

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 central nucleus consists in 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.

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".¹

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.

¹ 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 confere 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".

Another innovation in the chapter arises from the way it is set out: it starts from the personal location of the salesian and from his own experience of profession. The language of profession is seen in reference to each member of the Society and to the community and the choice of the evangelical counsels.

— a sign of a meeting of love and covenant between the salesian and Christ and to his fellow members. This is a reciprocal commitment between the professed and the Society giving and receiving in the grace of baptism. It is a radical act of freedom on the part of the salesian, who by making his profession and thus dedicating himself to the Church, realizes in community; and the salesian offers himself totally to Him. 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.

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".¹ And again: "Let us try to swell

¹ Concerning vocational discernment of the document, "Criteria and norms for mission, vocation discernment, Admissions", Rome 1985, and in particular nn. 2-6: "The Constitutions and vocation discernment".

² D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions: Five faults to be avoided*, cf. Appendix to MB XVII, 262 1984, p. 244

our numbers. To achieve this end, each of us must take it upon himself to win over new members".²

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-

² 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:³ 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".⁴

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.

³ 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"

⁴ 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".⁵

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".⁶

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

⁵ D. RUA, letter of 1.12.1909; *Circular letters*, p. 499.

⁶ *ibid.*, *Redemptio: Donum*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, which develops the

⁶ 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 Congregation", 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".⁷

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.

⁷ 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,¹ 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.²

¹ cf. MR 8; LG 44

² cf. LG 44; PC 5; CIC, can. 654

The act of profession, "the pact of our alliance with God",¹ 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.²

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

¹ D. RUA, letter of 1.12.1909; *Circular letters*, p. 499

² 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;³ 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

³ "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.⁴

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".⁵

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.

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

⁴ SGC, 122

⁵ 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",⁶ 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".⁷ This com-

⁶ RD 7; cf. also IG 44 and PC 5, on which the doctrine is based; v. also ET 7; MR 8

⁷ 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 fulfilment⁸ 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.*

⁸ 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.*

In the formula we can distinguish five parts.

¹ Cf. *Constitutioni 1875*, Formula of the vows (F. MOTTO), p. 295.

² Cf. C. 4 and C. 5.

³ For the history of the profession formula, v. F. DESRAMAULT, *Les Constitutions religieuses*, 1966, Commentaire Historique PAS 1969, II, pp. 397-407.

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,¹ 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 GC22.² 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.

¹ Cf. LG 44

² 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".³

"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).⁴

"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".⁵

"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".⁶

³ Cf. *Costituzioni 1875*, Formula of the vows (F. MOTTO, p. 205)

⁴ Cf. also C 3 and C 60

⁵ IG 42

⁶ 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";⁷ his apostolic service is a Church commitment, which he carries out for and in the name of the Church.

⁷ 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".⁸

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.

⁸ On the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in Don Bosco and in the Society, v. also IG 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 love¹ 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.

¹ 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,¹ 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.

¹ Cf. IG, 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).²

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.

² 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.³ 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",⁴ 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";⁵

³ The conciliar decree on consecrated life opens precisely with the definition: "*perfectae caritatis prosecutio*": "the pursuit of perfect charity" (PC 1)

⁴ Pius XI

⁵ 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;⁶
- 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!";⁷
- 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!"⁸

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

⁶ Cf. BM V, 135

⁷ Cf. BM VII, 6

⁸ 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.⁹ 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".¹⁰ 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".¹¹

The beatitudes, incarnate in our youth mission, make us truly "signs and bearers" of the supreme value to which Jesus gives testimony:

⁹ The conciliar decree on consecrated life opens precisely with the definition: "*perfectae caritatis*

⁹ Cf. IG 31 "the pursuit of perfect charity" (PC 1)

¹⁰ E. VIGANÒ, *Strenna* 1985, in the international youth year

¹¹ 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".¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ The evidence shows that as the testimony of our sanctity

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Cf. E. VIGANO, *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

¹⁴ 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.*