

## 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

We participate in the eternal designs of God for the salvation of the

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,

through a "human" sign, the fatherly countenance of God.

<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



ART 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>1</sup> Cf. *Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales, 1858-1873*, ed. F. MOTTIO, p. 86

<sup>2</sup> Cf. MO, 129

<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 (MOTTO, p. 76)

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.*

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>2</sup> GC21, 141

<sup>3</sup> GC21, 141

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SGC, which states in the second part of the text: "The Salesian mission is first and foremost a mission to the young and to the common people."

## 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

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>1</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 evangelization of the world."

<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.*

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. The Salesian Mission, in the course of its effort to evangelize the people of God will leave among the people to whom they are sent the sensitivity of Don Bosco's charisma, courage and love for the young. It will enable the growing Church to become a living and dynamic presence and of dialogue on the faith and vital concerns between different generations. In this way the Missions are for us not just our own country, but the spearhead of Don Bosco's whole charism which, together with the gospel message, presents the only and preferred method of the young and of vocation.

But a Salesian Mission has also another characteristic: that following the example of the Son of God who made himself everything like his brothers among the local people. The Salesian missionaries do not give the impression of being one who has brought a message from elsewhere, but of one who bears their hopes and anxieties, and their own.

we pray to the Lord.