by the following general chapters as a valid norm for the future. It is to be considered a further practical application of the principle by which the confreres share in the selection of those responsible for government and in the elaboration of their decisions, "in the most suitable way" (C 123). This procedure, while giving additional voice to the confreres, does not jeopardize the chapter nor make it too difficult in the matter of number of members, ease of functioning, and efficiency of the assembly, and allows for the maximum simplicity in the manner of electing delegates.<sup>44</sup>

A final observation concerns the significant presence at the general chapter of the two complementary components of the salesian vocation: clerical and lay (cf. C 4, 45). First of all it is evident that every member of the chapter represents all the confreres of his province or

<sup>44</sup> Cf. ASC 259 (1969), p. 6-7

vice-province, be they brothers, deacons or priests. But in order to turn to greater advantage the presence of lay confreres alongside those who are clerics, the GC21 had already formulated the following guideline: "In electing delegates of the province for a general chapter, the members of the provincial chapter should keep in mind the possibility they have of choosing delegates among the brothers especially when the province has the right to send more than one delegate".<sup>45</sup> This indication was included by the GC22 in the new article 169 of the Regulations which emphasizes the desirability that chapters and councils should express by the significant presence of clerical and lay members the complementary relationship between them that is characteristic of our Society.

#### **4.4 Norms for the functioning of the general chapter**

The particular law of an institute must also include the norms which determine the procedure of the general chapter's work and of the elections.<sup>46</sup> In our own law the principal norms are found in the Constitutions (C 150, 152, 153) and in the Regulations (R 111-134). Other norms are fixed by the internal regulations which every general chapter establishes at the beginning of its work: these are true capitular deliberations and form part of our law, even though in themselves they are valid only for the duration of the general chapter.

It may be helpful to quote briefly, in addition to those already mentioned, some of the norms in the Constitutions and Regulations which govern the functioning of the chapter:

— For the validity of the acts at least two thirds of the members must be present (C 152); this norm holds good for meetings for both elections and the making of decisions; it should be noticed that while the common law of the Church requires the presence only of an ab-

<sup>45</sup> GC21, 210

<sup>46</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 631 §2

solite majority, our own law demands the presence of a greater number (two thirds).<sup>47</sup>

— A decision of the chapter has the force of law when it is approved by an absolute majority, with the exception of modifications to the text of the Constitutions for which a two thirds majority is needed, because of the quite special importance for us of our fundamental code (C 152, 191); it will be observed that the calculation of the majority is no longer made on the basis of valid votes, as in the preceding legislation, but on the number of those present with the right to vote.<sup>48</sup>

— Not only the provinces and local communities, but each individual confrere too has the right to send to the general chapter his own desires and proposals (R 112). This very broad faculty is another example of the application of the principle of responsible and effective participation by all the members (C 123) in "matters of the greatest importance for our Congregation".<sup>49</sup>

— The same principle is applied once again in the insistence on the duty of those in authority to foster the provision of adequate information on the work of the general chapter (C 124): before the chapter, by informing the confreres of its place, date and general purpose (R 111); during the chapter, by providing full and timely information on the progress of the work (R 124); and after the elections by immediately making known the results (R 133).

— Again in the same context, it is laid down that at the beginning of the chapter the Rector Major shall present a general report on the state of the Congregation (R 119). This report is the responsibility of the Rector Major alone in its overall content and particular judgements, but evidently it will involve the collaboration of the members of his council who have assisted him during his mandate. This report will be the object of study and analysis on the part of the

<sup>47</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 119, 1-2

<sup>48</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 119

<sup>49</sup> BM XIII, 183

capitular assembly, also through dialogue with the Rector Major himself, so as to develop the awareness of the world community, to identify and understand the main problems and needs of the Congregation, to assess the level of our maturity and of the genuine apostolic nature of our work, and to discern future guidelines and commitments.<sup>50</sup> It is clear that even after the chapter has closed, this document will remain a valid instrument for personal and communal reflection on the Congregation "qualis esse debet et qualis esse periclitatur", and useful for animating all confreres and awakening in them an awareness of their common responsibility for the realization of the common vocation (cf. C 123).

*Let us pray for the general chapter,  
the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity,  
that it may be docile to the Holy Spirit,  
and be an instrument for extending  
and propagating its work  
in the course of time and changing events.*

*That the members of the general chapter  
may be always aware of their obligations,  
and seek in a constant atmosphere of prayer  
the will of God  
as regards both the persons of the confreres  
and the development of our mission,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the members of the general chapter  
may be enlightened  
in all the choices they have to make,  
especially in electing the Rector Major  
and his more immediate collaborators,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

<sup>50</sup> GC22 RRM, Introduction, p. 5-6

*That the work of the general chapter  
may lead to decisions which foster  
harmony among the members  
and promote greater efficacy in our work,  
for the greater glory of God  
and the benefit of the young and the poor,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*



## CHAPTER XII

### SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY

*"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20,28).*

The similarity of thought between this text and the one that headed the previous chapter is evident. What we have in this instance is a reminder of Paul's "spiritual testament" (Acts 20,17-38), which could well form the basic document for all exercise of authority in the community.

In the first place it is the figure of Paul himself who bears witness, through the force of personal confession, before the elders of the Church of Ephesus: he reveals his humility, which is expressed in kindness and tenderness towards all; he refers to the sufferings he has undergone, foreseeing that he will have to suffer worse ones still, and always because of his fidelity to his preaching of the Kingdom of God (20,18-25), with complete disinterest from a material point of view (20,33-35). Summing it all up he can say: "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (20,27).

The exhortation to the heads of the community is nothing else than an invitation to follow Paul's example of pastoral action: attentive care of the flock, which involves vigilance because there are fierce wolves about (recall John's words about the Good Shepherd: cf. Jn 10); the care of those whom he feels have been entrusted to him by the Spirit, those of whom he has been made the shepherd; the awareness of his tremendous responsibility in their regard, even though he is not their "proprietor", the one and only Shepherd is Jesus Christ crucified (20,28).

We cannot fail to note the ecclesial nature of this pastoral service ("feed the church of the Lord"), which cannot be limited to the Bishops or those who work in parochial structures. It applies to everyone who, in communion with the Bishop and the local Church, is in the position of a pastoral guide to a portion of the People of God. With greater reason can this be said of those who have a specific and practical responsibility with respect to local Churches, as have those with provincial authority.

\* \* \*

Following the order adopted for the fourth part, after the chapter on structures at world level there follows that on provincial structures.

Such an arrangement is in harmony too with the specific role of the province which forms a bridge between the local communities and the world community, which is the entire Congregation.

The province "unites" the different local communities in one large community (C 157) and expresses the brotherhood between its members and those of other provinces and of the whole Congregation.<sup>1</sup>

The internal arrangement of the chapter is similar to that of the preceding chapter, with one exception: before dealing with the provincial, the provincial council and the provincial chapter there are some preliminary articles which deal with the division of the Society into juridical circumscriptions of various kinds.

And so the chapter is divided up as follows:

1. *Juridical circumscriptions:*

- their erection, definition and suppression: *art. 156*
- the province: *art. 157*
- the vice-province: *art. 158*
- provincial delegations: *art. 159*
- enrolment of members in a circumscription: *art. 160*

2. *The provincial:*

- figure and duties: *art. 161*
- appointment and powers: *art. 162*
- duration in office: *art. 163*

3. *The provincial council:*

- general duties and composition: *art. 164*
- cases in which its consent is needed: *art. 165*
- conditions for appointment of councillors: *art. 166*
- designation and duration in office: *art. 167*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SGC, 512; C 58

- the vice-provincial: *art. 168*
- the provincial economer: *art. 169*

#### 4. *The provincial chapter:*

- nature and authority: *art. 170*
- competence: *art. 171*
- frequency: *art. 172*
- composition: *art. 173*
- election of delegates: *art. 174*

The commentary which follows deals with each of the four sections as a whole, emphasizing certain points in them without going into details about each separate article.

## 1. THE JURIDICAL CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS (ART. 156-160)

Since the Code of Canon Law requires that the Constitutions shall indicate the "*juridical circumscriptions*" into which an institute is divided and to whom it belongs to constitute them,<sup>2</sup> the chapter opens with a section which deals with this matter in its general aspects.

### 1.1 Juridical circumscriptions and their membership

A first article, of a general character, says that to divide the Society into circumscriptions belongs to the Rector Major with his council, and that normally these are *provinces and vice-provinces* (C 156).

The Rector Major is given wide faculties in the matter to meet the needs of the Congregation spread throughout the world; but in normal practice attention must be paid to what the Code prescribes concerning the government of a "province" or of a "part equivalent

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 581

to a province": such circumscriptions are governed by a "major superior" who has ordinary power, proper or vicarious.<sup>3</sup>

The two kinds of circumscription indicated by the Code correspond in our own law respectively to the province, introduced by Don Bosco himself in 1879 when the expansion of the Congregation made a territorial division imperative,<sup>4</sup> and vice-province, already contemplated in our privileges and by the Constitutions before the SGC.<sup>5</sup> In the revision carried out by the GC22 the vice-province has been officially inserted alongside the province.

The "delegations directly dependent on the Rector Major" which had been established by the GC21 have disappeared from the definitive text, because they were "parts equivalent to a province" as was clear from their whole structure (union of several houses, a superior with a council, a delegation chapter, local superiors with their respective councils) and consequently they had to have a superior with ordinary (and not merely delegated) power. In fact, following upon the approval and promulgation of the Constitutions, the Rector Major suppressed the delegations dependent directly on himself, and erected them as vice-provinces,<sup>6</sup> with the exception of the Generalate, which is a single community and not a "part equivalent to a province" and has been made directly dependent on the Rector Major.<sup>7</sup>

The new Constitutions also clarify the *membership of the individual confrere in a particular juridical circumscription* (C 160). By his religious profession after the novitiate, the member is not only incorporated in the salesian Society (cf. C 59, 107), but is also enrolled in the particular juridical circumscription for whose service he asked to be admitted. This expression was chosen deliberately because the provincial who admits the candidate to profession does not always enrol him in his own province (as, for instance, in the case of interprovincial novitiates).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 620

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BM XIV, 25-26; cf. also T. VALSECCHI in *Origine e sviluppo delle Ispettorie salesiane*, in RSS n. 3, July-December 1983, p. 252-273

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1986*, art. 83

<sup>6</sup> Cf. AGC 312 (1985), p. 60-66

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 60

A temporary or permanent transfer from one circumscription to another remains always possible; the competent authorities and manner of procedure in such a case are contained in the general Regulations (cf. R 151), where there is also an article concerning the assignment of a confrere to a particular salesian house (R 150) which in this way becomes his religious domicile for all juridical purposes.<sup>8</sup>

A final element that should be pointed out is that the principle of participation and shared responsibility (C 123) is explicitly applied when there is question of the erection or modification of juridical circumscriptions: the Rector Major will first make an adequate consultation among the confreres before making a decision (C 156). The same principle holds in the case of the transfer of a member from one circumscription to another: in this case the provincial must hear the opinion of the confrere concerned.

## 1.2 The province

The official Italian text preserves the terminology ("ispettoria", "ispettore") chosen by Don Bosco as being more in keeping with the Italian situation of his time.<sup>9</sup>

While the second part of art. 58 considered the province under the aspect of a fraternal and apostolic community, with a supportive and promotional role creating unity and solidarity, art. 157 puts the emphasis on the apostolic and religious structure, and on the canonical entity enjoying the autonomy given to it by the Constitutions.

"The province", says the text, "*unites the different local communities in one large community*". It is characteristic of the province that it brings together the local communities in a wider union, following one and the same apostolic plan which applies the mission of the whole Society in the concrete circumstances of the particular Churches.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 103

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BM XIII, 208

The province is a kind of "intermediate structure". On the one hand, being incarnate in a particular territory and a local Church, it is heir to the sense of the concrete that guided Don Bosco in adapting to changing social and ecclesial situations; and on the other hand the provincial community is a constant reminder of the necessary unity with the world community, by making the confreres aware of their membership of the entire body which is the Congregation, and by prompting a permanent examination of their fidelity to Don Bosco. "No province", wrote Fr Luigi Ricceri, Rector Major, "is loyal to its members if it does not lead them beyond the province into the unity of the world Congregation".<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that although clarifying the canonical aspects, the Constitutions emphasize once again (as in art. 58) that the structure is at the service of communion and the apostolic mission in the particular Churches.

The article takes up again the idea, already expressed by art. 120 (cf. the commentary on that article), that the province makes incarnate in its territory the "life and mission" of the Congregation, i.e. our charisma or vocational identity. There must be the "*necessary and sufficient conditions*" for the realization of this objective, says the article (C 157), thus indicating a general criterion for the erection of a province, which refers back in fact to other more specific criteria, like those for salesian activity (cf. C 40-43), those concerned with the communal aspect of the mission (cf. C. 44, and also C 58 mentioned above), and finally those dealing with insertion in the social and ecclesial environment (cf. C 7, 48).

### 1.3 The vice-province

The vice-province (as a "part equivalent to a province") resembles a province (C 158). For this circumscription it was decided to keep the

<sup>10</sup> ASC 272 (1973), p. 20

term ('visitatoria' in Italian) already present in our particular law (cf. the "privileges" granted to the Congregation).

It is established when not all the necessary and sufficient conditions for the erection of a province are present. Some of the impediments are indicated: scarcity of personnel, insufficient financial resources; but there could also be another reason for the erection of a vice-province, as for instance that not every aspect of the salesian mission is represented but only some specific service (as is the case with the vice-province of the Salesian Pontifical University).

On the other hand the geographical situation, the number of houses or confreres, or other circumstances (of a social, cultural or political nature etc.) may require that a group of houses be dealt with as a separate entity, i.e. as a part equivalent to a province.

A vice-province may subsequently develop in such a way as to meet all the conditions needed for a province (e.g. through increase in personnel and the development of the salesian presence in the territory concerned); but it may also remain the same for a long period of time, as long as the reason endures for which it was constituted in the first place (e.g. a specific service entrusted to it).

#### **1.4 The provincial delegation**

The provincial delegation (C 159) is not a juridical circumscription of the Congregation, i.e. a part juridically autonomous, but is and remains an integral part of a province.

It consists of a group of communities within a province, which find themselves in a common and exceptional situation (e.g. in a distant area, a different country, a zone with a different language, a mission territory in the strict sense, etc.), but do not have the necessary requisites for erection as a juridical circumscription (province or vice-province) on its own. The constitution of such a delegation belongs to the provincial, who continues to be its ordinary major superior for all purposes. He appoints a delegate on whom he confers such powers as he considers opportune. Since however a judgement on such situations

may involve aspects which extend beyond the interests of the province and involve the Congregation (cf. C 156), the approval of the Rector Major is required for both the establishment of the delegation and the appointment by the provincial of the delegate.

## 2. THE PROVINCIAL (ART. 161-163)

### 2.1 Figure and duties

The figure and duties of the provincial have already been spoken of in earlier parts of the Constitutions and commentary. In particular, in art. 44 which dealt with the communal nature of the mission, the provincial was presented as a "promoter of dialogue and teamwork" who guides the provincial community in pastoral discernment with a view to the realization of the common educative and pastoral plan. In art. 58 on the provincial community, even though he is not named explicitly, it is evident that the provincial bears the first responsibility for carrying out the duties which are listed there. It could be said that the whole content of that article is summarized in art. 161 where it is stated that the service of the provincial is directed to the "*building up of a fraternal provincial community*".

In the first place the provincial is the *animator and pastoral guide* of his provincial community. He "carries out his service ... with love and pastoral zeal" (C 161). His animating activity is directed to the "religious life and apostolic action" of the provincial community, i.e. to everything concerning the salesian vocational identity as described in the first and second parts of the Constitutions; at the same time he has a particular responsibility as regards the formation of all the members (cf. R 101 for ongoing formation), but especially of the novices and young confreres (C 161).

As animator and pastoral guide he must be close to his confreres so as to know them, follow them, encourage them and keep them united: "a father whose task it is to help his sons manage their offices well, advising, helping and teaching them how to get out of difficulties



in critical situations".<sup>11</sup> For this reason the Regulations say: "The provincial will see to it that he has frequent personal contact with the members in a spirit of service and fraternal communion" (R 146). Once a year he will make the provincial visitation of each community, carrying out with the individual confreres and with the entire community a careful verification of the way in which the vocational identity is being realized (R 146). He will give special attention to the rectors, with whom he will maintain frequent contact (R 145).

His care extends also to the groups of the salesian Family (R 147) and to our lay collaborators (R 148): no easy responsibility this at the present day!

His presence in the province must be something like that of the soul in the body, a continuous and watchful presence, comprehensive and warm-hearted, directing and leading at the same time.

Here we may recall what the Code of Canon Law has to say about religious superiors as animators and guides of their confreres: "Superiors ... together with the members entrusted to them, are to strive to build in Christ a fraternal community, in which God is sought and loved above all. They are therefore frequently to nourish their members with the food of God's word and lead them to the celebration of the liturgy".<sup>12</sup> The Code is clearly referring to the *ministry of teaching*, which the superior is called to fulfil; the document "Mutuae relationes" says he has "the competency or authority of a spiritual director according to the evangelical tradition of his institute":<sup>13</sup> the provincial is called to "direct" especially by his life, but also through his guiding and stimulating word. Alongside this task must be remembered another very important one for a salesian provincial, which finds its model in Don Bosco, that of "*sanctifying*" his brothers. At this level the grace of the provincial's priestly ministry is manifested in a particular way: in the celebration of sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, he brings to his brothers the gift of the Spirit and guides the provincial community in the perfect fulfilment of the Father's will.

<sup>11</sup> GC1 (1877), BM XIII, 209

<sup>12</sup> CIC, can. 619

<sup>13</sup> MR 13

After indicating these essential aspects, the Constitutions emphasize that the provincial "*animates by governing*": he is the superior of his community: to him the Church has given a specific personal authority: "He exercises ordinary power over all the houses and members of the province in both the internal and the external forum, according to the norms of the Constitutions and of canon law" (C 162).

His power, both the ordinary ecclesiastical power of governance or jurisdiction and the so-called "dominative" power,<sup>14</sup> is connected with his office for the whole period of his mandate and carries with it the final right (and duty) of the superior to discern and decide what shall be done.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless the provincial does not exercise his authority in isolation. He is *assisted by a council*, whose members help him in the service of authority. This is already stated in art. 161 which describes the figure of the provincial, and will be taken up and developed in the articles concerning the provincial council.

Finally the Provincial carries out his office "*in union with the Rector Major*" (C 161): this is a reminder of the general principle expressed in art. 122 (cf. also C 58 and R 144).

## 2.2 Appointment of the provincial

In the postconciliar revision of the Constitutions our uninterrupted juridical tradition concerning the procedure for the appointment of the provincial was confirmed.

The SGC nevertheless introduced the *consultation* process, following the indications of "*Ecclesiae Sanctae*",<sup>16</sup> to give to the confreres the possibility of an effective participation in the selection of those

<sup>14</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 596 §§1,2

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Essential elements of religious life*, CRIS, 31.5.1983, n. 49

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ES II, 18

responsible for government. Here we find another clear case of the application of the principle of participation and shared responsibility (cf. C 123). The expediency of a consultation for the appointment of superiors finds explicit endorsement in fact in the new Code.<sup>17</sup>

The manner of making the consultation is specified in art. 143 of the Regulations. It is the immediate concern of the Rector Major himself, who can carry it out through a delegate; in the majority of cases it will be done by the regional councillor of the region to which the province concerned belongs.

In art. 162 are indicated also two necessary conditions for a confrere to be appointed provincial: that he be a priest which gives a particular tone to his service, as already explained,<sup>18</sup> and an adequate period of time after perpetual profession.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.3 Duration in office

The constant traditional period of office for the provincial has remained at six years. The SGC however introduced the norm that in ordinary circumstances he cannot be confirmed in office for a second period of six years in either the same or a different province: an interval of at least a year is needed. For particular reasons however a second mandate may be necessary or convenient; hence the stipulation "ordinarily" in art. 163

This norm was confirmed in the definitive text and corresponds to the criteria, desired by the Code of Canon Law, that offices should be held for a limited period of time and that there should be an opportune rotation: "An institute's own law is to make suitable provisions so that superiors constituted for a defined time do not continue in offices of governance for too long a period without an interval".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 625 §3

<sup>18</sup> Cf. commentary on art. 121, p. 878-884

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 623

<sup>20</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 624 §§1,2

### 3. THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL (ART. 164-169)

#### 3.1 Duties of the provincial council

Art. 161 has already spoken of the help the provincial receives from his council in carrying out his own duties. In art. 164 the subject is the council itself, which has the general task of *collaborating with the provincial in everything that concerns the animation and government of the province*. Here we find linked together once again the two ideas of "animation" and "government" (cf. C 130, in connection with the general council); they express the two aspects of leadership of the community which mutually complement each other and which concern the whole of the vast field of the life and mission of the Congregation in the territory covered by the province. In fact the Regulations describe the general duties of the provincial council in the following terms: "to collaborate with the provincial for the development of the salesian life and mission, to help him to gain knowledge of situations and to see that the provincial plan is being put into practice" (R 155).

It was decided not to specify further at Congregational level any specific sectors (apart from the administration of goods) to be entrusted to individual members of the provincial council, as was done on the other hand for members of the general council, so as to leave the greatest possible freedom to the individual provinces to provide as they thought best according to different situations.

The provincial for his part, recommends art. 165, must use the help of his council and "promote the active and responsible collaboration of his councillors". The Code of Canon Law insists expressly on this point: "Superiors are to have their own council, in accordance with the Constitutions, and they must make use of it in the exercise of their office".<sup>21</sup>

The Constitutions and Regulations provide practical indications as regards this duty. The provincial will call the council together

<sup>21</sup> CIC, can. 627 §1

regularly, at least once a month (R 155). He will always listen to his council in matters of greater importance before making a decision, but in certain cases he cannot proceed even validly if he has not previously obtained the consent or opinion (according to the case concerned) of the council. In these cases the help of the council becomes so indispensable that it conditions the very possibility of action by the provincial.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2 Composition of the provincial council

The council is presided over by the provincial (who nevertheless, as was said concerning the Rector Major, is not a member of the council and does not vote). It is made up of the vice-provincial, provincial economist and an uneven number of other councillors, three or five according to the needs of the province. In this way there is normally ensured that the number of voters is uneven, and the holding up of important business on account of a split vote will be avoided.

The members of the council are appointed by the Rector Major. Because of the large number of such appointments and the fact that they fall due at widely different times, the Rector Major can make such appointments with the consent of a reduced number of members of the general council (cf. C 132 §2).

Candidates are proposed by the provincial, who is also competent to carry out the wide consultation among the members of the province required by art. 167. The manner of making this consultation however depends on the Rector Major with his council (R 154); the details were laid down recently and came into force from 15 April 1985.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the importance and responsibility which attaches to this office, not only for the general duty of collaborating with the provincial in the religious and pastoral animation of the province, but also

<sup>22</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 627 §2

<sup>23</sup> Cf. AGC 312 (1985) p. 54-55

because of the vote that has to be given in specific cases (which include admissions to professions and sacred Orders), it is required that candidates shall have been perpetually professed for at least five years<sup>24</sup> and have completed the entire curriculum of the initial formation period (C 166). For the vice-provincial it is also required that he be a priest, since he is a major superior in a clerical religious institute.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.3 The vice-provincial

The figure of the vice-provincial was introduced by the GC19 and subsequently included in the revised text of the Constitutions. According to the new Code he is a religious Ordinary and major superior,<sup>26</sup> and therefore holds an office to which is attached ordinary vicarious power. This means that he fulfils his office not only when he takes the place of the provincial who is absent or impeded, but always has this ordinary vicarious power; he is always therefore the vicar of the provincial, a man of trust, "the first collaborator of the provincial" as art. 168 puts it. His general function is that of extending and complementing the action of the provincial, and involves "everything that concerns the ordinary government of the province" (C 168); he is called therefore to assist, advise and complement the provincial, without usurping his place.

The vice-provincial may be given by the provincial other special duties, so that he can exercise his powers in a more permanent and practical way, always in the name of the provincial.

The General Chapters did not want to go into further details in the Constitutions and Regulations, because experience in the period since the GC19 had shown that in different provinces the vice-provincials had been given charge of a wide variety of sectors: in one province it might be formation, in another youth pastoral work, in still others the

<sup>24</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 623

<sup>25</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 620; cf. C 4. 121

<sup>26</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 134 §1; can. 620

promotion of vocations, the scholastic sector, the salesian Family etc. And so it preferred here also to leave the greatest possible freedom of action to the provincial, so as to allow for a greater adaptation of the office of vice-provincial both to the different and changing needs of each province, and to the personal capacities of the confreres concerned.

### 3.4 The provincial economer

The provincial economer is the one member of the provincial council to whom is entrusted, at the level of our own law, the immediate responsibility for a particular sector: the administration of the temporal goods of the province and the control and coordination of local administration. In the exercise of his duties he depends always on the provincial, who retains the ultimate responsibility even in this sector (cf. C 161, 190); he acts therefore in the name of the provincial but with personal responsibility in fulfilling the duties given him by the Constitutions and Regulations (cf. C 187-190 and R 193-197).

*Let us pray for our province (vice-province),  
for its superiors and all its confreres  
so that in the territory where it works  
it may make present Don Bosco's charisma  
for the benefit of needy youth.*

*For all the confreres of our province,  
that all their works and activities  
may be inspired and sustained  
by fidelity to Don Bosco and his spirit,  
by dedication to poor youth,  
and by attention to the signs of the times,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the provincial and his collaborators,  
that they may be efficacious witnesses*

*among our confreres and young people,  
of the fatherliness of Don Bosco,  
and be a bond of unity between the province  
and the salesian world community,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For those in the province with particular responsibility  
in the field of formation,  
that they may fulfil their mission with zeal  
and help each member to grow in his vocation,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For our young confreres, novices and aspirants,  
that in the members of the province  
they may find elder brothers,  
exemplary in their observance and apostolic fervour,  
ready to understand and help them  
in the realization of their own vocation.  
Lord, hear our prayer.*



## 4. THE PROVINCIAL CHAPTER (ART. 170-174)

### 4.1 Nature and authority of the provincial chapter

Art. 170 describes in the first place the *nature* of the provincial chapter, taking up once again the concept, matured during the process of revision of the Constitutions, of the provincial community<sup>27</sup> which "unites the different local communities in one large community" (C 157). The local communities, "a living part of the provincial community" (C 58), find in the provincial chapter an outstanding occasion for living and intensifying the sense of their membership of the province, overcoming the somewhat restricted perspective of their own environment and particular activities so as to concern themselves with the general problems of the province.

Spiritually and fundamentally the provincial chapter is a *fraternal gathering* in the deep sense described in chap. V of the Constitutions (cf. in particular C 49, 50). The brotherhood finds its root in the call of God himself, made concrete in the convocation of this particular meeting, so incisive for the life and mission of the provincial community; its source is in the presence of the Lord in whose name the chapter members are gathered; its inspiration in the Holy Spirit, actively present for guiding the communal discernment process, for helping to get to know God's will, and for animating a better service to the Church.<sup>28</sup>

Juridically the provincial chapter is the *representative assembly* of the confreres of the local communities.

Through elections at local and provincial level the proportionate presence of all the communities and all the confreres is ensured; in this way the chapter reflects the sum total of all the activities, works, experiences and talents of the whole provincial community.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. SGC, 512

<sup>28</sup> Cf. by analogy, what is said of art. 146 on the general chapter, p. 936 ff.

The provincial chapter differs from the provincial council in being a collegial organism, in which all the members exercise together, with equal rights, the powers granted them by law.

The *authority of the provincial chapter* is indicated in the second part of art. 170. It is not a legislative authority, like that of the general chapter (cf. C 147), but is nevertheless not a simply consultative authority. The provincial chapter can "deliberate" on matters which regard the province, within the competence given to it by the Constitutions and Regulations. The principal items, as we shall see, are indicated in art. 171; others are distributed throughout the body of our Rule. To the provincial chapter finally are given certain true powers (cf. C 120), but not in an absolute sense: its decisions need the approval of the Rector Major with his council before acquiring binding force within the province.

## 4.2 Competence of the provincial chapter

Art. 171 lists the general and principal tasks which the provincial chapter is competent to perform:

— The first two concern the good running of the province, and in a particular way its "*religious and pastoral life*" (another expression for "life and mission", a phrase frequently found in the Constitutions). Of interest to the chapter members therefore is the whole vast field of our vocational identity. The provincial chapter can "decide on" and "inquire into suitable means for promoting" the life and mission, but always with due respect for what is entrusted by the Constitutions and Regulations to other organs of government (art. 170). It cannot therefore take the place of the provincial or the provincial council in dealing with cases in which the decision belongs to the provincial and council. The chapter's decisions do not belong to ordinary government, but are general guidelines or lines of action for a longer period (normally three years).

— The third task for which the chapter is competent concerns the *study of the deliberations of the general chapter and the manner of their verification* at provincial and local level, and in particular of

the most recent Chapter. The provincial chapter, in fact, is "the most opportune means for enlisting the participation of the confreres in the study and implementation of Chapter decisions".<sup>29</sup> It can happen not infrequently that a general chapter expressly leaves to provincial chapters specific points on which they must make decisions.

There is also a close connection between the provincial chapter and the next general chapter which will follow. It is stated in art. 112 of the Regulations: provincial chapters can send proposals and study contributions in preparation for the general chapter convoked by the Rector Major; in view of such general chapter the provincial chapter will proceed to the election of one or two delegates and their substitutes; this is in fact the fifth task of the provincial chapter.

— The fourth task falling within the competence of the provincial chapter concerns the formulation and revision of the "*provincial directory*". This forms part of the particular law of our Society within each individual province (C 191). It collects together norms which, at a subordinate level, contain dispositions for the application or putting into practice of our fundamental code, which is the book of the Constitutions. In accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C 124) various matters, as we have seen, have been left to provincial government. To lay down these norms is the competence of the provincial chapter which gathers them in a directory, which will nevertheless have binding force only after the approval of the Rector Major with his council (cf. C 171).

Some particular matters left explicitly to provincial directories concern religious poverty (R 58), prayer life (R 72, 74), salesian formation (R 87, 88, 106), and the administration of temporal goods (R 190).

The Rector Major with his council has given some clarifications and guidelines concerning the provincial directory, emphasizing its purpose: "the application to local realities of the principles and norms of the general legislation, so as to render more concrete and efficacious in the provincial community the commitment of fidelity to our Rule of life".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> SGC, 760

<sup>30</sup> Cf. GC19, p. 35-43

### 4.3 Frequency of convocation

The ordinary frequency of convocation of the provincial chapter, after the revision made by the SGC, is every three years (formerly it had been every six years). The main reason for the innovation was that of offering the confreres and communities a greater possibility of responsible collaboration in the conducting of the affairs of the province (cf. C 123) through the provincial chapter, which is precisely the best qualified assembly and the one which represents all the communities of the province.

The three-yearly rhythm also fits in very well with some of the principal duties of the chapter itself: it allows for the making of a verification of the deliberations of the preceding general chapter (C 171,3) at a point midway in the six-year period before the next one, and to formulate at the end of the six years proposals for the new general chapter (R 112).

The triennial rhythm of provincial chapters may be modified in the case foreseen by art. 143 of the Constitutions (death or cessation of office of the Rector Major) or that indicated by art. 149 (extraordinary general chapter).

An extraordinary provincial chapter is possible in a province when the good of the province requires it. The judgement on this point belongs to the provincial, who has the authority to convoke it; but he must obtain the consent of his council and is obliged to consult the Rector Major beforehand.

### 4.4 Composition of the provincial chapter

Art. 173 presents the composition of the provincial chapter. Its members can be distinguished into two groups:

1) *Members by right:*

— in the first place those responsible for the government of the province: the provincial and members of the provincial council;

- then the superior of every provincial delegation, who governs an important part of the province in the name of the provincial;
- the moderator of the provincial chapter, appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council (cf. R 168);
- the rector of each canonically erected house; if he is seriously impeded, he may be substituted by the vice-rector with the previous approval of the provincial;
- the director of novices.

## 2) *Elected members:*

The general Regulations provide for two elections at two different levels: the first is at the local level in every house or group of communities combined together (cf. R 161, 163), and then at provincial level from a list of eligible candidates in the proportion of one for every twenty-five or fraction of twenty-five confreres of the province (cf. R 165).

The quantitative criterion was first introduced by the SGC following an explicit vote of the GC19 in favour of "a wider and more representative composition of the provincial chapter",<sup>31</sup> and was subsequently included in our law so as to guarantee that the elected members of the chapter would exceed in number those present "ex officio".

In these elections all the confreres, whether perpetually or temporarily professed, have active voice (C 174), but only the perpetually professed have passive voice (C 173,7).

Finally it should be noted that in view of a more significant presence of the complementary clerical and lay dimensions of the salesian vocation (cf. C 4, 45), art. 169 of the Regulations recommends among other things that in the context of the elections the confreres keep in mind the desirability that the composition of the provincial chapter should really reflect this complementary aspect which is characteristic of our Society.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cf. GC19, p. 20-21

<sup>32</sup> Cf. GC21, 210

*Let us invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit  
on the provincial chapter,  
so that in carrying out the tasks entrusted to it  
it may be a means of growth for the province (vice-province),  
and a help to the confreres for an ever greater fidelity  
to their own vocation and mission.*

*That the light of the Holy Spirit  
may enlighten and guide the members of the provincial chapter,  
and sustain them in the decisions they must make  
to increase the fraternal life of the communities  
and render their work more efficacious,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That the celebration of the provincial chapter  
may be an occasion for deep reflection  
for fostering communion among the members of the province,  
and revive in all of them the search for religious fidelity  
and enthusiasm in their apostolic commitment,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

*"As each one has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace; ... whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4,10-11).*

We are back once again with the first Letter of Peter (already quoted at the beginning of chap. XI), with its pressing recommendation to think of the coming of the Lord: "The end of all things is at hand" (4,7). It is a direct invitation to create the climate of eschatological expectation (of the just judgement and at the same time the reassuring reward) which formed the dogmatic basis for so many exhortations of the first christians, and which at the present day has to some extent lost its force.

And so through the stimulus given to it by this vision of the future, the christian community (whom Peter was addressing in his letter) intensifies its life of prayer (4,7) and fraternal charity, "since love covers a multitude of sins" (4,8). Charity gives style and purpose to many relationships in communal life, and hence also to the exercise of authority.

This is the style to which our Constitutions refer when they speak of the shared responsibility of the community (assembly) (cf. C 186). This shared responsibility results from the existence of a plurality of charismata of various kinds which are found in the community, as a consequence of which each one is in a certain sense superior to his neighbour because he has something which the other does not. Peter warns that these personal charismata should not be disregarded but exploited for the common service of all, since they have been received by each one as a gift and are not something belonging to him by right; consequently he can be only an administrator of them and not a capricious owner using them in arbitrary fashion (4,10).

There are some who have the specific duty of animating and exercising some office. What is looked for in these people is zealous action and witnessing to the words of God, to "oracles of God ... by the strength which God supplies" (i.e. to the energy which comes from God's Word: 2 Thess 3,1). Such action will be the sure sign of purity of intention on their part and of the manifest presence of the fatherhood of God. All glory will go in consequence to God alone for having made his presence in the community clear and credible. They should act in the same way as did Jesus Christ in exercising among us his word and his office (4,11).

What we have in this passage from Peter is a wonderful summing up of community co-responsibility, which is linked with the other text from Rom 12 which was quoted in connection with the fraternal and apostolic community (cf. Constitutions, Chap. V). It is a case of circulation in love, in which the specifically different charismata, and hence also the offices of authority, are not played down but used to strengthen love itself. In fact, christian love is a love which leads to growth, because it comes from God, and from him takes its consistency and authenticity.

\* \* \*

This chapter presents the third and final level of the organizational structure of our Society, the service of authority in the local community.

The reasons for the sequence of the different levels have already been explained in the introduction to the fourth part. There was no desire to belittle the values and more concrete and immediate character of the local community in comparison with those at provincial and world levels. In fact, the experience of living together in a fraternal and apostolic community under the guidance of a superior is something which forms part of the daily life of the confreres. But this aspect is dealt with explicitly elsewhere in the Constitutions, particularly in chap. V, which begins by describing at length the ideal of community life in the local communities (C 49-57), including the role of the rector, and concludes (in reverse order) with two articles on the wider provincial and world communities (C 58-59), which are more remote from daily experience but none the less real on that account. In reading the present chap. XIII what was said in chap. V should be kept in mind, as also the content of some other articles which will be mentioned in due course.

The layout of the chapter is analogous to that of the preceding one on structures at provincial level. It opens with an article on the local community as a distinct and canonically defined entity, and goes on to deal with the local superior, the local council and the assembly of the confreres.



And so the chapter contains the following sections:

1. *The local community (art. 175)*
2. *The rector*
  - his figure (*art. 176*)
  - his appointment and duration in office (*art. 177*)
3. *The local council*
  - nature and general duties (*art. 178*)
  - composition (*art. 179-180*)
  - cases in which its consent is needed (*art. 181*)
  - exceptional situations (*art. 182*)
  - the vice-rector (*art. 183*)
  - the economer (*art. 184*)
  - others holding local responsibility (*art. 185*)
4. *The assembly of the confreres (art. 186)*

## 1. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY (ART. 175)

Art. 175 on the local community, which introduces chap. XIII, has a double purpose:

*a.* to collect together items dealt with in other parts of the Constitutions, which define the charismatic reality of the salesian community:

- the expression "a common life in unity of spirit" sums up the whole of chap. V on the fraternal and apostolic community;
- the article recalls the common shared responsibility in carrying out the apostolic mission, which is entrusted in the first place to the community (C 44);

it recalls the authority of the rector, as a guide in pastoral discernment (C 44), as the centre of the fraternal community (C 55), and as the one responsible for making decisions after the common search for God's will (C 66). At the same time it takes up again the criteria concerning the exercise of the service of authority in our Society, described in the introductory chapter to the fourth part.

In this way the present article should be read in the light of what has been said already in the preceding chapters of the Constitutions.

*b.* in the context of the juridical structures, the article presents in particular the canonical entity of the community, with the constitutive elements laid down by the Code: "a religious community is to live in a lawfully constituted house, under the authority of a superior designated according to the norms of law".<sup>1</sup>

We may note that our own law distinguishes between the two terms "*community*" and "*house*": the term "*community*" refers to the group of confreres who live in the same house or residence, while the term "*house*" has a wider connotation and indicates the whole complex of confreres and material objects (property, works, church, buildings etc.). The religious "*house*" is by ecclesiastical right a public non-collegial juridical person.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of this canonical distinction can be understood the different uses of the two terms in our Rule: the term "*house*" is used when it is a matter of the whole complex, including personnel and material (cf. for example, the ordinary power of the provincial over all the houses: C 162), or when dealing with the administration of temporal goods (cf. the appropriate chapters in both Constitutions and Regulations); the term "*community*", on the other hand, is used when dealing with the relationships between persons for instance (cf. art. 186 on the assembly of the confreres).

According to our Constitutions,<sup>3</sup> the competent authority for the erection or suppression of a house is the Rector Major, who must have

<sup>1</sup> CIC, can. 608

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 634 §1

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also CIC, can. 609 §1

the consent of his council (C 132 §1,2), following a request by the provincial with the consent of the provincial council (C 163,5), and for the canonical erection the previous written consent of the Bishop of the diocese.<sup>4</sup>

Canon law (art. 132, §1,2 of the Constitutions says "in accordance with canon law") lays down other conditions as well,<sup>5</sup> among which are those "necessary for the members to lead their religious life in accordance with the purpose and spirit proper to the institute".<sup>6</sup> By this the Code emphasizes, as does our own art. 175, that it is not sufficient to set up a canonical entity, but all the spiritual reality of the religious community must be created.

Except for the case of a community dependent directly on the Rector Major, every local community forms part of a juridical circumscription which is normally a province or vice-province (cf. C 58 and 156-158), and depends on the respective major superior (C 162). The latter is also the competent authority for the assignment of confreres, by a precept of obedience, to a particular salesian house (R 150). The Regulations indicate that for each house the number of confreres shall normally be not less than six (R 150).

## 2. THE RECTOR (ART. 176-177)

For a group of persons to constitute a religious community there is necessary the presence of a superior, designated according to the norms of law (C 175 and can. 608).

Throughout all the time of renewal the importance was often emphasized of the participation and shared responsibility of the members

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 609 §1

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 610-612

<sup>6</sup> CIC, can. 610 §1, which says literally: "In establishing religious houses, the welfare of the Church and of the institute are to be kept in mind, and care must be taken to safeguard everything that is necessary for the members to lead their religious life in accordance with the purposes and spirit proper to the institute"

of a community (cf. C 123), but no doubt was ever cast on the traditional fact of religious life concerning the authority of the superior, and no proposal was ever made that there should be a collegial government of the community in an ordinary manner.<sup>7</sup> Our Constitutions do not contemplate the lack of a local superior, even by way of exception. The provincial can modify the ordinary structure of government of a community when particular circumstances require it (e.g. a reduced number of confreres), but "provided always that the figure of the rector is safeguarded" (C 182).

## 2.1 Duties of the Rector

The local superior, following the salesian tradition which goes back to the Founder takes the name in Italian of "*Direttore*". He has ordinary power of government within the domain of the house of which he is superior, both over the community and every part of it and over the individual members.<sup>8</sup> He can command in virtue of the vow of obedience (C 68) and has the right and duty of making the final decision as to what is to be done (C 66).

The various aspects of the figure and duties of the rector have been already mentioned at various points of the Rule, both in connection with the fraternal community (chap. V) and when speaking of the apostolic mission and religious obedience: he "represents Christ" among his brothers (C 55), he is the centre around which the community unites (*ibid.*), and the animator and guide of the pastoral mission of the community (C 44); he is the father and spiritual guide, who encourages and leads each confrere and the community in the seeking of God's will and in fidelity to the common vocation of each one (C 55, 66).

Art. 176 describes in particular the figure of the rector as the "*first in order of responsibility*" as regards the religious life of the community,

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Note of the CRIS, 2 February 1972, AAS 69, 1972, p. 393

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C 120 and CIC, can. 129, 131

its apostolic mission and the administration of its goods. It relates therefore precisely to the rector's task of "governing", and echoes the words of our Father Don Bosco: "The rector must command: he should know his own regulations well and also those of the others; he should know what they all must do, but everything stems from a single principle... There can be only one person with ultimate responsibility".<sup>9</sup>

What has been said of superiors at other levels is true also for the rector: his task is not exclusively one of governing; he *governs by animating and animates by governing*. The familiar twin concepts of animation and government enter at this level too. It should be noted that it was precisely at local level that the specific function of the superior was first described by the word "animation": the GC21 dealt at length with the rector as the "animator" of the community with a view to the education and evangelization of the young.<sup>10</sup> The function of the rector, said the GC21, makes one think of "the inner energy and activity of the soul, which gives life, harmony, growth and cohesion to all the parts of a living organism sharing in the life functions of the various members of the body".<sup>11</sup>

This is what the Constitutions have in effect already said, when presenting the rector in the context of the fraternal community: "His first task is to animate the community so that it may live faithful to the Constitutions and grow in unity" (C 55). In dealing with communal obedience too the Rule says: "The superior exercises his authority by listening to the confreres, encouraging all to make their contribution and promoting a union of wills in faith and charity" (C 66). We refer the reader to the commentary on art. 55, and also to that on art. 66 dealing with shared responsibility in obedience, which describes the whole process of communal research before the final decision is made by the superior.

<sup>9</sup> Words of Don Bosco to Superior Chapter, 4 July 1884: cf. MB XVII, 189. Don Albera referring to this aspect in the 'Rectors' Manual', wrote that "from the time of his appointment the rector becomes in the house the head to which everything should be referred, the centre and source of all vitality, the firm hand at the helm to prevent anyone going astray"

<sup>10</sup> Cf. GC21, 46-57

<sup>11</sup> GC21, 46

Two means should be noted in particular which the Constitutions indicate as being very valid for this animation: *the friendly talk* for personal dialogue, but which is nevertheless of concern to the whole community (cf. C 70, R 49); and *the assembly of the confreres* for communal dialogue, which involves each and every confrere (cf. C 186, R 184). To help the rector in his task, but also to enlighten the community on the figure of the rector, the GC21 asked that a "Rector's Manual" should be published, which would provide an ample commentary on the "harmonizing of spiritual leadership with religious authority".<sup>12</sup>

The corresponding articles of the Regulations contain some other indications for the rector to enable him to fulfil his animating function well: he is asked to be sure that he is present in the community and be available to the confreres (R 172), to make effective the participation of the confreres according to their personal abilities and talents, and to encourage fraternal meetings (R 173), to attend well to communal spiritual direction (R 175), to show concern for the individual confreres, especially the young ones, the old, the sick and those who may be in difficulty (R 176).<sup>13</sup>

In all this task of animation and government the rector is assisted, as we have seen for superiors at other levels, by a council.<sup>14</sup> Its composition and duties will be specified in art. 178-181.

It should be observed that in particular circumstances, e.g. in the case of the number of confreres being very small, the provincial can modify the internal structure of the community, and even dispense

<sup>12</sup> Cf. GC21, 61 d. The manual, published in 1982 with the title *The Salesian Rector: a ministry for the animation and governing of the local community*, has been revised and brought up to date after the approval of the Constitutions

<sup>13</sup> In the commentary on art. 53 reference was made to Don Bosco's concern for the sick. To the rectors he said: "I recommend to the rectors in a particular way that they see to it that nothing is wanting for those who are sick". Also in his confidential memoranda to rectors he wrote: "Be thrifty in everything, but make sure that the sick lack for nothing" (cf. BM X, 452). In general for the more needy confreres Don Bosco recommended: "Rectors should often reach out to those who need help so as to encourage them in their efforts to improve themselves, discover their personal needs and provide for them" (BM X, 1048)

<sup>14</sup> C 176; cf. CIC, can. 627

from the necessity of a local council (C 182), but in this case the rector must consult the provincial in cases in which the consent or opinion of the local council is required (R 181); i.e. the rector is bound to ask the provincial for his advice or consent (according to the nature of the case) before he can act validly.<sup>15</sup>

Finally the strict bond should be noted which unites rectors with the provincial. While the Regulations recommend the provincial to give special attention to his rectors (R 145), the rectors are asked to give the provincial clear and simple information about the progress of the community, in the awareness of belonging to the same provincial community.

## 2.2 Appointment of the rector and his duration in office

As for the provincial, so also for the rector the procedure of *appointment* has been confirmed, but with the innovation (introduced by the SGC and later codified in the text of the Constitutions) of a previous consultation among the confreres (C 77). The appointment is made by the provincial, who must have the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major; but this latter approval is necessary only in the case of a first appointment, and not in the case of confirmation in office for a second three-year period (cf. R 170).

The consultation is made among the confreres of the whole province, and not only among the members of the community concerned. Through it is realized the dialogue which is fundamental for proper discernment and for the exercise of shared responsibility; the superiors listen to the community so as to understand its needs for the fulfilment of the mission, and all the confreres take part by making their own contribution to indicate whom they consider most suitable in the Lord for the guidance of the community.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 127 §2

The practical details for the making of the consultation are to be decided by the provincial with his council, with due regard to any indications which may have been given by the provincial chapter. As for the appointment of provincial councillors, here too the rhythm of consultation could be every three years, i.e. by asking the confreres to indicate suitable persons for the office of rector as they fall due at the end of the three-year period.<sup>16</sup>

Art. 177 specifies two conditions that must be satisfied for a confrere to be appointed rector: that he be a priest (as has been already seen in the commentary on art. 4 and 121), and an adequate period of time spent in the Congregation after perpetual profession.<sup>17</sup>

The traditional *duration in office* has also been maintained: a mandate of three years which can be prolonged for a further three years in the same community (C 177). After this period the confrere shall "normally" cease from holding the office of rector for at least a year.<sup>18</sup> The confirmation of the rector in office for a third term remains possible as an exception, but in this case the provincial must once again seek the Rector Major's approval (cf. C 177, R 170).

### 3. THE LOCAL COUNCIL (ART. 178-185)

At the local level too the superior has his council.<sup>19</sup> We find this canonical disposition affirmed in art. 176, which speaks of the rector. It is repeated in art. 178 as a norm for every community, unless the provincial considers it opportune to make an exception in particular circumstances (C 182).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. AGC 312 (1985) p. 54-55. Here there are other useful guidelines, e.g. concerning voting forms and their counting and scrutiny, as well as the reserve to be maintained concerning results, which because of their nature cannot be made public

<sup>17</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 623

<sup>18</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 624 §2

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 627 §1



Art. 178 explains the general duty of the council: *to collaborate with the rector in animating and governing the community*. It is a task which concerns the whole field of the religious life and apostolic mission.

Everyone is aware of the importance of the council, which the whole tradition of religious life recognizes as the principal instrument at the superior's side in his role of animator and guide. As the name itself suggests, it belongs to the council to assist the rector by giving him "council" or advice, helping him in discernment; but in more general terms it assists the rector in whatever pertains to the exercise of his office, sharing in this way his responsibility.

From this point of view the essentially 'pastoral' importance of the council must be pointed out: more than an administrative organism, the council is a team which shares responsibility with the rector as regards the realization of the mission. To this end the council reflects on the community situation, studies appropriate directives for the different pastoral sectors, and feels directly committed and co-responsible for all the areas of activity.

For his part the rector is obliged to make use of this help<sup>20</sup>, and to listen to his council in all questions of importance (C 181; R 173). In some cases he must obtain the consent of the council if he is to act validly; these cases are listed in art. 181 of the Constitutions. At the present time however there are no explicit cases in our law where the 'opinion' of the council is needed for validity. In any case, the Regulations prescribe that the rector must convoke his council at least once a month (R 180).

It should be noticed that the rector, even though he convokes the council and presides over it, does not vote (cf. the comment on this point in connection with the general council). An exceptional case is that of admission to professions and sacred Orders (C 108). Here it is not the rector but the provincial who admits the candidates; nevertheless the rector with his council have previously to give their opinion, and in this case he votes together with his council; he may also explain his opinion to the provincial separately.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 627 §1

### 3.1 Composition of the local council

In the new Constitutions the composition of the local council has become much more flexible and adaptable to different practical needs. This elasticity was introduced deliberately by the SGC as a necessary application of the general criteria of subsidiarity and decentralization (cf. C 124).

In the first place the number of councillors is not rigidly fixed by our law, but it is said that its number must be "proportional to the number of confreres in the community and to the requirements of their activities" (C 178).

The Constitutions then distinguish between three categories of councillors (art. 179):

a. ex-officio members: *the vice-rector and the economer;*

b. a certain number of *confreres responsible for the principal sectors of the community's activity*. Here the SGC did not wish to prescribe and maintain at a universal level the figure and tasks of these confreres, as was the case previous to the postconciliar revision when certain of them belonged to the local council by right. Instead it has been left to the provincial chapter to define the roles and duties of those responsible for the principal sectors of the community's activities (C 185), so that the roles and structures within the community may correspond with the needs of situations which may differ to a very great extent from one province to another. The Constitutions then leave to the provincial and his council the faculty of deciding, after hearing the opinion of the community concerned, which of these shall form part of the local council.

c. possibly a certain number of *members elected annually by the assembly of the confreres*. This faculty is applied in local communities with numerous confreres, according to the judgement of the provincial who will decide on the number of confreres to be elected (C 180).

This composition of the council, with the possibility of representation of different sectors of activity and of election of members by the confreres, could lead to a certain heterogeneity which could in turn lead to difficulty in reaching a convergence on particular problems. Very fittingly art. 180 of the Regulations reminds the members of the council that they must "remember their solidarity as regards decisions taken, and that in any case they are obliged in conscience to have respect for persons and to be discreet regarding matters discussed".

It is the right and duty of the rector to inform the confreres about decisions of common interest (R 180; cf. C 123).

### **3.2 Appointment of councillors**

The appointment of the vice-rector and the economer belongs to the provincial. He does not need the consent of his council in this case but must first hear the opinion of the rector.

The appointment of those responsible for the principal sectors of the activities of the house, and hence implicitly their appointment as councillors, also belongs to the provincial (R 183).

To be appointed or elected a member of the local council it is necessary that the confrere be perpetually professed and no longer in initial formation (C 178). For the vice-rector it is also required that he be a priest: this follows from the fact he takes the place of the rector when the latter is absent or impeded, and can also act for him habitually in matters of ordinary government.

### **3.3 The vice-rector**

In the revision of our Constitutions the vicar of the superior has also been introduced by our own law at local level. Between his figure and those of the vicar general and the vice-provincial there is a certain analogy, in so far as the vice-rector is the first collaborator of the rector, whose action he extends and integrates in such a way as to form

one with him; he too possesses within the domain of the house ordinary vicarious power. Nevertheless he is not a "religious Ordinary": his vicarious power is in fact limited; it is habitual only "in matters which have been especially entrusted to him", while it becomes unlimited "in everything concerning the ordinary government" only if the rector is absent or impeded, as also in the case of the death of the rector, "until the provincial provides otherwise" (C 183).

Our own law also provides that, if the rector is seriously impeded, the vice-rector can substitute him as a member of the provincial chapter, with the previous approval of the provincial.

On the basis of the same criterion of subsidiarity and decentralization, which inspires all the norms concerning the structural organization of the local community, the assignment of any specific task to the vice-rector was avoided in the Rule. This was deliberately left to the initiative of superiors on the spot.

The Regulations nevertheless provide some general criteria in this regard, which serve to ensure for the figure of the vice-rector a proper habitual consistency (R 182). It is customary for him to have the responsibility for one of the principal sectors of the educative and pastoral activity of the community, with the proviso that his office should not ordinarily be combined with that of economer. The community must be informed of the habitual faculties that the rector has given to his vice-rector.

It should be noted that in the figure of the vice-rector, the Rule offers the rector the possibility of entrusting to him whatever would be an obstacle to him or take him away from his fundamental task as rector (cf. C 55, R 172).

### **3.4 The local economer**

At local level too the administration of temporal goods is assigned by our law to the responsibility of an economer in the first instance. He carries out his service in dependence on the rector with his council.

In chap. XIII of the general Regulations are found the concrete dispositions concerning the management of the goods of the house (R 198-202). Art. 184 of the Constitutions recommends in general that the economer should carry out his service in a spirit of charity and poverty.

#### 4. THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CONFRERES (ART. 186)

Before the SGC the Constitutions did not speak explicitly of an assembly, though they did in fact provide for an official meeting of the members of the community, but for the sole purpose of electing the delegate for the provincial chapter and his substitute.<sup>21</sup>

In the revision made following the guidelines of Vatican II, on the basis of the principle of participation and shared responsibility, there has been introduced into our own law the organism of the assembly of the confreres. "Our common vocation requires the responsible and effective participation of all the members in the life of the local community", says art. 123. As we have seen more than once, the expressions "life and action", "life and mission", indicate all our vocational identity. And in fact at various points the Constitutions emphasize that participation extends to all the essential aspects of our vocation (cf. C 3):

- the apostolic mission entrusted to the community ("the members are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility": C 44);
- the fraternal community: all the confreres together and each one individually are called to build communion between persons (C 49, 52);
- the practice of the evangelical counsels ("we seek the will of the Lord together in patient brotherly dialogue, with a deep awareness of shared responsibility": C 66).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Constitutions* 1966. art. 100

The assembly, which unites all the confreres to consider the "principal questions which concern the community's religious life and activities" (C 186), is a special occasion for participation. It is a suitable instrument for the coordination of the community's apostolic endeavours, the communion of persons, and the common seeking of God's will. It is a means of common discernment and verification of growth in fidelity to our vocation in the concrete circumstances of daily life.

The article of the Constitutions gives a clear indication of the competence of the assembly of the confreres:

*a.* It is an assembly with powers to elect: to it belongs the election of the delegate to the provincial chapter and his substitute, and the possible election of members of the local council (cf. C 181).

*b.* It is a consultative organ: the assembly cannot make decisions about the matters it deals with (as a chapter can), but its general task is to examine, analyse and study the principal questions, be informed about them and discuss them, to discern and as far as possible reach a convergence of views, of lines of action, of programmes and verification. Although it does not have the right to make decisions, its role is indispensable as a responsible and effective participation in the government of the community. If it functions well it is a preparation for the decisions of the superior, which result from the common research (cf. C 66).

Art. 184 of the Regulations further specifies the tasks and duties of the assembly by giving details concerning the competence assigned by the Constitutions; they are listed as follows:

- to seek means or lines of action for fostering religious and apostolic life, or in other words a fuller realization of our vocation;
- to examine the more important problems that can surface in a community;
- to draw up a programme each year covering the community life, pastoral and educative activities, and ongoing formation and to review this programme at suitable fixed periods (cf. also R 174);

— to participate in the elaboration and verification of the community's pastoral and educative project (cf. R 4);

— to be informed and reflect on the financial situation of the house; this can be done, for example, when the balance sheet is drawn up, about which the economer is to interest the whole community (cf. R 202); here too enters the verification of communal poverty referred to in art. 65 of the Regulations.

The assembly itself is to decide on the frequency of its meetings. The minimum laid down by the Regulations is at least three times a year; this corresponds to the above-mentioned tasks, in particular to the programming at the beginning of the year, the revision towards the end of the year, and the reflection on the financial situation and observance of communal poverty when the balance sheet is presented.

From the manner in which the structures are set up at the level of the local community, it is clear that the confreres are invited to deepen their sense of shared responsibility, to learn to dialogue and contribute to the meetings in fraternal fashion, and to augment the sense of the common good and union between the members of the community. The structures must offer favourable conditions for responsible participation, but the confreres themselves are asked to do their utmost to put them into practice and render them efficacious.

*Let us pray for our community,  
that in fidelity to Don Bosco and his spirit,  
and in the dedication of all its members to apostolic work  
it may respond generously to the mission entrusted to it  
for the benefit of the young and the poor.*

*That our community may live,  
in a family spirit and reciprocal self-donation,  
a life of zeal and charity  
which will render clearer and more convincing  
its gospel witness,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the rector of our community:  
may the Lord assist him and give him  
the light of his Spirit,  
so that he may render incarnate among us  
the presence and fatherliness of Don Bosco,  
and guide the community  
in seeking and fulfilling the Father's will,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the members of the community council,  
that with salesian apostolic discernment  
they may be able to organize and direct the work of all,  
for a more living and effective presence  
among those to whom we have been sent,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For the younger confreres that they may develop,  
and for the old and sick confreres,  
that they may find in the community  
the support they need,  
in an atmosphere of brotherhood and sincere friendship,  
Lord, hear our prayer.*



## CHAPTER XIV

### ADMINISTRATION OF TEMPORAL GOODS

*"Be content with what you have; for God has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13,5,16).*

All through the Bible worldly goods are considered under three aspects: they are recognized as gifts of God and therefore good in themselves; vigilance must be shown in their regard lest they become idols; and they are to be shared with others, and especially with the poor. In the New Testament in particular Jesus lays down a radical distinction between God and mammon (Mt 6,24) and insists strongly on their use in almsgiving.

In the context of Heb 13,1-17 this motif emerges in the context of a catechism of community life. But the same teaching also forms part of a new and much deeper line of thought which pervades the whole Letter, and especially the passage that heads this chapter: Jesus' teaching on authentic worship. What practical effect does the Lord's teaching have on the life of the community? As elsewhere in the New Testament the new kind of worship implies brotherly love (13,1), a love which in certain circumstances involves the use of temporal goods: freedom from greed, the living of a simple life with trust in God, whose property we are (13,5). Knowing what has been said in the preceding chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews, we may quite reasonably say that the concrete model being offered is not that of an enlightened stoic, but the generous love shown by Jesus in the unlimited offering of himself (cf. 10,5-10; 12,2).

The same thought appears again towards the end of the quotation in terms more directly linked with worship. After noting once again the total oblation of Christ (13,10-13), the text recalls that christian worship is performed in two ways: through the sacrifice of praise, i.e. the making of offerings and thanksgiving to God, to be carried out continually as we make our way to our future home (13,14-15); and as a secondary act endorsing the first through the practical exercise of charity, expressed in giving help to those in need (13,16).

"Such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb 13,16). Even something so apparently down to earth as the administration of temporal goods is enveloped by the most lofty inspiration, and for this reason such a task is no insignificant expression of the liturgy of life.

We were not caught unawares by the prescription of the Code of Canon Law: "Each institute is to establish suitable norms for the use and administration of goods, so that the poverty proper to the institute may be fostered, defended and expressed".<sup>1</sup>

The general lines for the administration of goods, as will be seen from an examination of the individual articles, had already been made clear by Don Bosco from the very first drafts of the Constitutions. They enter into the concept of poverty which our Father wanted to be one of the characteristics of his Congregation.<sup>2</sup> They are key elements, even though for obvious reasons they are expressed in a different form in the renewed text of the Constitutions.

A good idea of the importance Don Bosco attached to the careful administration of temporal goods can be gleaned from what he wrote in his spiritual testament concerning the election of the new Rector Major after his death: "After attending to these most important duties" (i.e. to thank the electors for their trust, to inform the Holy Father of the election, to inform the confreres and the F.M.A., and to write a letter to cooperators and benefactors), "let the new Rector Major make every effort to get to know the exact financial state of the Congregation".<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco had his feet firmly on the ground!

Whatever Don Bosco was able to do he always attributed to the goodness of divine providence and the assistance of Mary Help of Christians. But he spared no effort in seeking the necessary means for his work. How much labour and perspiration went into his continual appeals to public and private charity: requests, letters, lotteries, journeys, etc. He undertook even humiliating tasks on account of his boys. And at the end he said: "What we have is not ours; it belongs to the poor; woe to us if we do not use it well".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 635 §2

<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco once said: "Poverty is our asset; it is God's blessing! We should even ask the Lord to keep us in voluntary poverty" (BM VI, 177). On the importance of poverty for the future of the Society, cf. in particular MB XVII, 272

<sup>3</sup> MB XVII, 260; cf. also "Spiritual writings of Don Bosco", English edition (New Rochelle), p. 351-352

<sup>4</sup> BM V, 450; cf. C 79

And use it well he did, not least because of his natural instincts gained in a peasant family. He had the careful eye of a cautious administrator. He not only kept a check on things from day to day and had a list of the dates when bills were due for payment, but he carefully preserved every document, from deeds of ownership, lease and use of property, public and private agreements, official letters etc. right down to bills from the baker!<sup>5</sup>

Can we say then that Don Bosco is a point of reference for us also in the matter of regular and thrifty administration? Certainly we can — but always in accordance with his own way of doing things. An example will be sufficient to show us what was always in the forefront of his mind, something more important than evident economic problems.

— "Take the invoices and pay the bills", said Don Bosco.

— "We need to keep something back for meeting unforeseen eventualities", replied Don Rua.

— "No. The Lord will provide".

— "The Lord has already worked miracles for us, but there is a big bill to be paid in a few days time and then..."

— "The Lord will provide again when that happens. Earmarking money for future needs closes the door to Divine Providence".<sup>6</sup>

And it is in this salesian perspective that we now examine the four articles (187-190) of chap. XIV which deal with the "Administration of temporal goods".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 8

<sup>6</sup> BM XIV, 81

## ART. 187

The Salesian Society may acquire, possess, administer and alienate temporal goods. This is true for the Congregation as a whole, for individual provinces and for each house. Such goods should not be held in the name of an individual person, and should be retained only to the extent that they are directly useful for our works.

Acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income, and every other kind of interest-bearing investment is forbidden, except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions.

### 1. Capacity of acquiring, possessing, administering and alienating temporal goods

The mission of the Church is supernatural but is inserted in human structures, and for its realization temporal means are necessary.<sup>1</sup> To attain its proper objectives it has the inherent right to possess temporal goods, independently of any secular power.<sup>2</sup>

The objectives for which the Church claims its rights over temporal goods are:

- the regulation of divine worship;
- the provision of fitting support for the clergy;
- the carrying out of works of the sacred apostolate and of charity, especially for the needy.<sup>3</sup>

The strict connection needs to be emphasized between the right to temporal goods and the reasons (i.e. the purposes) for which the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. GS 76: "There are close links between the things of earth and those things in man's condition which transcend the world, and the Church uses temporal realities as often as its mission requires it"

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1254

<sup>3</sup> Cf. PO 17; CIC, can. 1254 §2

Church claims this right, as an indication that there are no other reasons why the Church should possess temporal goods.

If the Church claims that the possession and use of material goods is necessary for the attainment of her spiritual purposes, the Congregation does likewise. It is able to do so because it is a "public juridical person" in the Church, a living part of it.<sup>4</sup> But it can do it only in accordance with canon law,<sup>5</sup> i.e. because it participates in the mission of the Church, is submissive to its laws, acts in its spirit, in communion with and under the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Congregation, in order to live, act, organize itself, begin and continue apostolic activities, must have economic resources.<sup>6</sup> For us therefore poverty does not consist in not possessing, but in being able to harmonize the commitment to our mission with the economical requirements involved. In this field too we have a prophetic role to play (cf. C 77). In all our activities we look upon temporal goods as means for attaining the ends for which the Society was founded. In this connection the SGC warns: "The structures must be at the service of the community and of the individual members so that they may be able to fulfil faithfully their vocations".<sup>7</sup>

It can happen that an individual may become attached to such goods, misuse them, be deceived by their complex mechanism, or waste them through lack of ability or preparation, or through neglect or deliberate abuse. It will be a good thing to remind those responsible for financial management that in addition to taking scrupulous care to keep their administration in order, they should remember that they are acting as custodians of the goods of the Church and must not allow any arbitrary or personal use of them.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 116, 1258, 1259

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1255

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SGC, 726

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SGC, 706

<sup>8</sup> Cf. SGC, 726

2. **This is true for the Congregation as a whole, for individual provinces and for each house**

It is interesting to note how from the beginnings (it is already in the text of the Constitutions of 1864, submitted with a view to obtaining the "decretum laudis") there occurs the idea that every house can possess goods; and how Don Rua cleverly extricated himself from a dispute with the tax officials by showing that "our property is no longer in the name of the Oratory... but of individuals who are joint owners of the land and buildings where our institutes are situated".<sup>9</sup>

The Constitutions emphasize: "Such goods should not be held in the name of an individual person", and the reason is obvious! As well as giving us secure and unchallenged ownership, this norm takes from individuals any temptation to independence or to act as an owner. Exceptions to this rule are very rare, and are dictated exclusively by the rigidity of civil laws in some countries which deny to private or religious associations the right to own property.

3. **"They should be retained only to the extent that they are directly useful for our works"; hence "acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income is forbidden"**

Art. 59 of the Regulations says the same thing but with greater force and clarity: "The Society should not retain possession of any real estate apart from its houses and the property needed for its work".

The Biographical Memoirs tell us that Don Bosco had made it a rule for his followers that "since we depend on God's daily providence, our Society shall never hold stock or real estate beyond its houses and their dependencies".<sup>10</sup> And to Mgr Cagliero Don Bosco wrote on 6 August 1885: "Recommend to everyone to avoid building or the ac-

<sup>9</sup> D. RUA, Letter of 31.12.1891, *Circular letters*, p. 81

<sup>10</sup> BM VIII, 388

quiring of property which is not strictly necessary for our use. Never buy anything so as to sell it again, neither territory or dwellings, for the purpose of making financial profit".<sup>11</sup>

Whenever Don Bosco received something as a beneficiary under someone's will, "he used to sell the property and convert it into cash, of which only a tiny part went into the bank; the greater part went at once into building programmes, the defraying of the costs of maintaining his institutes and young pupils, and in obtaining equipment for the workshops in the schools of arts and trades".<sup>12</sup>

In his "spiritual testament" in the part dedicated to the "Superior Chapter", our Founder laid down the following principle, which he considered vital for the Congregation and which he described as one of the "two things of the greatest importance": "It must be considered an unvarying principle that we do not keep any real estate except for our houses and whatever goes with them that is necessary for the health and well-being of the confreres and pupils. The keeping of property for the purpose of making money is an insult to Divine Providence which always comes to our aid in a wonderful and I would even say almost miraculous way". He came back again on the same point at the end of his "testament" when, evidently concerned about the future of the Congregation and as though to emphasize the more important points that must not be forgotten after his death, he wrote again: "let no real estate be kept, apart from the houses we need".<sup>13</sup>

Fr Ricaldone made the following comment on this phrase: "He (Don Bosco) considered it to be a real offence against Divine Providence to own houses, estates and property of any sort. If we rid ourselves of such things and apply their value to doing good to souls, we shall gain for ourselves and our works abundant new blessings. If, on the contrary, God sees that instead of relying entirely on him we place our faith in the revenues and interest produced by investments and real estate, he will leave us to the mercy of our miserable resources which,

<sup>11</sup> MB XVII, 626-627

<sup>12</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, LAS Rome 1980, p. 157

<sup>13</sup> MB XVII, 273

since they are only human, lack solidity and lasting security. This complete trust in a loving providence, this total and generous detachment from earthly things, have been the reason and the cause of the marvellous expansive force of salesian work and constitute our richest endowment".<sup>14</sup>

**4. "Every other kind of (permanent) interest-bearing investment is forbidden, except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions"**

The emphasis here is on the adjective "permanent", which was unfortunately omitted in the English translation. We must get rid of any idea that the salesian can live or find Providence by permanently investing money in any interest-bearing way, i.e. in a stable, fixed and perpetual or long-term manner!

It is quite a different matter to keep money temporarily in the bank and make use of the interest it gains. The primary reason for putting it in the bank in a current account is security and the facility for carrying out financial operations, even though the account may gain interest. But the primary concern is not, and should never be, to keep the money there untouched, so that it will gain more and more interest!

This holds good for sums of money already needed for work that has been programmed or kept in reserve for purposes foreseen over the next few years at the most. It should be noted too that in short or medium-term investments in securities, there should never be any idea or semblance of speculation, and risk or imprudence should be avoided.

When you think seriously about the matter, it would seem almost impossible that in a well managed salesian house there should be any surplus money for investment. There is always the maintenance of the work to be attended to, and always a pressing need for the means necessary for it to attain its objectives. But if in fact there does happen

<sup>14</sup> D. RICARDONE, *Poverty*, ASC 82 (1937), p. 40



to be some money left over, it should be given to the provincial (cf. R 197) or to the Church or to the poor.<sup>15</sup> It is certainly not meant to be saved up or capitalized.

Still less can this be done with whatever comes to us for charitable purposes! The only exceptions allowable are those foreseen in the following art. 188,4, which must always be submitted for the appraisal and "authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council".

The GC21 for greater clarity deliberately made no mention in this present article of the contents of art. 188,4 so as to emphasize that temporal goods are kept in the Congregation only to the extent in which they are directly useful for educative and pastoral activity, excluding every kind of interest-bearing investment; and because the cases expressed there of "student burses, legacies for Masses, life annuities and charitable foundations", are matters of true economic operations involving extraordinary administration with burdens attached, and hence are subject to the normal need for authorization.<sup>16</sup> The GC22, in the definitive revision of the Constitutions, added here the phrase: "except in the cases referred to in art. 188 of the Constitutions", solely for the purpose of avoiding an apparent contradiction with the following article, but by so doing has also emphasized the need for proper authorization for the cases contemplated by art. 188,4.

Personal and community discernment on art. 187 could usefully concentrate on the following two aspects:

1) See whether the structures are at the service of the community and of the individual members, so as to help them to fulfil their vocations faithfully.<sup>17</sup>

There are five guidelines which will guarantee the attainment of this objective:

<sup>15</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 640

<sup>16</sup> Cf. GC21, 416-418

<sup>17</sup> SGC, 706

- a proper relationship between a sound administration and religious poverty;
- the priority of institutional aims over material goods;
- the awareness of being custodians of the goods of the Church;
- the functional relationship between witness and temporal goods;
- financial solidarity among all the works of the province so as to help those in greater need, and to meet the cost of extraordinary works and acquisitions programmed by the provincial chapter and/or provincial council.

2) Avoid any counter-witness to poverty in the possession and use of property, keeping in mind the circumstances of the local neighbourhood, and checking whether in the structures we are really moved by criteria of simplicity and functionality (cf. C 77).

Mamma Margaret said to her son on her deathbed: "Do not seek pomp or splendour in your work. Seek only the glory of God and let the foundation of your work be true poverty".<sup>18</sup> Don Bosco, in his "Spiritual Testament" from which we have already quoted, recommended to the Superior Chapter that "great care be taken when authorizing new building work or repairs to houses that any suggestion of extravagance, grandeur or panache be avoided". And he concluded: "When the desire for ease and comfort begins to appear among us as regards our houses, our rooms or ourselves, from that moment our Congregation will begin to decline".<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> BM V, 371

<sup>19</sup> MB XVII, 258

*Lord our God,  
free us from the stupidity of men of this world,  
who accumulate goods with the sole thought  
of enjoying them in this life;  
and grant that the example and exhortations of Don Bosco  
may prompt us to place all our trust  
in the Providence "which has always come to our aid  
in a wonderful and almost miraculous way".*

## ART. 188

The authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council is needed for:

1. acquiring, alienating, exchanging, mortgaging or renting real estate;
2. contracting loans with or without mortgage;
3. accepting inheritances, bequests or donations to which obligations are attached; (when no obligation is attached it is sufficient merely to notify the Rector Major);
4. establishing annuities, student burses, Mass obligations, special or charitable foundations;
5. constructing new buildings, demolishing existing ones or making major alterations.

When such authorization is applied for either at the provincial or local level, adequate documentation must be submitted together with the opinion of the provincial and his council, and also that of the rector and his council when a local house is concerned.

The article makes it clear that certain important financial operations which increase or diminish the patrimony of the Congregation are subject to control, in the sense that authorization is necessary before the operations can take place.

This throws further light on the fundamental principle that in the Congregation no one can act as a sole proprietor but that we all, according to our different degrees of competence, are administrators of goods that do not belong to us. It may be a good thing to repeat once again, to hammer the point home, that our goods belong to the juridical person which has lawfully acquired them (i.e. the Congregation), but fall under the supreme authority of the Supreme Pontiff because they are ecclesiastical goods and hence regulated by the norms of canon law and of our own Constitutions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1256-1257

Now our Constitutions say very clearly that for the financial operations referred to in art. 188 *"the authorization of the Rector Major with the consent of his council is needed"*.

The five points listed in the article are clear and easily understood. They do not call for detailed explanation. The only comment necessary concerns a point that the members of the GC22 decided should be added to point 3. They distinguished between inheritances, bequests or donations to which obligations are attached, and those free of any such obligations. The first need the usual authorization; for the second it is sufficient to inform the Rector Major. With this slight addition it was possible to meet the requirement expressed in can. 1267,2, which says that offerings made for the Church's works cannot be refused except for a just reason, and also make the desirable provision that the Rector Major and his council be always aware of significant additions to the Congregation's patrimony.

Requests for authorizations have to be accompanied by "adequate documentation" which the provincial and his council, and when the case so requires also the rector and his council, must send in accompanied by their own opinion. In practice this documentation comprises:

1. a formal request from the provincial with the opinion referred to above, for the purpose of completing and explaining the content of the various accompanying documents;
2. an extract from the minutes of the provincial council indicating the opinion of all the council members; if the request concerns a house, the same is required from the council of the local community concerned;
3. any other documents which may make the request more clear.

In addition, in the case of constructional work an estimate of the cost must be submitted, together with an explanation of how the project will be financed; if it exists, a technical report should also be included with constructional details, at least in outline.

If real estate is to be purchased, the cost must be stated together with the means by which it will be met and by whom. Complete documentation also calls for detailed blueprints and an indication of the house or organization making the purchase.

In the case of the sale or donation of goods, a precise statement is required of the goods being sold or given away and their estimated value; the use to be made of the money that will be received must also be clearly stated.

When it is a question of short or long-term loans or bank credits, the following must be stated: the amount involved, the rate of interest, the form of repayment and the time stipulated, property mortgaged to guarantee the loan, how the loan will be serviced.

It should not be thought that all this is a matter of so much red tape and a tribute to the bureaucracy which is the guardian angel of modern society. We come back rather to that basic principle that we are not the owners and masters of the goods of the Society, but only careful and faithful administrators.

In the draft of the Constitutions made in 1864 Don Bosco had expressed all this in a significant way: "every house may possess and administer goods ... but always within limits fixed by the Superior General". Later on he insisted: "the rector has no power to buy or sell real estate without the consent of the Rector Major", to which he added in the text of 1875: "nor to construct new buildings, nor to demolish those already in existence, nor to make innovations of any importance".<sup>2</sup>

*Lord our God,  
grant that in our dealings  
with those responsible for financial matters,  
we may act with delicacy of conscience,  
without concealment or deception,  
not keeping back what is due to others;  
in the certainty that  
sincerity and clarity in worldly affairs  
is a reflection of our awareness  
of being attentive and faithful servants.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni* 1864, XII, 4, 12; *Costituzioni* 1875, X, 12 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 160, 165)

With regard to all the operations referred to in article 188, it belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his council, after hearing the opinion of the provincials with their respective councils and in the light of relevant decisions of the Apostolic See, to determine the financial limits within which each provincial with the consent of his council is competent to grant authorizations by an analogous procedure.

In the case of operations which exceed the amount laid down by the Apostolic See, or of things donated to the Church as the result of a vow, or objects which are precious by reason of their artistic or historical value,<sup>1</sup> the permission of the Apostolic See itself is required.

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 638,3

This article completes the preceding one, by stating to whom it belongs to lay down the limits for the operations spoken of in art. 188: the competent authority is the Rector Major with his council, who will however keep in mind the indications and norms given in this regard by the Apostolic See.

Speaking at this point of authorization (or "nulla osta", as it is known in Italian), we may draw attention to the duty of "rendering an account" which is repeatedly emphasized in our own law. The two aspects are closely connected: the fact of dependence because of the need for authorization, or the fact that limits have to be imposed, mean that I have to give an account of my administration in respect of ecclesiastical and civil laws. All of us in the Congregation, at one level or another, have to give an account of the goods entrusted to us. The Code of Canon Law reminds us that we have to do this at the times and in the manner laid down.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason the general Regulations include several norms which relate to this point<sup>2</sup>. It has been like that since the early days of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 636 §2

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R 56, 65, 192, 196, 202

Congregation: as early as 1864 the constitutional text reminded the confreres that they should be always ready "at any moment to render an account to God and their superior of their own administration".<sup>3</sup>

No one should think that to ask for an account implies a lack of trust and confidence in the one who must give it. It does not indicate any distrust of the person concerned; as the words of art. 56 of the Regulations show, there is a lot of trust implicit in the receipt of money by the members "for small individual needs" and which it is assumed that they will use "with a sense of responsibility". The conclusion of the article was only to be expected: "and (they will) give an account to the superior", and this for the obvious reason that "everything must be placed among the common goods". Still less should the rendering of an account be considered superfluous at community level. The importance of the financial report — an obvious requirement which is taken for granted in every administration at a civil and economic level — has for us an extra motive in the appraisal that has to be made in connection with our institutional objectives, and in the witness to poverty and charity asked of us by the Church.<sup>4</sup>

It is not out of place either, in this context, to recall the observance required in respect of civil, social and fiscal laws, which is in a certain sense an open financial report to the civil community (e.g. laws concerning the declaration of income, work contracts, social insurance", etc.). If we are trying to educate youngsters to be "upright citizens", we must not fail to set the example ourselves!

A final suggestion is offered us by the SGC:<sup>5</sup> administration and economy are the task of the whole community, i.e. all the confreres should feel truly responsible for and involved in the economic running of the house. Because of this the means of community sharing in the administration must be developed (cf. R 184, 202).

We must foster in ourselves a proper evaluation of the economic aspects both within our community and in the wider social environment in which we live.

<sup>3</sup> *Costituzioni* 1864, XII, 6 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 162)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 640; R 65

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SGC, 615



*Lord my God,  
when I am asked here on earth  
to give an account of my stewardship,  
grant that I may be able to respond  
with the openess you will one day demand of me  
when I come before you.*

## ART. 190

All temporal goods are administered respectively by the economer general and by provincial and local economers, under the direction and control of the appropriate superiors and councils, in conformity with canonical dispositions, in accordance with the Constitutions and general Regulations, and in compliance with the laws of each country.

The article refers to those members to whom is entrusted the responsibility of taking care of the administration of temporal goods in agreement with the superior: the economer at various levels, whose office is a stable one contemplated by the Constitutions; at world and local levels he was at one time called the "prefect".<sup>1</sup>

Here we have another practical example of the decentralization called for by art. 124 of the Constitutions. The corresponding articles of the Regulations then go on to express in greater detail the tasks at the different levels: art. 192 for the economer general at the level of the general council; art. 193 for the provincial economer in the province; and art. 198 for the local economer in the individual house. The adverb "respectively" clarifies, if need be, that each one administers temporal goods only at his own particular level.

The importance of the task involved calls for:

- the selection and preparation of suitable personnel;
- the setting up of an office which will be methodical and efficient, with everything exact and nothing overlooked, where everything is done in accordance with the norms of canon law, our own Constitutions and Regulations, and the civil law of the country concerned;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, IX, 10-14 ("Prefect" general), and X, 14-15 (local "prefect") (cf. F. MOTTO p. 151-153; 167)

- direction and supervision on the part of the respective superiors and councils, not for inquisitorial purposes but in the role of helpful collaborators, especially in adopting an economic policy which will ensure a proper relationship between temporal goods and our constitutional objectives;
- the possibility of occasional professional assistance by experts in various sectors of the economic, financial, taxation and insurance fields (cf. R 185);
- the setting up of consultant bodies of confreres to give guidelines and advice in the various financial and administrative sectors (cf. R 185);
- the formulation by provincial chapters of detailed norms for administration (R 190).

Scrupulous and prudent care to provide a sound administration not only ensures a proper evaluation of goods for the service of man, but is also a guarantee for the observance of individual and collective poverty; it therefore becomes a means for a clearer witness of poverty.

In the economist, to whom is entrusted administrative responsibility in a special way, we have a characteristic figure of the salesian house, whose traditional roots are found in Don Bosco and Don Rua, true models of administrators who were wise from a human point of view and endowed with solid faith in divine providence.

On the one hand, the salesian economist must display qualities and attitudes which make him professionally competent:

- an up to date knowledge of the laws which concern the economic sector in its various aspects: book-keeping, financial principles, taxation, etc.;
- diligence, order and comprehensiveness in economic operations like keeping registers, filing documents, preparing financial reports;
- prudence in making decisions, which must always be made in agreement with the rector and his council;
- integrity as regards social prescriptions and in fulfilling the requirements of both ecclesiastical and civil law;

— the ability to deal with other people, both inside and outside the community.<sup>2</sup>

But above and beyond these human and professional qualities, the economer must appear in the salesian house as the one who, in a family spirit, helps the confreres and the community as a whole to live their vocation in fidelity to the Rule, and in a proper relationship with worldly goods and with the means necessary for educative and pastoral work. One with the rector, he is the guardian of the spirit of poverty that Don Bosco wanted to find in his family, a spirit based on sound economy and trust in providence, which accepts the means we need for our work and administers them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others (C 77).<sup>3</sup>

It may be well to recall yet again that what we administer is not ours. As we have said before they are goods of the Church! We cannot permit any arbitrary or personal use of them. Neither must we forget that what we have in our hands is the fruit of the work of the confreres and a tangible sign of that providence which, through their generosity and sacrifices (sometimes beyond all calculation), enables us to carry on our work.<sup>4</sup>

We end by noting that the taking on of administrative tasks is a true service, always laborious and tiring and sometimes unrewarding and little appreciated. Our confreres therefore, who sacrifice their time and strength in a demanding work to create for the community the conditions needed for a more efficient pastoral work, deserve all our encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. RICCERI, *Our poverty today*, ASC 253 (1968), p. 46 ff.; cf. also on this theme *The Salesian Rector* (1986), Appendix

<sup>3</sup> On the figure of the salesian economer, cf. also D. PILLA, *Religious basis in economic and administrative activity of the salesian*, in ASC 300, p. 47-51

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, 726

*Let us pray for our confreres  
who have been called by obedience to the delicate task  
of administering the material goods of the community,  
that as they carry out for us and among us  
the hidden and sacrificing work  
performed by St Joseph in the Holy Family,  
they may be given through his intercession  
the support of the Father's Providence.*

*That our ecomers may be strengthened  
by the collaboration and gratitude of the confreres,  
and so be encouraged to work  
as ministers of Divine Providence,  
we pray to the Lord.*

*That our ecomers and their collaborators  
may be able to link a spirit of evangelical poverty  
with a brotherly and solicitous concern  
for the needs of their confreres and the young,  
and above all for those who require  
special care and attention,  
we pray to the Lord.*

*Lord our God, give to our ecomers  
the shrewd business capacity of the wise administrator,  
that they may be able to induce trust in the confreres,  
arouse the charity of benefactors and friends,  
and bring down divine blessings on our Society.*

## CONCLUSION

*"I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart" (Ps 119,32).*

The Constitutions come to an end. They have set our Rule of life as a process of growth "into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4,15; C chap. VIII), and it is fitting and efficacious that the final biblical text should remain open. We recognize and acknowledge that for us the articles of the Constitutions are a grace of God to be numbered among his "commandments", and we affirm that they signpost the path we want to follow. Behind this there is a profound and substantial reason which we have been gradually discovering: the presence of a mysterious other Person in intimate contact with us, who "gives freedom" to our heart.

This whole line of thought finds in Psalm 119, a hymn and meditation in honour of the Law of the Lord, as indeed in the whole Bible a solid foundation: the law of God is the way he traces out and shows to man. It is first and foremost the great plan of salvation he has established for the world, in which the indications of his grace (God's powerful interventions) and his moral commands are inseparably woven together. A man will follow the right path in life if it coincides with the one God has marked out, and hence he will follow it sincerely and willingly in loving fidelity to the "law" of the Lord.

The word "run" indicates the great yearning and willingness of the pilgrim who is prompted by the thought of the goal at which he is aiming ("let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith", Heb 12,1-2). To linger on the way, or worse still "to look back" means to be "unfit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9,62).

To *give freedom to the heart* means in Biblical terms to fill it with courage and consolation (Ps 25,17; Is. 60,5). St Augustine notes: "We must not allow ourselves to be hemmed in by fear of punishment, but open ourselves in the joy and love of righteousness", and this all the more because God has written his law in our hearts (Jer 31,33), and the Spirit gently guides our steps in the law's fulfilment.

\* \* \*

The text of the Constitutions written by the Founder and approved by the Apostolic See contained a concluding article, placed immediately after the formula of the vows. It recalled the personal responsibility for the observance of the Rule, and at the same time provided an implicit stimulus to fidelity to the promise made before God and the Church.<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion remained practically unaltered right down to the edition of 1966.<sup>2</sup>

The SGC, in revising the text according to the criteria given by Vatican II, preserved the substance of the earlier text but widened its perspective, basing the faithful observance of the Rule on its deep ecclesial and salesian significance. Art. 200 of the Constitutions approved "ad experimentum" by the SGC, referring back to the Foreword, was an invitation to find in the text of the Rule "the spiritual riches of our tradition" as a true evangelical way of life which the Church, by its approval, had authenticated for the growth of every member and of the whole Society according to the spirit of the Founder.<sup>3</sup>

The GC22 made its own the thought of the SGC and decided to broaden the content of the "conclusion", after receiving various requests to do so from provincial chapters and individual confreres.<sup>4</sup>

As a result the Conclusion is now made up of six articles which, in addition to certain general observations about our particular law, present some global considerations on the sense of the Constitutions and the responsibility of observing them, emphasizing especially the values of fidelity and perseverance "as a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant that the Lord has made with us" (C 195).

Details of the concluding part are as follows:

— a first article (C 191) lists all the items that go with the Constitutions to form the "particular law" which regulates the life and activity

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, F. MOTTO, p. 209

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1966*, art. 200

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, art. 200

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Schemi precapitolari*, II, p. 293-297

of our Society; this article corresponds substantially to art. 123 of the Constitutions of 1972;

- two articles (*C 192, 193*) provide a general description of the constitutional text from both a charismatic and juridical point of view; they also deal with the question of the authentic interpretation of the Constitutions and the moral obligations that derive from their profession and approval by the Church;
- *art. 194* deals with the possible separation of a confrere from the Society; this is a delicate matter which touches the conscience of the individual and our communal responsibility; appropriately it has been placed in a context which treats of commitment and fidelity;
- *art. 195* is a stimulus to fidelity and perseverance, founded entirely on God's fidelity and sustained by love for the young; it is at the same time an incentive to gratitude for the gifts offered us by salesian life which have been described in the constitutional text. This article corresponds to art. 119 in the text of 1972, and finds a fitting place in the concluding section;
- finally the text closes with an article (*C 196*), deeply spiritual in tone, which serves as a worthy crowning synthesis of the whole. It reproduces in large part the content of the Foreword to the previous edition (1972), which finds here a very meaningful location. In it Jesus Christ is proclaimed as our supreme living Rule, Mary our guide, Don Bosco our model, and the Constitutions "*a way that leads to Love*".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312 (1985), p. 27



## ART. 191 THE PARTICULAR LAW OF OUR SOCIETY

The life and activity of communities and confreres are regulated by the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Society.

The latter is expressed in the Constitutions, which represent our basic code, the general Regulations, the deliberations of the general chapter, the general and provincial directories, and in other decisions made by competent authorities.

This article, essentially juridical in character, sets the "*particular law*" of the Salesian Society into the background of the universal law of the Church, and at the same time provides a synthesis of the sources of our law.

It must be remembered in the first place that the new Code of Canon Law, while providing a more general legislation, respects the principle of decentralization. One of the criteria underlying the reforms of the laws concerning consecrated life was, in fact, that of leaving to the different institutes the possibility of making more elastic norms, adapted to their needs and the style of life corresponding to their charismata. For this reason the Code frequently says that as regards certain aspects of their life the institutes themselves can and must lay down their own legislation.

And so the first paragraph of the article indicates the kinds of norms, in order of priority, which regulate the life and activity of communities and confreres.

They are:

- *the norms of the universal law*, emanating from the Apostolic See and contained mainly in the Code of Canon Law;
- *the norms of particular law* promulgated by the diocesan Bishop in matters in which even Religious are subject to him. For example, can. 678 states: "In matters concerning the care of souls, the

public exercise of divine worship and other works of the apostolate, religious are subject to the authority of the Bishops".<sup>1</sup>

*the norms of our own particular law*, i.e. the norms of the legislation which the Society itself, through the competent authority, lays down for its members and communities at world or provincial level.

The second paragraph specifies what is meant by our own particular law, and indicates its sources. It is "expressed in the Constitutions, the general Regulations, the deliberations of the general chapter, the general and provincial directories and in other decisions made by competent authorities".

We may note that the universal law of the Church distinguishes between the Constitutions, regularly called the "basic code", and the other sources of an institute's own law which must exist and be approved by the institute itself, and which by the same authority can be revised, adapted and brought up to date. When it is said, for example, that the supreme Moderator is to be elected in accordance with the norms of the Constitutions,<sup>2</sup> it means that the details of the manner of making the election must be inserted in the basic code and hence must be approved by the Apostolic See. When, on the other hand, it is said that an institute's own law is to make suitable provisions so that superiors constituted for a defined time do not continue in offices of governance for too long a period without an interval,<sup>3</sup> it means that an indication in this regard must appear in some part of the institute's law. It may be placed in the Constitutions if so desired, but it is not obligatory to do so; it may be simply placed among the Regulations or some other part of the particular law.

Let us look at the matter in a little more detail.

<sup>1</sup> CIC, can. 678 §1

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 625 §1

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 624 §2

## 1. The basic code

This means the book which contains the essential elements which define the Institute's identity and mission, the purpose it seeks to achieve, its animating spirit and the way in which it is organized. In the Constitutions the evangelical and theological elements relating to consecrated life and union with the Church must be harmonized with the juridical elements needed to provide a precise definition of the physiognomy, ends and means for attaining them that the institute has available. The Code of Canon Law, however, warns that the norms should not be multiplied without real necessity, because it is not the multiplicity of laws that guarantees that they will be observed.

It is characteristic of the basic code that it must be approved by the Apostolic See: this approval, which is necessary in addition for any subsequent modifications, has the purpose of guaranteeing fidelity to the institute's proper character.

## 2. The other sources of an institute's own law

Of their nature the Constitutions must contain whatever is of stable significance and importance in time and space; but there are other subsidiary elements of a practical nature, which apply the Constitutions and are relatively stable, organic and complementary in nature, and are approved and promulgated by general chapters or other competent authorities. In these sources or collected documents, which are at the same time both normative and spiritual, are contained everything that is necessary for the life and activity of the Society or of a province, but which can be more easily revised when necessary for adaptation to times and places.

The GC21 gave a concise description of these texts containing our own law:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> GC21, 380-384

- The *general Regulations* represent the collection of prescriptions which apply the general norms of the basic code in a manner adapted to changeable situations. Thus they contain the concrete, practical applications of the Constitutions to matters of universal import and are consequently valid throughout the Congregation.
- *General and provincial directories*: these are a collection of practical norms, based on constitutional principles and salesian tradition, which regulate the life and mission of the Society in certain specific sectors: at world level they are promulgated by the Rector Major with his council, often by the mandate of a general chapter (an example is the "Ratio fundamentalis institutionis et studiorum"); at provincial level they are formulated by the provincial chapter, but acquire binding force only after approval by the Rector Major with his council.
- Finally there are *decrees or deliberations*, promulgated by the general chapter or by competent authorities at world or provincial level; they are dispositions which relate to precise aspects of specific matters, and are sometimes valid only for a stated period of time (e.g. for the following six years).

All these normative texts, together with the Constitutions or basic code, constitute the "*Rule of life*" of the salesian, using the term in its widest sense.

*Almighty God,  
 your law is our Word of life;  
 grant that we may accept as a gift from your hands  
 the precepts by which you indicate  
 the path we are to follow,  
 and that we may fulfil them with fidelity  
 as a response of love;  
 so that like your Son Jesus Christ,  
 we may fully correspond  
 with your plans in our regard,  
 and be called your sons.  
 Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 192 MEANING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The present Constitutions enshrine the spiritual riches of the traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco, and define the apostolic project of our Society.

The Church, in approving them, assures us of the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by our Founder, and recognizes in it "a special benefit for the whole People of God".<sup>1</sup>

The Apostolic See alone is their authentic interpreter, but for the practical direction of the Society and the good of the confreres the Rector Major with his council, as well as the general chapter, can give interpretations.

<sup>1</sup> RD 14; cf. PC 1

Art. 192 completes and enriches the preceding article by concentrating our attention on the deep significance of the basic code or Constitutions in the life and mission of the Society. It connects up with the ideas expressed in the Foreword and in the first article of our constitutional text, which linked the Rule directly with Don Bosco the Founder: in the general introduction to this Commentary many elements were pointed out which help in the discovery of the meaning of the Constitutions.

Here emphasis is laid on two elements in particular:

— *The Constitutions "enshrine the spiritual riches of the traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco"*: this means that in the Constitutions the life of the Congregation and the holiness of its members coalesce with the spiritual experience of the Founder: all the gifts and blessings by which the Holy Spirit has enriched the salesian charisma have found a place in the text, which has rightly been called the most precious patrimony of the Society.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the work of revision, the Rector Major was able to say in all truth to the members of the GC22:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 578

"We are neither the only nor even the principal agents in the production of the new text of the Constitutions and Regulations: we are heirs of Don Bosco and have inherited a wealth of lived experience from generations of witnesses; the revision is the result of active participation on the part of the entire Congregation".<sup>2</sup>

— *They "define the apostolic project of our Society"*: this aspect has already been dealt with in the general introduction to this Commentary.<sup>3</sup> It responds to the prescription of the Code of Canon Law that the fundamental code or Constitutions of an institute are to contain "the intentions of the Founder and all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions".<sup>4</sup> The Constitutions will also contain the basic norms about the governance of the Congregation, the discipline of the members, and their formation and admission.<sup>5</sup> The evangelical, theological and juridical elements combine to provide a satisfactory description of the Society's plan of life and activity, the "particular style of sanctification and apostolate"<sup>6</sup> which "has its proper field of competency and a measure of real autonomy".<sup>7</sup>

The second paragraph speaks of the *approval of the Constitutions by the Apostolic See*: this is a specific characteristic of any religious institute recognized as being of pontifical right (cf. C 4).

This approval takes on a particular importance because it "assures us of the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by our Founder"; it guarantees the ecclesial nature of the charism to which the Spirit has given rise. We may note the meaningful phrase taken from the Apostolic Exhortation "Redemptionis donum": the Church, in approving our Constitutions recognizes in the Society "a special benefit for the whole People of God",<sup>8</sup> i.e. recognizes that this form

<sup>2</sup> GC22, 58

<sup>3</sup> Cf. general introduction p. 28-29

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 578; can. 587

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 587 §1

<sup>6</sup> MR 11

<sup>7</sup> MR 13

<sup>8</sup> RD 14

of life "belongs to her life and holiness".<sup>9</sup> We recall what Don Bosco said when presenting the first approved text in 1874: "We should welcome this fact as among the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that, in observing our rules, we rest upon a firm, secure and, I may add, infallible basis, since the judgement of the Supreme Head of the Church who has sanctioned them is infallible".<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the third paragraph of the article dwells on the *interpretation* of the Constitutions.

We know that interpretation is a mental process by which the relationship is established between a linguistic sign and a thought or a fact. Now, since the Constitutions are ecclesiastical laws and, when approved by the Apostolic See, become pontifical laws, it follows that only the Apostolic See can interpret them authentically.

The text nevertheless, with the approval of the same Apostolic See, lays down certain spheres for the interpretation of the text in the life of the Society:

1. The General Chapter, lawfully and correctly convoked and assembled according to the Constitutions (cf. C 146 ff.), can by an absolute majority of votes:
  - authentically interpret any doubt about the meaning of the Constitutions, and resolve any difficulty that may arise about their observance and application;
  - modify the text itself of the Constitutions by either abrogation or derogation, or by adding new prescriptions; but in such a case the modifications will have no binding force until they have been approved by the Apostolic See.<sup>11</sup>
2. The Rector Major can interpret the Constitutions "for the practical direction of the Society and the good of the confreres";

<sup>9</sup> Cf. LG 44

<sup>10</sup> D. BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 227

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 587 §2; C 148

he can also suspend or modify a constitutional norm with, however, the consent of the Apostolic See. Both of these are possible in cases of urgent necessity and with the consent of the general council, and will remain in force until the following general chapter.

*Lord our God,  
you have called us to serve you  
in the salesian Society;  
grant us an understanding heart  
to discover in our Rule of life  
the sure sign of your will for us.*

*Help us to understand and love  
the spiritual riches of our salesian traditions,  
so that we may be zealous followers  
of the gospel way of life  
authentically indicated by our Founder,  
and be for your people in our life and works  
true witnesses to holiness.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*



## ART. 193 BINDING QUALITY OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

The Constitutions are binding on every member in virtue of the obligations he has freely assumed before the Church by religious profession.

Without prejudice to what is laid down by universal law,<sup>1</sup> major superiors can dispense temporarily from individual disciplinary articles.

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 85-87; 90; 92; 93; 1245

### The binding force of the Constitutions

In the concluding article of the 1972 Constitutions it was stated: "When approving them the Church does not intend to impose obligations under pain of sin". This was substantially a repetition of the more explicit declaration in the previous edition: "For the tranquillity of souls, the Society declares that these rules do not of themselves oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin". A similar declaration is found in the Constitutions of nearly all the institutes that have come into being during the past two centuries. The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had indeed prescribed such a declaration in the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901.

Significant therefore is the change of language introduced in the recent revision of the Constitutional text; the intention was to place more clearly the duty of the practice of the Rule at its true level, which is not that of simple moral obligation and formal observance, but one that stems from the loving option made at profession.

Indeed it makes no sense to speak of "obligation under the pain of sin" in the case of a religious who has freely and deliberately chosen to give himself completely to Christ. Obligation under the pain of sin would expose us to the risk of falling back into a sterile legalism, to see the law as something in itself and forget the call that lies behind it, forget that its observance requires the freedom of sons and that its purpose is to entrust ourselves in love to a Person: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him: ... come, follow me" (Mk 10,21).

This is an indication that the Church takes our profession seriously: we have no need to be bound under pain of sin because such an obligation would be inadequate in the case of one who had made profession to seek total love. The final article will emphasize that "for us, the Lord's disciples, (the Constitutions) are a way that leads to Love" (C 196). "Our living Rule is Jesus Christ ... present in Don Bosco..." (ibid.): the Constitutions put before us a Rule of life which we accept and welcome with gratitude and docility so as to attain the fullness of charity.

Summing up, we may say that the Constitutions carry with them an obligation of loyalty to the profession made, an obligation which is the more gratuitous and demanding because it stems from the law of love. The salesian is zealous in observing them, because he knows in faith that they are an authentic expression of the way of the Gospel to which the Lord has called him and which he has joyfully accepted.

Docility to the Constitutions is an obligation incumbent on each and all: on those whose duty it is to animate others to be faithful (cf. C 55), and on every confrere who wants to contribute to the building of the community; even when it seems to run contrary to his own judgements and ideas, the Rule is a sure and certain shining path to follow. The members humbly bow to the Constitutions in a spirit of loving faith in the will of God, "bringing their powers of intellect and will and their gifts of nature and grace to bear on the execution of commands and on the fulfilment of the tasks laid upon them".<sup>1</sup>

And what about a salesian who does not observe the Rule? What happens in the case of one who through weakness or negligence, or perhaps even through contempt, fails in matters which are serious or even only light? He realizes that he has sinned, because by transgressing one or other of the norms, he has tried to turn aside from the path of his vocation and from the solemn obligation he took on before God, the Church, his confreres and young people. Every act of infidelity slows up his own progress and that of the community as well. The intensity of his desire to be a true salesian will be the measure of his humble and courageous efforts to be faithful day by day. The

<sup>1</sup> PC 14

simple truth is that he will always feel that he is a sinner; each evening his examination of conscience will reveal faults. He will never love as much as he should and could do! St Paul warns us that we shall never finish paying off our debt of love (cf. Rom 13,8).

For this reason the Constitutions themselves (C 90) urge us to continually renew our will for conversion and the purification of our heart, seriously but without anxiety, in the peace and humble joy of having been called by One who will never desert us.

### **Dispensation from prescriptions of the Rule**

Related to the obligation to practise the Constitutions is the problem of dispensation from some requirement. This point is dealt with in the second part of the article.

Dispensation is an act by which the appropriate authority takes away the obligation of observing a norm or a precept.

In general it is the doctrine of canon law that a superior can dispense:

- in cases of factual doubt in respect of laws from which the Apostolic See is accustomed to dispense (in cases of juridical doubt the law does not bind at all);
- in urgent cases, i.e. when it is difficult to have recourse to the Apostolic See (or to the appropriate authority) and delay would be seriously harmful, always supposing that it is a question of a law from which dispensations are customarily given.

It is in this sense that the article must be interpreted. The major superior, i.e. the provincial and vice-provincial (in addition obviously to the Rector Major and the Vicar General), can dispense temporarily from individual articles of the Constitutions which contain disciplinary norms. The dispensation is given provisionally, i.e. for a certain period

of time, and only in connection with norms which are not essentially constitutive of the Congregation.<sup>2</sup>

This in no way limits the dispositions of the universal law in virtue of which, for example, the superior:

- can grant a dispensation in particular cases from private vows, for a just reason and always provided the dispensation does not injure the acquired rights of others, to members, novices and those who reside day and night in a house of the Congregation;<sup>3</sup>
- can dispense the same people from the obligation of observing a holyday or day of penance.<sup>4</sup>

*God our Father,  
you have given to man the sublime gift of free will  
and have made possible for him  
an unforced service of love.*

*Grant that  
by the loving acceptance and faithful observance  
of the Rule of life we have freely professed,  
we may be assimilated to Christ, the obedient Servant,  
to the praise of your glory  
and the salvation of our neighbour.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 85

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1196,2

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1245

## ART. 194 SEPARATION FROM THE SOCIETY

Should it happen that a member believes in conscience that he should withdraw from the Society, he shall do so before God after he has taken the advice of prudent persons, and with the support of the understanding and charity of his confreres.

He may not however leave the Society until his temporary profession has expired or he has not been admitted to further profession, or until he has been lawfully freed from the vows and obligations he assumed at the profession itself by passing to another institute, by dispensation or by dismissal in conformity with the universal law.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. CIC, can. 685; 688; 689; 691-704

It may seem surprising that this article, dealing with the case of a member who in conscience believes that he should leave the Society or who for just reasons is separated from it, should appear in a context which speaks of fidelity to the Rule. The placing of the article, after being discussed in the general chapter, was in fact decided on after consulting the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, and is motivated by the fact that while reflecting on fidelity one must keep in mind the very real problem that arises when a member makes a different option.

Separation from a religious institute is always a serious and delicate matter. In it are interwoven lawful rights and interests, and involved too are lofty values of freedom and conscience in the natural order, and in the supernatural order man's eternal destiny. It is not a matter that can be approached either superficially or unilaterally, neither on the part of the confrere who might tend to make his own choice without a serious discernment in dialogue with his superiors, nor on the part of the institute which might be tempted to expel a member too hastily to free the Congregation from a difficulty. Both these unilateral ways of going about the matter could prove prejudicial both to the individual concerned and to the community itself.

Sometimes repugnance is experienced in dealing with norms concerning separation from the institute or dismissal, or even in speaking of correction, admonition or penance. One gets the impression that

such things are considered as alien to the spirit of charity and brotherly understanding, while on the other hand it can happen that complaints about a confrere whose conduct proves harmful to the peace or mission of the community lead to requests for his removal being made without much reflection. An intelligent following in a spirit of rectitude of the laws that are laid down, without giving way to pressure or anger, will enable matters to proceed with harmony and balance, and will safeguard the legitimate interests and concerns of all the parties involved.

### **The confrere who leaves the Society**

The first paragraph contemplates the case of a confrere who believes in conscience that he should withdraw from the Society: this could happen, for example, because he wants to enter another institute, or a diocese, or perhaps return to the lay state, because by remaining in the religious life or in a community he would encounter obstacles that in practice turn out to be insuperable.

In a case of this kind the Constitutions first invite the member to act in full sincerity before God, i.e. not for negative reasons, not through weariness or escapism, but because mature reflection has led him to the conclusion that God wants him to follow a different path. A sign of this sincerity is recourse to competent and prudent persons for advice, and particularly the willingness for fraternal discussion with superiors. In such circumstances Don Bosco used to recommend openness with superiors and the avoidance of any hasty decisions: "In times when your heart and mind are agitated by doubts, I recommend you not to come to any decision, because in such decisions there cannot be the will of God. 'Non in commotione Dominus'. At such times I urge you to approach your superiors, lay open you heart, and follow faithfully the counsel they give you".<sup>1</sup> This is, in any case, the prac-

<sup>1</sup> D BOSCO, *Introduction to Constitutions*, cf. OE XXVII, p. 48

tice throughout all religious tradition: in a field of such importance it would be an enormous risk to take decisions without prior consultation.

In addition the confrere is asked to act in full loyalty with regard to the Church and the Congregation. Mindful of the commitment that he made freely and in all seriousness, he must not leave the Society until he has been freed from his vows and from the commitments assumed at his profession. The Regulations recall that this loyalty extends also to precise commitments concerning material goods (cf. R 54).

But the article also emphasizes the attitude of the community in a sad circumstance like the departure of a confrere. Already art. 52 had pointed out that the community has a special duty of support in respect of members who are suffering doubts or difficulties regarding their own vocation; now the article says that the member who is leaving the Society will be strengthened by the "understanding and charity" of the confreres. The latter will be careful not to make rash judgements nor assume hostile attitudes, and will remember that this is a very needy brother who must still be shown love. The practical expression of this love and charity is expressed in art. 54 of the Regulations which, after saying that the member leaving shall not have the right to demand anything for the work done in the Society, adds in the same breath that "fraternal help will be afforded him to face the initial difficulties of his new situation". In the house of Don Bosco there are many mansions... God grant that no confrere may leave us for false motives or through our own fault!

### **Manner of separation from the Society**

The second paragraph of the article, which was made more complete at the request of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, presents a concise summary of the different ways in which separation from the Society can come about. They can be summed up as follows:

1. *Transfer to another institute.*

This is a possibility offered to confreres in perpetual vows. The subject remains a religious but changes his Congregation. In such a case the agreement of the supreme Moderators of both institutes with the consent of their councils is required. After a suitable period of trial the candidate may make his profession in the new institute, without the need for a new novitiate.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Separation from the institute at the end of temporary profession.*

This happens when a member does not renew his vows,<sup>3</sup> or because he is not admitted to the renewal of temporary vows or to perpetual profession.

3. *An indult to leave the institute with dispensation from vows.*

Such an indult can be granted, for grave reasons and after serious discernment:

- to the temporarily professed by the supreme Moderator with the consent of his council;<sup>4</sup>
- to the perpetually professed by the competent authority, in accordance with law, after hearing the opinion of the supreme Moderator with his council.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of deacons and priests, the indult can be granted for passage to the secular clergy ("*secularization*"): in this case it is necessary that a Bishop, after weighing up the reasons for the request, be willing to incardinate the cleric or at least receive him into his diocese on trial; after an experimental period of five years the religious becomes automatically incardinated, or he may be sent back earlier to the Congregation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 684

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 688 §1

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 688 §2

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 691

<sup>6</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 693



It should be noted that in every form of dispensation, the indult when granted and notified, if not rejected at the time of notification, includes by virtue of the law itself a dispensation from obligations arising from the profession.

#### 4. *Dismissal from the Society.*

This is a very serious measure, for which canon law gives detailed norms for different cases:

— There is an immediate dismissal ("ipso facto"), contemplated by the Code of Canon Law, as a consequence of certain facts diametrically opposed to religious profession: in this case the major superior with his council need only make an official declaration of the fact after obtaining the necessary proof.<sup>7</sup> For other facts, gravely opposed to religious behaviour, the superior is obliged to set in motion the process for dismissal, after notifying the confrere concerned of the gravity of the situation.<sup>8</sup>

— The dismissal of a confrere can be decided on by the supreme Moderator with his council for reasons which are "grave, external, imputable and juridically proven". Because this is a very serious procedure (which must be ratified by the Apostolic See), the Code gives examples of the grave reasons which can justify dismissal, and indicates the procedure to be followed.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly every form of dismissal carries with it the dispensation from the vows and obligations arising from religious profession.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion we may recall that those who, after finishing the novitiate, have left the institute can be readmitted by the supreme Moderator with the consent of his council, without the obligation of repeating the novitiate.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 694

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 695

<sup>9</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 696-700

<sup>10</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 701

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 690

As was said at the beginning, all this should be considered in the light of fidelity to God's gift, but also with understanding and charity towards members who in conscience make a decision which is a serious one and frequently causes them a great deal of suffering.

*God, our loving Father,  
send your Spirit of Light,  
Wisdom and Fortitude,  
to our confreres who are suffering doubts,  
to help them to overcome their trial  
and discern the way you want them to follow.*

*Grant that all the members of our community  
may accompany them with greater prayer and love,  
to help them to serve you  
wherever you may call them.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

## ART. 195 FIDELITY AND PERSEVERANCE

Fidelity to the commitment made at our religious profession is a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant the Lord has made with us.

Our perseverance is founded entirely on the fidelity of God who loved us first, and is nourished by the grace of his consecration. It is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent, and is expressed in gratitude to the Lord for the gifts that salesian life offers us.

The Constitutions end with an invitation to fidelity (C 195), through the generous practice of the Rule (C 196). The two final articles are closely connected by their content, in which is found once again the fundamental source of inspiration of the Constitutions, already expressed in art. 3 and 23-25, on God's consecrating initiative and the salesian's response in faith, an initiative and response which is seen most clearly at the moment of religious profession, made publicly before the Church (C 23). Both articles speak of our "response", the first to the "special covenant" with God the Father, and the second to the "predilection of the Lord Jesus". And this response is our life itself, generously given for the young!

Art. 195 is certainly one of the most important in the Constitutions. It contains expressions of great spiritual significance: "special covenant", "grace of his consecration", "fidelity to the commitment made at profession", "a response we continually renew", "love for the young"; noteworthy too is the decisive character of some of the expressions: "continually", "special", "entirely". The fidelity of the salesian is described from two standpoints: as a personal relationship with God, and then as a reality which involves our relations with youth and the whole of our salesian life.

## Our fidelity, a response to God with the help of his Spirit

The first part of the article (the first paragraph and the introductory phrase of the second) speaks of "fidelity" and "perseverance". It is really a question of the same reality seen under two different aspects: "*fidelity*" is the continuation of the relationship freely established at the moment of profession: fidelity to oneself, to the Congregation, to young people and especially to the Lord; "*perseverance*" is the continuity of the efforts necessary to keep oneself faithful ("daily efforts to grow", as art. 25 puts it).

A comparison of content and expressions makes it clear that this article is a prolongation of articles 23 and 25: it is a matter of fidelity "to the commitment made at our religious profession" and to the significance inherent in that fundamental act of the life of the salesian.

There are many motivations and highly esteemed human virtues which, without any doubt, enter into the concept of fidelity: personal rectitude, respect for a promise that has been made, brotherly friendship, concern for a common good in which one is involved, etc., but our fidelity as consecrated Salesians has roots which go much deeper: we remain faithful first of all to a Person, to one who has "loved us first", who has called us, consecrated us to himself by his grace, established a "special covenant" between us and himself. "Profession", said art. 23, "is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds". "Father, I offer myself totally to you" (cf. C 24), was the response that each of us made. Fidelity is nothing else than the continual renewal of that response, which we meant to be "total". For us therefore, being faithful means living the logical consequences of the decisive act of profession, "one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make" (C 23).

But the consciousness of being faithful to God and to the self-donation made to him on the day of profession is not enough. It is also indispensable to be clearly aware that *one cannot be faithful without him*. If fidelity were nothing more than the result of an indomitable will to persevere in the chosen direction, there would be the possibility that at times of darkness and depression such determination might give way. But fidelity is founded on faith: it is absolute trust in One

who deserves it and who has preceded us with his own fidelity. The whole of Scripture indeed sings the praises of the faithful God: He is the rock of Israel (Deut 32,4); his word will stand for ever (Is 40,8); his promises will be kept (Tob 14,4); he has spoken and will fulfil what he has said (Num 23,19); God's loving designs will be infallibly realized (Ps 31,11). St Paul reminds the christians of Corinth: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor 1,9). To the totality of our gift corresponds therefore the total support we find in him and in the covenant of love he has deigned to establish with us.

There is an important detail in the text: "Our perseverance ... *is nourished by the grace of his consecration*". In the consecrating act of God "through the gift of his Spirit" (C 3), we discover the profound reason for our fidelity: God has taken us for himself; he has bound us to himself in his Son and in the strength of his Spirit: it is an enduring Gift, and one that is infinitely dynamic: a living Presence, "a lasting source of grace and a support for daily efforts to grow towards perfect love" (C 25).

In the eyes of the world perpetual profession may seem a rash or senseless thing, and to persevere in it doubtful or impossible. But the salesian, knowing "in whom he has believed" (2 Tim 1,12), goes quietly and surely ahead, leaning from one moment to the next on the anticipating love of the Father, on the saving presence of the risen Son and on the strength communicated by the Spirit, trusting also in the motherly assistance of Mary. All this evidently supposes a basic attitude of prayer and watchfulness.

### **Our fidelity is sustained by love for the young**

Articles 24 and 25 refer to another important support for our fidelity: *the help of the confreres* the Lord has given us. "Father, may your grace ... together with my brother salesians keep me faithful day by day" (C 24). "The confreres ... are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness" (C 25).

Art. 195 emphasizes too an aspect directly concerned with our mission: our fidelity to God includes in practice *fidelity to those to*

*whom he has sent us*, because God has consecrated us to himself so as to send us to serve the young wherever he wishes (cf. C 3). When making his profession, the salesian says to the Father: "I offer myself totally to you, and pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me".

This is an endorsement of the traditional image of the salesian: he is never presented without a group of youngsters around him. Don Bosco spoke frequently of this primary commitment, which gives sense to the salesian's whole life. Two of his more significant statements were: "The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them".<sup>1</sup> "Our primary goal is the care of youth, and consequently no concern which takes us away from that can be good".<sup>2</sup>

Experience shows us how true this is: the salesian who has little love for the young is in danger of abandoning his vocation; one who sincerely loves them, even though on that account he may suffer difficulties and trials, will never fail in his duty to them. Humble daily dedication to the young is for us a practical form of being faithful to God!

The article concludes with a final consideration: our fidelity is *sustained also by the experience of interior joy* which the salesian plan of life offers us: this experience is expressed in an attitude of thankfulness to the Lord.

Don Bosco has assured us that the salesian who is faithful in God's service will always be happy. And this is indeed the case! In community life and in the apostolate he receives from the Lord so many gifts of grace, possibilities for personal growth and brotherly friendship, and opportunities for doing good. God is a good master. The mission he entrusts to us and the family of which he invites us to form a part are sources of great joy: the one who is faithful will indeed be a happy man, and these gifts of God are themselves an encouragement to persevere in fidelity.

<sup>1</sup> BM VII, 171-172

<sup>2</sup> BM XIV, 216

Here therefore we have an invitation to the *action of grace*. We should not be surprised if an occasional doubt comes along, or we find that fidelity is not immune from temptation and trial (Scripture provides abundant evidence of this), but the love of God is greater than any difficulty. It is a good thing to keep in mind the promise of fidelity of the pioneer Salesians: "even if all our companions should be dispersed, even if only two, or even one, should remain, that one would strive to promote this Pious Society's growth and, as far as possible, always keep its rules".<sup>3</sup>

*God of grace and fidelity  
you have consecrated us to your service  
in the youth apostolate,  
and have given us in abundance  
the gifts of your Spirit.*

*Grant that we may persevere  
in our covenant with you,  
so that our love for you who first loved us,  
and for the young to whom you have sent us,  
may be the expression of our gratitude  
and foster a devotion pleasing to you.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM VI, 361

## ART. 196 A WAY THAT LEADS TO LOVE

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.

In response to the predilection of the Lord Jesus who has called us by name, and 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.

We meditate on them with faith and pledge ourselves to put them into practice; they are for us, the Lord's disciples, a way that leads to Love.

The final article of the Constitutions is a pressing invitation to the faithful practice of the Rule, but before this it expresses some thoughts which broaden our outlook in this respect and direct our gaze to the Person of Jesus Christ himself. Each of the three paragraphs reflects his light: "Jesus Christ the Saviour..., the Lord Jesus who has called us..., we the Lord's disciples".

### In the light of Christ "our living Rule"

The first paragraph recalls a fundamental truth which expresses the absolute originality of christianity: for the christian there is only one law, the law of love. Jesus himself, in fact, summed up all the commandments in just one: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Mt 22,36-40). But there is more to be added: this concise and supreme law is not only an objective rule, expressed in happy and forceful terms. Christian morality and holiness consist in resemblance to a Person, in whom the law of Love is incarnate, because "he loved to the end" (Jn 13,1): "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15,12).



The text of the Constitutions, after setting out the complete evangelical project of salesian life, turns to him who is our "living Rule", the perfect Model, seen in the complexity of his mystery:

- to the Christ of yesterday, such as the Gospel presents him;
- to the Christ of today, the risen Christ who lives in the Church and the world, who sends us his Spirit, who makes it possible for us to model ourselves little by little on him (cf. Jn 15,5);
- finally to the Christ present in the "Gospel in practice", the Saints, and for us in Don Bosco who, as an authentic disciple of the Good Shepherd, loved youth to the extent of being willing to give his life for them (cf. C 14); in Don Bosco we discern the countenance of Jesus and the fruits of his grace.

The Rule itself, therefore, invites us to read all the text of the Constitutions in the light of Christ and its "salesian translation" made by Don Bosco: "The salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ" (C 11).

### **Willing acceptance, meditation and practice of the Constitutions**

The text began by presenting the initiative of the love of God who, through the Holy Spirit and the motherly intervention of Mary, raised up St John Bosco to carry out a project for the salvation of youth. Now, after describing that plan, a gift of the Father for the Church and for the world, we are reminded that it is still God's love that guides each salesian in a generous and faithful response for the salvation of the youth of the present day. Once again the greatness of our vocation is highlighted, enveloped as it is in God's loving initiative. Each of us has been the object of a love of predilection on the part of the Lord Jesus: "And Jesus looking upon him loved him" (cf. Mk 10,21); each of us has been called personally "by name": "Come, follow me" (ibid.). Each of us has been guided by Mary, as was Don Bosco from his dream at the age of nine.

The Constitutions have the purpose of helping us to live to the full this vocation of ours. For this purpose three fundamental attitudes are recommended to us: to *accept* them willingly as a precious gift; to *meditate* on them in faith so as to understand them well, and to *practise* them so that they will bear fruit.<sup>1</sup>

• We must "*accept*" the Constitutions willingly for three specific reasons; they are:

- "*Don Bosco's will and testament*": this thought connects the final article with the Foreword, and indeed with the first expression which opens the text: "For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament"; now at the end it is said that we truly welcome it as such, aware that the renewed text is in faithful continuity with that written by the Founder, and is imbued with his life and spirit;
- "*our book of life*": the Constitutions are not an historical treatise nor simply a "fine book", but a concrete description of our vocation and an indication of the means by which we can realize it; in other words the Rule is a map of our salesian road through life, a book therefore which is practical and of vital importance;
- a "*pledge of hope for the poor and the little ones*": young people too, and especially those who have been abandoned, have an interest in this book of the salesian Constitutions, where they are present in so many articles; it is quite clear in fact that the more fervently and courageously the Salesians follow the path here set out for them, the greater will be the number of "the poor and little ones" who will be loved, helped and saved!

• Then we must "*meditate on them with faith*". Of itself the text of the Rule is a dead thing. It becomes significant and useful only through a conscious believer in whom it comes to life. It must be read with faith and pondered over: it is a highly concentrated work, which will not yield up its treasures to one who reads in haste; it is a demanding text which will be fully understood only after its meaning has been allowed to sink in, and has led to prayer. It is of great impor-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. comment on these attitudes in general introduction, p. 29-31

tance for the salesian to take the Rule frequently in hand as a text for meditation and prayer.

• Finally we must set about *putting the Constitutions into practice*: they were written to be lived, to shape and animate all our life. And we must practise them with that interior enthusiasm indicated by the biblical text that inspires the concluding part: "I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart" (Ps 119,32): we practise them with love and so as to increase our love ever more. This is the great wish contained in St Augustine's "Regula ad servos Dei": "May the Lord enable you to observe this Rule with love, enthralled with its spiritual beauty, entranced with the sweet odour of Christ, convinced of the excellence of your way of life, not as slaves suffering beneath the yoke but as sons established in grace".<sup>2</sup>

The final phrase reminds us that the way along which the Rule leads us is precisely that of love: it takes us back to Christ and his Gospel. "Love", says St Paul, "is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13,10). "The holiness of the Church is shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful".<sup>3</sup> And for us, pastoral charity is the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit (C 10).

To know, love and practise the Constitutions is truly the way in which we follow the "way that leads to Love", and the capital letter indicates that the reference is to infinite Love: Jesus, the "living Rule" and his Father: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4,16).

We are accompanied by Mary our Mother, the Help of Christians, "the star of our future inviting us to trust and optimism". "With her motherly help we can translate into our practical life Don Bosco's evangelical plan defined in the Constitutions", "so that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love" (C 8).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine, "Regula ad servos Dei", ch. VII, 1

<sup>3</sup> LG 39

<sup>4</sup> GC22, 89

*Father, you have loved us from all eternity,  
and have begun and ended all things in love;  
you have chosen us in Christ  
before the foundation of the world  
and have destined us to be holy and spotless in love,  
for the praise and glory of your name.*

*Grant that by joyfully accepting your eternal designs,  
with the guidance of your Holy Spirit  
and following the example of Christ our Saviour,  
of his most holy Mother and of all our Saints,  
we may follow the path indicated by our Constitutions  
as a way which leads to the fullness of your Love.  
Through Christ our Lord.*

OR

*Lord Jesus, we choose you  
as the living centre of our faith and life,  
and we want you to be our living Rule.  
You are the Saviour proclaimed in the Gospel,  
living today in the Church and the world,  
and whom we find present in Don Bosco  
who dedicated his life to young people.*

*Grant us, we pray, through Mary's special intercession,  
to accept our Constitutions  
as Don Bosco's will and testament,  
our book of life and a pledge of hope for little ones,  
and to be faithful to the option we have made.*

*Give freedom to our hearts,  
that we may run in the way of your commands.*

*You live and reign for ever and ever.*

## THE GENERAL REGULATIONS

In art. 191 of the Constitutions, which indicates where the particular law of our Society is to be found, immediately after the Constitutions themselves (which form our basic code) are listed the general Regulations. These are a collection of dispositions which explain or apply the fundamental salesian project and are valid for the whole Congregation.

Since the early days of our Society's foundation, this "second volume" of our own law has contained a body of norms which supplement the Constitutions, so as to constitute with the latter a single "*Rule of life*".<sup>1</sup>

Several times in the course of the preceding commentary, norms of the Regulations have been quoted which indicate concrete ways of fulfilling personal or communal obligations. It will therefore be opportune to take a moment to look further into the significance of the Regulations.

As soon as Don Bosco had obtained the definitive approval of the Constitutions (13 April 1874), he felt the need for a set of complete and homogeneous regulations which would be based on the preceding rules which had been designed for the Oratory and later for the House annexed to the Oratory,<sup>2</sup> but would be updated to meet the new situation.

As can be seen from the Biographical Memoirs he began to work on this in the summer of 1876; he spent a great deal of time thinking over it, he had the rectors read over the parts dealing with personnel when they met together for the Conferences of St Francis de Sales; he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. General introduction, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> On the first Regulations for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, v. BM III, 64-68, 441-453, 455, 456-457, 458, 463; BM IV, 378. On the Regulations for the house annexed to the Oratory, v. BM IV, 542-559

then got Don Rua to revise it from beginning to end, and asked Don Barberis to examine carefully the articles dealing with discipline, in the light of the principles they had often discussed together. Finally Don Vespignani, under the responsibility of Don Rua, wrote the definitive copy. This was quickly printed and distributed in November 1877 to all the houses, with the title *"Regulations for the Houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales"*.<sup>3</sup>

This text, which had matured over some twenty years of reflection and experiment, is one of the most important that Don Bosco has left to his sons. Together with the decisions made in the "Conferences of St Francis de Sales" and later in the first four general chapters, at which Don Bosco was present, it constituted the first nucleus of the future "general regulations" and indicates the Founder's desire and intention to express in writing a tradition that he had begun and lived, so that it could be passed on to his sons as a particular ascetical and pedagogical manner of practising overall salesian discipline. The GC10 of 1904 (as was said when dealing with the history of the constitutional text),<sup>4</sup> distinguished between "organic" deliberations (later inserted in the text of the Constitutions) and "preceptive" ones, and drew up a complete and systematic book of Regulations.

The renewal of Rules called for by Vatican II imposed on religious the duty of revising not only their Constitutions but also the text of Regulations or general Directories.<sup>5</sup> The *Motu proprio* "Ecclesiae Sanctae" had indicated among other things for the Special General Chapter of each institute a criterion for the diversification of normative texts, which assigned a proper value to the different books containing the institute's own law. On the basis of this criterion our own SGC was able to judge which items should be included in the basic code, and which should be inserted in supplementary collections. The SGC also carried out an updating of the entire text of the Regulations, excluding elements that were no longer applicable or that were designed to meet customs more local in character.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BM XIII, 347-348

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "A brief history of the text", p. 52-53

<sup>5</sup> Cf. PC 3

In this way the Rector Major, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, was able to present in 1972 together with the renewed Constitutions also the new text of the Regulations, as "concrete applications and things to be done of universal import, and therefore valid for the whole Congregation".<sup>6</sup>

The GC21, in the light of the experience in the Congregation in the six years of experiment that followed the SGC, thought it opportune to clarify the particular character of the Constitutions and other normative texts by specifying their spiritual nature and binding force. Concerning the general Regulations it stated: "The Regulations represent the collection of prescriptions which apply the general principles of the 'Rule of life' in a manner adaptable to changing situations... They are more detailed and circumstantial than the Constitutions. The Church has established that they be enacted by the highest authority in the Congregation (the General Chapter) and they can be appropriately modified and adapted, always however in harmony with the Constitutions but without the need of subsequent approval by the Holy See".<sup>7</sup>

Finally the GC22, in accordance with can. 587 of the Code of Canon Law, detailed in organic fashion where our Rule of life is to be found: it is expressed not only in the Constitutions, but also in the other texts which go to form our particular law, and among them the general Regulations have first place (cf. C 191).

Furthermore the GC22 provided in the Regulations a more complete treatment of some themes which in recent years and at the present day have taken on greater practical significance for the salesian life and mission, e.g.: the pastoral educative project, our service to the salesian Family, the adaptation of our norms concerning formation to the requirements of the new Code. The GC22 also reorganized all the material of the Regulations to bring it into line with the new structure of the Constitutions, and adopted a style of expression more in keeping with the normative character of the articles concerned.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Constitutions 1972*, Presentation, p. 6

<sup>7</sup> GC21, 381

The general Regulations appear today in a quite new perspective; they harmonize well the Constitutions, of which they specify the directive force and offer concrete methods of application.<sup>8</sup>

## Nature and significance of the Regulations

From an analysis of the sources quoted it is possible to deduce the various elements that together constitute the nature and purpose of the general Regulations.

1. In the first place, as has been already said, there is a *strict connection between the Regulations and the Constitutions*. The two mutually integrate each other and together form a single body of norms, the necessary synthesis between ends and means.

The Constitutions express the values which constitute the essential patrimony of the Congregation, the vocational demands of its charismatic identity, the specific purposes of the institute, in fidelity to the intentions and spirit of the Founder and in continuity in time and space.

The Regulations embody the concrete expression of the salesian constitutional values, in so far as they provide more detailed guidelines and norms which are necessary for guaranteeing the translation of those values into everyday practice.

The Regulations offer "a practical channel for the application of the Constitutions to life".<sup>9</sup> As such they are means which are indispensable for attaining the end. Without this normative instrument the Constitutions would be in danger of remaining a fine ideal but one not realizable, or at least not realizable at a communal level in the life and activity of the confreres (cf. C 191); they would be open to widely varying interpretation and application by different individuals and groups, thus destroying one of the essential elements of our voca-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. AGC 312 (1985), p. 44

<sup>9</sup> AGC 312 (1985), p. 44



tion: living and working together, a fundamental requirement for us Salesians and a sure way for fulfilling our vocation (cf. C 49).

The practice of the Regulations is therefore linked fundamentally with the values of our vocation itself, as expressed in the constitutional text. It is not just by chance that in the new edition of the Constitutions, at the side of many of the articles we find a reference to one or more articles of the Regulations; altogether there are 177 of them. This is a new editing feature which not only proves helpful for consultation and study but also emphasizes the strict linkage between Constitutions and Regulations. Each of these references indicates in different ways according to the matter concerned an explanation or a practical way for putting into practice the constitutional articles referred to.

2. *It belongs to the General Chapter* to make or change the general Regulations; the supreme authority of the Society is the only organ competent to make laws for the whole Congregation (cf. C 147). The authoritative source from which they emanate is therefore a further guarantee of a harmonious and organic consistency between the Regulations and the Constitutions themselves.

The Constitutions need the approval of the Apostolic See, whereas the Regulations do not. The reason is as follows: the approval of the Apostolic See makes the Constitutions true laws of the Church which thus becomes the guarantor of the authenticity of the Founder's charism and of its usefulness for the service of the ecclesial community;<sup>10</sup> it follows that they cannot be modified without the consent of the same Apostolic See. On the other hand the Regulations are laws and dispositions made by the authority of the general chapter; it follows therefore that they are internal laws of the Congregation itself and can be modified or adapted by the general chapter without subsequent approval by the Apostolic See. This is a consequence of the nature of the Regulations, which are means, applications or dispositions designed to explain or facilitate the realization of the basic code. As such, the Regulations are more dependent on changeable circumstances, and they are more detailed and circumstantial in content and style.<sup>11</sup> The Code

<sup>10</sup> Cf. GC21, 378

<sup>11</sup> Cf. GC21, 381

of Canon Law says: "They can be conveniently reviewed and adapted according to the needs of time and place".<sup>12</sup>

But once they have been approved by the general chapter and promulgated by the Rector Major, the norms of the Regulations are binding on all confreres (C 148): they have the character of true "laws" for the Society, forming a single legislative collection of norms with the Constitutions. It may well be that they have a binding character different from that of the Constitutions either on account of the matter involved or by the explicit will of the Legislator; but a reductive interpretation which would limit our Rule and normative legislation to the Constitutions alone would not be in harmony with the thought of the Church and of the Congregation.

3. It must be pointed out that of their nature the validity of the general Regulations *extends to all the Congregation*. This was the explicit intention with which they were drawn up by the general chapters, in which confreres took part from all parts of the salesian world, representatives and bearers of the particular cultural sensitivities present in different contexts. The Regulations therefore reflect a concrete practical approach which is not regional but universal in outlook. This is evident from the very big majority by which each article of the Regulations was approved.

It is well to remember in this connection that the GC22 reconfirmed the principles of subsidiarity and decentralization in the service of authority and in the structures of government (cf. C 124), and left various applications of general laws of the Congregation to be decided within the environment of the individual provinces.<sup>13</sup> It emphasized creativity and flexibility as being characteristic components of the salesian spirit (cf. C 19), and showed and recommended sensitive attention to the requirements of inculturation (cf. C 7, 30). Consistently with this the general chapter did not insert in the Regulations any dispositions which might appear to clash with these criteria. The norms contained in each article were in fact approved precisely because they

<sup>12</sup> CIC, can. 587 §4

<sup>13</sup> Cf. what is said of provincial directories: C 171, 191, with respective commentaries

were recognized as expressions of our vocational unity and channels for salesian incarnation in every region.

## Structure of the Regulations

The GC22 has the special merit of having reorganized all the material contained in the general Regulations. Once the structure of the Constitutions had been established, the Chapter decided to follow the same structure for the Regulations as well. In this way not only is their use made easier but the strict connection between the two parts of our Rule is better illustrated.

And so the Regulations too are distributed in the same parts, chapters and sections as are found in the Constitutions. They also carry the same titles of the parts and many chapters as do the Constitutions. The only exception concerns the first part of the Constitutions to which, because of the nature of its content, there corresponds no specific part of the Regulations. The chapter on the salesian Family does not really concern the Family in itself (cf. C 5), but rather the activity of the Salesians with respect to the Family; for this reason the GC22 decided to include it as the last chapter of the section dealing with salesian activity.

The general Regulations therefore finish up arranged as follows:

### *FIRST PART*

#### *SENT TO THE YOUNG — IN COMMUNITIES — FOLLOWING CHRIST*

Ch. I	Those to whom our mission is addressed	art.	1-3
Ch. II	Our pastoral educational service	art.	4-10
Ch. III	Activities and works	art.	11-35
	— The oratory and youth centre		11-12
	— The salesian school and centres for teaching trades		13-14
	— Hostels and boarding schools		15

	– Initiatives at the service of vocations		16-17
	– The missions		18-24
	– Parishes		25-30
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### **Invitation to know and practise the Regulations**

In presenting the renewed text of the Rule of life, the Rector Major says: "There is now beginning in the life of religious institutes a stage which should be characterized by a striving for realization and practical applications. ... We are asked to be practical and to testify to the values, guidelines and norms of our Rule of life".<sup>14</sup>

In this context the Rector Major emphasizes the specific role of the Regulations: "Since in accordance with the criteria which distinguish between the various parts of the text of the Rule of life, the normative items have been placed as far as possible in the Regulations, it follows that 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

<sup>14</sup> AGC 312 (1985), p. 44

of importance, but rather the need for mutual integration. How could one assign any methodical force to the Constitutions if one overlooked or disregarded the Regulations and the other prescriptions of our particular law? ".<sup>15</sup>

This means that in respect of the Regulations we must have the same *attitudes of knowledge, love, and realization in practice*, that we have for the Constitutions.<sup>16</sup>

Experience provides an ever greater confirmation of the fact that renewal requires not only a clear understanding of the values to be lived and ideals to be achieved, but also a practical methodology which indicates the paths, programmes and interventions necessary so that the projects planned in various sectors may be gradually realized.<sup>17</sup>

It is true that for all this the Regulations alone are not sufficient, but neither can they be left aside. To do so would be to seriously compromise the realization of our vocational identity.

<sup>15</sup> AGC 312 (1985), p. 44

<sup>16</sup> Cf. General Introduction, p. 17-34

<sup>17</sup> Cf. GC22, RRM, 331

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- Numbers in **heavy type** indicate articles of the Constitutions
- Numbers in ordinary type indicate articles of the General Regulations

**Note:** The following details are a reproduction of the analytical index printed at the end of the book of the Constitutions and Regulations. They are re-printed here for convenience of reference.

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