

CRITERIA FOR SALESIAN ACTIVITY

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more... To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9,19,22).

This is another autobiographical extract from Paul, belonging to a context (1 Cor 8-10) which highlights the sense of christian liberty as a condition indispensable to the cause of the Gospel for all, starting from those who are weakest.

The meaning of the two statements of Paul is immediately clear, especially if considered in the light of the example of Jesus. But the concrete situation which forms the context of chap. 9 of the first letter to the Corinthians helps to clarify still further the union between freedom and service. Some people at Corinth were opposed to Paul: he was using his freedom to be independent of the community for his maintenance, they said, because he was not a true apostle (9,1). Paul reacts vehemently through the whole of chap. 9, making clear the real sense of his freedom: it was above all that of an apostle totally possessed by Christ's Gospel (9,12); that as such he had certain financial rights (9,4-12); but he had given up those rights so that his service of the Gospel should be more transparent, universal, all-embracing, and therefore free (9,12-18).

More than a proud declaration of principle, Paul was giving an example of a freedom so completely at the service of all as to become the gospel choice of being a "slave" of all: Jews, pagans, those of little account or who were weak and fragile from a religious point of view (9,19-22). Was he being just non-committal, or an opportunist? In reality there was a very firm principle underlying this unlimited self-abandonment: *"I do it all for the sake of the Gospel"* (9,23). Paul, like Christ, takes on all human conditions so as to make spring up within them a genuine experience of faith.

To make of freedom a service, giving up even lawful rights and therefore working absolutely gratuitously, with unconditional dedication to others, through fidelity to the Gospel understood as an absolute benefit for man, even to the point of exclaiming: *"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"*: all this forms an apostolic criterion which Don Bosco (as he appears in his historic "Valdocco experience" C 40) put into practice, and left us a legacy.

MO, p. 16

The *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* were published in 1946 (Ed. SII Torino) and later reprinted by offset at the instance of the Direzione Generale Salesiana. In the Introduction (by Fr E. CERIA), the reason is explained for their publication, despite Don Bosco's prohibition (cf. MO, p. 142)

ART. 40 DON BOSCO'S ORATORY A PERMANENT CRITERION

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.

All the constitutional texts, from Don Bosco's first manuscripts onwards, have carried a brief description of our works. The present Constitutions, however, do not do so, or at least not in any great detail. The fact that salesian pastoral practice is carried out in specific kinds of work, which still constitute a fundamental presence of the Congregation at the present day, has led to the preservation of a description of them in the General Regulations. But some indication at least was needed in the Constitutions, and the diversity of the contexts in which we work and the continual springing up of new needs suggested that in this section (C 40-43) should be presented the criteria which must inspire the concrete putting of the mission into practice in the various works and activities.

The section, in fact, carries the heading "*Criteria for salesian activity*". In it we find the ideal model for reference, i.e. a characteristic "pastoral experience" of Don Bosco, realized at the Oratory of Valdocco: a model which is presented as a general criterion for discernment and renewal (C 40). Three inspirational criteria are then given for the realization of our works and activities, with their chief consequences (C 41). Finally three main lines of action are indicated for practical salesian activity: education, evangelization, and communication (C 42, 43).

A characteristic pastoral experience

The Oratory quite literally filled Don Bosco's whole existence. It had its first expressions in the games and Sunday gatherings in the meadows of the Becchi and in the "Società dell'allegria". It developed during the early years of his priesthood, from the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli to the growth in size of the youthful community in the poor Pinardi house with the stable organization of its life and activities. At Valdocco the Oratory subsequently developed in many ways: it was the cradle of the newly born Congregation and of other religious Associations and had reached maturity by the time Don Bosco died.

When our Father wanted to put his thoughts into writing, intending to leave in this way "a norm for overcoming future difficulties by lessons from the past",¹ so that his followers would be stimulated to continue his work in creative fidelity, he wrote the *"Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales"*.²

When one looks back in the light of faith on the pastoral pilgrimage of Don Bosco, it becomes clear that in his encounter with the youngsters of the Oratory the foundations of a project were laid, enterprises grew in perspective, and a style came to maturity (cf. C 20).

For this reason Don Bosco's initiatives were originally called the "Work of the Oratories", and the mother-house still kept the name "Oratory of Valdocco", even after successive transformations.

But what exactly was it that made this pastoral experience a characteristic one?

An elementary knowledge of the history of northern Italy will tell us that the Oratories formed part of the tradition and practice of some of the Lombardy Churches. They were a setting for the main purpose

¹ MO, p. 16

² The *"Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales"* were published in 1946 (Ed. SEI Turin) and later reprinted by offset at the instance of the Direzione Generale Salesiana. In the Introduction (by Fr E. CERIA), the reason is explained for their publication, despite Don Bosco's prohibition (cf. MO, p. 1-12)

of teaching catechism to the children of the Parish, with games and entertainment offered as an inducement to attend. Don Bosco rethought the idea (and this is what is expressed in the article) to meet the needs of his poor boys. For him the Oratory was "*house, church, school and playground*": a complete programme of material relief, of family support, of evangelization, culture and social behaviour. Don Bosco transformed it from its parochial structure to an open and missionary work designed to reach those who remained untouched by the normal institutions. The Sunday activity became prolonged through the week, because his help and support for his boys was not confined to Sundays; he turned it into a youthful community, with himself at its centre to promote relationships and provide animation: a community "where friends could meet and enjoy themselves".

The GC21, on the basis of the story of Valdocco and recalling Don Bosco's original intuition, traced out the fundamental characteristics of the physiognomy of the oratory setting. They are: "personal rapport of 'friend' between salesian and youngster and the brotherly 'presence' of the educator among the boys; the creating of an environment to facilitate such a meeting; varied activities to fill leisure time; a missionary 'open-door' attitude to all lads who want to come in; a welcome for everyone, but with proper attention to individuals and groups; a gradual education of the youth community for festal celebration; a striving for firm group-life and unity — all these elements concur in forming a wholesome human and christian personality".³

In Don Bosco at the Oratory, rather than the brilliant manager of a structured work, we discover the creative affability which can size up situations and respond to them, moved by pastoral charity. He was tenaciously attached to his mission among young people. For this reason he was faithful and dynamic, docile and creative, firm and flexible, all at the same time.

Deeply convinced of his divine call to the ministry of pastor of the young,⁴ he felt himself inspired and guided by God. But at the

³ GC21, 124

⁴ MO, p. 22 ff.

same time he was very sensitive to the passing indications of current history ("We must try to get to know our times and adapt ourselves to them"),⁵ and attentive to the concrete situation of his boys.

This is borne out by the historical evolution of the Oratory of Valdocco in its multiple and diverse vicissitudes.

The permanent criterion

The Valdocco "pastoral experience which serves as a model" is put forward in the article as the *fundamental criterion* for the discernment and renewal, in dynamic fidelity, of all salesian works and activity. The SGC had indicated this very clearly in the document entitled: "*Don Bosco at the Oratory, the enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*".⁶ As is clear, it is not a case of looking at the first Oratory as a single concrete piece of work, but rather of considering it "as the matrix, the synthesis, the sum total of all the genial apostolic creations of our Founder, the mature fruit of all his efforts".⁷

Reference to the Oratory is indispensable, giving the word its full meaning in the fascination and charm of its early days. The Oratory, in fact, represents a pattern or yardstick for every one of our works which aims at being "a home for those who have none, a parish for those who do not know where their parish is, and a school open to all who might find difficulty elsewhere",⁸ a playground where friends can

⁵ MB XVI, 416

⁶ Cf. SGC, Document 2, nn. 192-273.

In this document which is the principal source of art. 40, the SGC insists on "dynamic fidelity" to Don Bosco, which implies flexibility in the face of new requirements and creativity in responding with "new presences", not only by filling 'lacunae' or youth situations not yet reached, but also qualitatively in responding to new problems unknown in Don Bosco's time, through the development of ideas already present in embryo in the personal work of the Founder, with the Valdocco Oratory as the constant point of reference (cf. SGC, 227 ff. 249 ff. 259 ff.)

⁷ SGC, 195

⁸ SGC, 216

meet and enjoy themselves. These are terms of great salesian import; they evoke images of sensitivity, attitudes, convictions, programmes and style of presence.

It is symptomatic of Don Bosco that in the circular he wrote to the members on the feast of St Joseph 1885, about the spreading of good books, he has recourse to the same pastoral categories, though with reference to a reality materially distinct from the Oratory. He said in fact: "With the 'Catholic Readings' I hoped to *enter houses*. With the 'Companion of Youth' my aim was to bring the young to church (parish!). With the 'History of Italy' I wanted to sit beside them *in school*. With a series of light readings I wanted to be once again their companion *in the time of recreation*. And finally, with the 'Salesian Bulletin' I wanted to keep alive in the boys who had returned to their families the love of the spirit of St Francis de Sales and his maxims, and to lead them to become the saviours of other youngsters".⁹

"Don Bosco of the Oratory" emerges as the ideal criterion for salesian action, for the realization of our mission in concrete service. More therefore than an invitation to re-edit what Don Bosco started, this criterion is an appeal to act like him in the deep understanding of what he did and achieved in the service of the young and the ordinary people.¹⁰

Every salesian house worthy of the name must aim at reproducing Don Bosco's characteristic pastoral experience, and appear as a present-day realization of the Oratory's emblematic and original reality.

Practical application of all this is needed in two directions: in *discernment* and in *renewal*.

In the light of the oratory criterion, renewal means a *constant verification* of our modern activities and works to see whether and to what extent they are a faithful continuation of Don Bosco's mission, in their style of presence and their ability to respond to needs. A

⁹ *Collected letters*, IV, p. 320

¹⁰ Cf. SGC, 197: In the Oratory Don Bosco provides a wonderful example of docility to God's will and of dynamic fidelity to the mission he had received for the education of the young

readiness for continual renewal must accompany all we do, and calls for a permanent adaptation of our works and activity to the youth condition and cultural changes. We are reminded of this by the first article of the General Regulations: "Keeping in mind its own social milieu, every province should study the situation and condition of youth and the common people, and periodically verify that its works and activities are providing an effective service for young people who are poor" (R 1).

The use of the criterion for discernment means looking at things in the *perspective of development*. The field of action is great, and the young are found everywhere in enormous numbers. New and urgent questions are calling for an answer, and an answer must be given. But rather than to the quantity of our works, the reference here is to the development of a spirit and style of safeguarding them. Certainly our creativity cannot be realized without regard to cost and method. We must be able to appraise situations with intelligence and a courageous heart. What is needed, in fact, is to find concrete methods and practical applications which best correspond to the salesian mission and its apostolic project.¹¹

Renewal and discernment; these are our two watchwords in the spirit of Valdocco!

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, under the heading of oratorian criteria falls also Don Bosco's solicitude for the young, "especially those who are poor, abandoned and in danger", the "predilection" spoken of in art. 14.

In the salesian the fervour of his initiatives stems from the love that prompts him to seek innovations, and even great ones, in ways of bringing salvation to youth.

The Oratory at Valdocco is the emblem of this earnest research. Indeed we can say that Don Bosco was clearly aware that in the Oratory he was giving a full response to God's call, and realizing in it the purpose of his life.

But going beyond this perspective, we may ask ourselves what are the fundamental criteria we can deduce from the Rule? Let us look

¹¹ Cf. SGC, 230

*We thank you Lord,
for giving us Don Bosco as our Father and Teacher,
and for guiding him, through the experience
of the Oratory at Valdocco,
to be a concrete model
in our apostolic life and activity.*

*Grant that we may bring him to life again in ourselves,
and, with him as our inspiration,
make every one of our works
an authentic salesian "Oratory",
"a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes,
a school that prepares for life
and a playground where friends can meet
and enjoy themselves".*

*We make our prayer through Christ our Shepherd,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.*

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, under the heading of occasional moments, Don Bosco's solicitude for the young, especially those who are poor, abandoned and in danger, is "pedagogical": spoken in his own words, it is not a mere expression of love. In the salesian the fervour of his initiatives stems from the love that prompts him to seek innovations, and even great ones, in ways of bringing salvation to youth.

The Oratory at Valdocco is the cradle of his career. Indeed we can say that Don Bosco was clearly aware that in the Oratory he was giving a full response to God's call, and remaining in the path of his life.

ART. 41 INSPIRATIONAL CRITERIA FOR OUR ACTIVITY AND WORKS

Our apostolic activity is carried out in a variety of ways, which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working.

We give practical expression to the redeeming love of Christ by organizing activities and works of an educational and pastoral nature designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church. Sensitive to the signs of the times and with initiative and continual flexibility we evaluate these activities, renew them, and create new ones.

The education and evangelization of many young people, especially among the very poor, means that we have to go to them where they are to be found, and provide adequate forms of service in the context of their own life style.

After proposing the fundamental model, the Constitutions go on in this article to enumerate, together and in their mutual interdependence, the criteria for the practical realization of the activities and works which take their inspiration from that model.

Don Bosco, living in dynamic fidelity the mission he had received, created and put into practice after careful appraisal those initiatives which charity called for. But he did not proceed in a haphazard fashion. He had precise points of reference which he followed, as a guide in the concrete realization of his ideas. The list of works in the first Constitutions reveals a well ordered development plan.

Our task today is one of fidelity in the development of the salesian mission. To interpret it as an uncritical repetition of the Founder's initiatives would be a grave mistake. Rather does it call for harmony with his perspective of commitments and agreement with the motivations underlying his actions, carried out in the characteristic style of the preventive system.

But going beyond this perspective, we may ask ourselves what are the fundamental criteria we can deduce from the Rule? Let us look at the text with an analytical eye and see what we can infer.

To give to our works and activity the physiognomy impressed by Don Bosco, art. 41 indicates three basic criteria: our works "depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working"; they must be "of an educational and pastoral nature" in salesian style; and they must be "designed to meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church".

Attention to the needs of those for whom we are working

The first criterion is a strong affirmation of the *priority of people* over structures, and of the attention that must be given to the needs of the human environment.

More than with works we are concerned with people, i.e. with those to whom we have been sent and with their needs. To their fundamental expectations we must provide a response. Our works and activities have to be continually rethought in relation to our beneficiaries and their needs. No work is of absolute value in itself. And every work recognized as suited to the attainment of the purpose and conforming to the spirit of Don Bosco is to be considered as valid and suitable for us. Our activity, in fact, is a service offered to young people of working-class areas: the young are our masters,¹ Don Bosco was fond of repeating, emphasizing by this phrase the great respect due to the person of the youngster, in whose regard he always adopted the attitude of an authentic servant. The vicissitudes and development of the wandering Oratory are a proof of the attention Don Bosco gave to his charges.²

Today the Salesians find themselves in the world in widely differing situations and are called upon to respond to the challenges made to them by the different environments, and to the urgent needs arising from new social and cultural circumstances.

¹ Cf. *Collected letters*, II, 361-362

² Cf. SGC, 349

The existing conditions of families, culture, work, social relationships, religious life, and living together are therefore factors which orientate our service.

This calls for great skill in detecting the sensitivity and expectations of the young, for the ability to identify their real needs and respond to the emerging idols which impoverish youngsters by alienating their spirit, and for dedication to the human and christian advancement of youth, especially those on the margin of society and the Church.

This criterion calls on the Salesians to verify the functioning of their works and activities, to make sure they are really a meaningful presence, providing an adequate response to the demands of the young and creating a space for them in which they can grow and be educated.

Our pastoral identity

The *educational and pastoral purpose* of the work is the second discriminating criterion indicated in the constitutional article.

As Salesians we undertake many activities and different kinds of work (schools, parishes, youth centres, and centres for free-time activities, for cultural animation etc.), with a view to meeting the needs of youth and working-class neighbourhoods. We give great importance to all these activities in so far as they contribute to the overall advancement of the individual. But we have to ask ourselves whether they are set up as Don Bosco would wish, and whether they do in fact attain their desired objective.

Every work and activity finds its justification in "*the education and evangelization of many young people*". Education is our special field and our characteristic way of evangelizing. On the other hand evangelization is the *raison d'être*, the radical motivation for our educational art. This basic identity is the most characterizing note of salesian action. Without it, any structure would fail in its purpose! In other words in all our works our qualification of "*missionaries of the young*" must be verified, bearers of the Gospel to today's youth.

This idea is wonderfully reflected in the availability of Don Bosco, who declared himself ready for anything, even for "raising his hat to the devil", provided that by so doing he could save the souls of his youngsters.³

The terms "educate and evangelize" and the double idea "upright citizen and good christian" illustrate the richness of this inspirational criterion, without which a salesian work cannot even be imagined.

The SGC expresses this demand of our identity very forcibly when it states that "the main criterion to be followed in deciding whether a work should continue or be closed down is the possibility or otherwise of carrying out real pastoral activity there".⁴

Strictly linked with the educational and pastoral objectives of our work is an indispensable community presence. The action of an educating and evangelizing community is a basic requirement for discerning the validity of our presence among various opportunities offered to us.

Sensitivity to the needs of the Church

The third criterion requires that our works shall "*meet the needs of the neighbourhood and of the Church*". "Sensitive to the signs of the times ... we evaluate our activities, renew them and create new ones". Concern for the needs of the Church was rooted in Don Bosco's conscience, and it should be the same in ours too.

The Church is the subject of pastoral work, and hence a particular contribution in this sector will be efficacious to the extent in which it forms part of ecclesial action. In the Church the various charismata and pastoral initiatives come together to form an organic unity. The specific needs of particular Churches vary from one to another, depend-

³ Cf. BM XIII, 325

⁴ SGC, 398

ing on the local social and cultural situation, the level of evangelization in their neighbourhood and the resources of the Church itself. On the other hand the richness of our charism makes it possible for us to offer new and varied contributions.

Some Churches ask of us a specialized catechetical service, others that we take charge of education in schools and provide animation for the young in general, others that we work among emarginated people, and still others that we work in populous working-class areas or lend a hand in founding new communities.

Which and how many of these we should choose must not depend only on our competence or on individual taste, but on the needs of the Church and on an assessment of such needs in the light of the overall commitments of a Province.

The SGC returned frequently to this concern for the universal and particular Churches. To quote one text among many: "In the plan of action of every Province and house, priority should be given to the way we can best take our place with complete generosity in the local Church. Our exemption should be looked on more as an opportunity for service than as a privilege, something to increase our availability as we carry out our mission".⁵ On the other hand the sensitivity of Don Bosco was no different: he was always ready to meet the expectations and requests of the Bishops. The Church, in fact, needs multiple forms and channels for carrying out dialogue with all of man and all men, and to reveal the overall design of salvation.

Certainly it must be noted that the pastoral contribution which the Salesians are called upon to offer must respond to the charism for which the Spirit has raised them up in the Church: in organized pastoral activity they are not asked to do work at random which may happen to be needed, but to bring the original contribution of their own identity (cf. C 48).

And this is a principle for efficacy, a norm for participation and a requirement for fidelity of the Congregation called to contribute to

⁵ SGC, 438

the building of the Church by manifesting "the multiform wisdom of God".⁶ On the other hand its particular nature and pastoral originality must be interpreted according to a criterion of adaptation to the needs of the individual Churches.

Vatican II expressed these criteria in recommendations of two kinds. The first is addressed to religious, who are invited to maintain and develop their own particular characteristics: "There exist within the Church a great number of clerical and lay institutes devoted to various aspects of the apostolate. They have contributions to make which are as varied as the graces given them: some exercise a ministry of service, some teach doctrine, some encourage through exhortation, some give in simplicity or bring cheerfulness to the sorrowful...".⁷ "Since however the active religious life takes many forms, this diversity should be taken into account when its renewal is being undertaken".⁸

The second kind of recommendation is addressed to the Bishops, so that they may help the Institutes to preserve their own identity, not only as regards community life and their internal regime, but also and especially as regards their specific apostolic mission. "The hierarchy, whose task it is to nourish and feed the people of God, ... uses its protective authority to ensure that religious institutes established all over the world for building up the Body of Christ may develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their Founders".⁹

If therefore religious are asked to make themselves available to meet pastoral needs, Bishops and Pastors are asked for discernment as regards their different charismata, so as to provide space in local pastoral work for the exercise of the gifts which the Holy Spirit has provided for the building of the Church. The document "Mutuae relationes" explicitly emphasizes this concern: "Bishops should confer on the different institutes a mission that is recognized as specifically theirs...; let specific duties and mandates be assigned to them".¹⁰

⁶ PC 1

⁷ PC 8

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ LG 45

¹⁰ MR 8

This kind of procedure will lead to the spontaneous definition of the physiognomy of the various Provinces, which are situated in specific territories and there have to render the salesian charism incarnate in the local culture and the reality of the particular Church.

Consequences

As well as the inspirational criteria, the article also presents some consequences which it may be well to consider, even if only briefly.

Attention to persons and to the social and environmental context, the dynamics of educational and pastoral action, and the response to ecclesial requirements, inevitably imply the need to accept a *legitimate pluralism* as a natural consequence. The article, in fact, speaks of our work being carried out "in a variety of ways", of "adequate forms of service", of renewing our activities and creating "new ones".

Such a perspective is obligatory in the multiplicity of situations we are called upon to meet. Indeed Don Bosco teaches us to be ever alert to find new and previously unknown ways of getting close to youth.

The article also recalls a fundamental attitude which follows from the criteria we have spoken of. The salesian house is characterized by "*initiative and constant flexibility*", which is typical of the salesian spirit (C 19). Burning and courageous zeal finds its expression in this kind of attitude, which prompts us to active intervention in the reality of the situations we find, with persistence and intelligent openness of mind so as to adapt them to the rhythm of life.

Finally it is well to note the reference in the last paragraph to *salesian presence in the places where the young are to be found, and especially the very poor*. This is a kind of service which could be called "unstructured", and arises from the fact that it sometimes happens that the usual educational and pastoral structures fail to reach a certain number of youngsters. In today's world, in fact, as was also the case in Don Bosco's time, there are young people in social and psychological situations which keep them away from ecclesial institutions: we are well

aware how many there are, especially in distressed areas, who are completely ignorant or have only a deformed idea of the Church.

It is natural therefore that, besides the salesians working for the education of the young in schools and oratories, there should be some who go after those at a distance in the places "where they are to be found", meeting them "in the context of their own life style" to provide "adequate forms of service" for their "education and evangelization". In many cases we have to find new ways of being present and of evangelizing, in line with the flexibility and creativity which are characteristic of our spirit (cf. C 19).

Salesians called to these forms of missionary service will have to remember the requirement of community life and maintain a deep communion with the other members of their community and Province, and to foster an ever more intense evangelical and salesian spirit, in close union with Christ the Apostle and in the spirit of the "da mihi animas" of our Father Don Bosco.¹¹

*Let us ask of Christ, the Good Shepherd,
that all we do may be inspired and guided
by a genuine charity
made concrete especially
in solicitous concern for other people.*

*That our activities may always provide a response
to the needs of the young for whom we work,
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*That all our works
may always have as their first objective
the service of the young and the poor,
inspired by the teachings of Christ the Saviour,
Let us pray to the Lord.*

¹¹ On "new presences", v. in particular GC21, 154-161: *New modes of salesian presence for evangelization*

*That above every secondary purpose
our primary aim may always be
the evangelizing education
given us by Don Bosco as an ideal,
Let us pray to the Lord.*

*Grant, O Lord,
that our every thought and action
may be always animated by the saving charity
of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Area of activity

The three areas of activity

... in the General-Regulation ...
... in this way it has been possible to avoid giving a list ...
... to compile of everything we do. By presenting the principal existing ...
... structures in groups we have been able to give prominence to the ...
... and their characteristic features. The search for the structures which ...
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... whole section ...
... A further point must also be made to preclude the risk of ...
... misunderstanding the content of these two articles which are, moreover,

ART. 42 ACTIVITIES AND WORKS

We carry out our mission chiefly in such works and activities as make possible the human and christian education of the young, such as oratories and youth centres, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties.

In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation.

In specialized centres we make available our pedagogical and catechetical expertise in the service of the young.

In retreat houses we provide for the christian formation of groups, especially of young people.

We dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young.

The three areas of activity *the Good Shepherd*

Articles 42 and 43 refer to works and activities grouped according to the different sectors of our mission: *education, evangelization and communication*. Within each of these areas some significant examples are given which are described at greater length with their characteristics in the General Regulations.

In this way it has been possible to avoid giving a list, difficult to compile, of everything we do. By presenting the principal existing structures in groups we have been able to give prominence to the similarity in physiognomy between the different works and activities and their characteristic features. The search for possible structures which do not yet exist, or initiatives for the renewal of the present ones, are not ruled out by the text which needs to be read in the context of the whole section.

A further point must also be made to preclude the risk of misunderstanding the content of these two articles which are, moreover,

drawn up in very different ways. The main areas of education, evangelization and communication, in which the operational structures are grouped, are not to be understood as watertight compartments. A school, for example, has a characteristic educational structure, but this does not preclude the importance of social communication in it, and still less that of pastoral activity. The parish too, although characteristically a work of evangelization, is not really salesian without dimensions of education and communication. And to complete the example, a publishing house, although primarily a social communications structure, would not achieve its purpose from a salesian standpoint were it not to have also an educational and pastoral aim.

There is indeed a real distinction between the three areas, because every work and activity must maintain the basic physiognomy which characterizes it, but these should not be considered one by one in a closed and exclusive fashion, but in an open and mutually connected manner as areas of activity which complement each other.

Area of the education of youth

Art. 42 provides a schematic outline of the first two sectors with a reminder in measured terms of some of the characteristic elements of the fields of activity, followed by an enumeration of the main structures.

First are grouped together those works which can be described as *educational* and *for the young*: the text, in fact, speaks of "the human and christian education of the young". This essential dimension of our activity finds practical realization in typical works in which the accent is on youth and education. In works of this kind it is possible to follow a programme of overall education following our pastoral plan, and it is indispensable that in all we do we have clearly in mind our preferential concern for the world of youth.

The General Regulations go into more details in describing the different works and their specific characteristics.

— The *Oratory and Youth Centre* (R 11-12) are seen as "an educational environment" with a "strong missionary slant". They are organized as a community service, and aim at evangelization through many different recreational, educative and apostolic activities.

— The characteristic element for the *salesian school* (R 13-14) is the overall development of the individual attained through a religious approach and a balanced openness to culture. The educational process is founded on solid cultural values and takes into account the dynamics of youth. Its social character is in line with the local social milieu, to which its cultural perspective and branches of training are also related.

— *Hostels and boarding schools* (R 15) constitute a service which enable a youngster to gain indispensable experience in a creative life environment. In them reigns a family atmosphere which facilitates relationships, promotes responsibility, and fosters a happy life together.

— The services of *vocation guidance* too reflect the characteristic aspects of our youth settings. They are fundamentally places where young people who feel called to an ecclesial commitment can find welcome, guidance and encouragement.

Although the list may well appear incomplete, the sequence of these and other works confirms our commitment to animation in the youth sector and emphasizes the educative aspect of the Congregation.

Area of evangelization of the poor and working classes

The second group includes works which are strictly *pastoral and for the common people*.

The article says that through these works "we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people". The evangelization of such densely populated and missionary environments is a specific characteristic of such works and gives them their particular aspect and style. Even in these works, preferential concern for the young always remains the expression of our specific vocation and the distinctive contribution we make to the pastoral work of the particular Church.

— In this area special mention is made of our *commitment in the missionary field*, which had already been indicated in articles 6 and 30 as being among the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission. In the light of one of the articles of the Regulations concerning the "Missions" (R 22), we can note a particular aspect of salesian missionary presence. At a time when progressively less attention seems to be given to concrete problems of global development in emerging countries, it is interesting to see the need declared for creating the "conditions favouring a free process of conversion to the christian faith with respect shown for the cultural and religious values of the neighbourhood". In this way prominence is given to the evangelizing and plebeian dimension of all our missionary work.

— With regard to *parishes*, art. 26 of the Regulations gives a clear outline of their specifically salesian qualities. They should be distinguished by their low-income population and their interest in young people. Their animating centre is the salesian community, which considers the oratory and youth centre as part of its pastoral project, sets great store by catechesis and bringing back those who have lapsed, fosters the linkage between evangelization and human advancement, and favours the vocational development of each individual.

— The constitutional article refers also to a particular task of the Salesians: *pedagogical and catechetical services in specialized centres*. This is a skilled service we are called upon to offer for a more efficacious and deeper formation and animation of youngsters by trained and competent educators.

— Finally the service provided by *retreat houses and spirituality centres* is highlighted. These provide a very valuable contribution to the growth of spirituality among groups, and especially youth groups, following the lines of the sanctity of Don Bosco. The GC21 makes explicit reference to such houses in connection with their importance as "places of vocational guidance".¹

As we have said already, the article provides only examples, though they are not without significance. The field of salesian work and ac-

¹ Cf. GC21, 118

tivity always remains open to inventiveness and creativity, provided the aim is to reach young people. In fact, says the article in conclusion, "we dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young".²

Finally, it may be asked why an article which consists simply and solely of a list of works has found its way into the Constitutions at all. Was it really necessary?

The prominence given to the kind of works, although not absolutely essential, is not something merely secondary in salesian tradition. Don Bosco, in fact, always attached great importance to the institution of "organized" works: they were the salesian "houses". These are better able to respond to the complexities of the salesian educational and pastoral plan, and the need for the community type of management which is characteristic of our educational system. Moreover an organized work does not mean that its structure is so rigid that it can never in any circumstances be changed. The perspective of the "family", which is constantly recalled, is a permanent call for structural flexibility.

The opening of a work is always a matter for planning; it is a question of how we are to place a house and community at the service and disposition of youth.

*God our Father,
in the multiplicity of your works,
you realize your undivided purpose
of bringing men to you.
Grant also to us the ability
to pursue incessantly the final end of salvation
in the multiple variety of our presence
among our fellow men.*

² Cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 1 (F. MOTTO, p. 73)

*By the guidance of your Spirit,
may we live in every situation and circumstance
the charisma of our Founder,
for the benefit especially of poor youngsters
and of peoples most in need,
and in the charity of Christ,
your Son and our Lord.*

ART. 43 SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

We work in the social communication sector. This is a significant field of activity¹ which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission.

Our Founder had an instinctive grasp of the value of this means of mass education, which creates culture and spreads patterns of life; he showed great originality in the apostolic undertakings which he initiated to defend and sustain the faith of the people.

Following his example we utilize as God's gift the great possibilities which social communication offers us for education and evangelization.

¹ Cf. IM 1

The third area of our activity is social communication, "a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission".

Communication should not be understood as the sum total of a collection of "instruments", but as a complex and dynamic reality which enters into all we do. Nor should it be considered merely as a particular activity or a specific sector of apostolic work, but rather as a main road to the full realization of our task as educators and pastors who are also communicators.

Social communication at the present day

In a society in which the reality of communication is invading and involving spheres formerly unexplored and not even thought of, the contents of this article are prophetic. The development perspective is no longer that of the industrial or post-industrial society, but the society of communications which are advancing with giant strides. "The mass media", said the GC21, "become ever more a massive educating in-

fluence, shaping and begetting cultures. They elaborate and broadcast accumulated evidence which underlie new life styles and new criteria of judgement".¹

As a result of its incisive action stemming from the combination of highly refined technical instruments and the most sophisticated forms of the language of visual images, social communication has taken on and is playing a decisive role in the cultural dialect and in social life and customs.

The Church has recognized its importance and even its indispensability for communicating the gospel message. "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims from the housetops the message of which she is the depository. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes".²

The Founder's example

Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of the important implications of this phenomenon for the young and for people in general: "In his own day Don Bosco considered the press, the publication of good books and magazines, stage plays for youth, music and song not only as means for the service of educational pastoral works, such as oratories, hostels, schools, missions, but also as 'original apostolic endeavours' directed of their very nature to the mission Divine Providence gave him for youth".³

¹ GC21, 148

² EN 45

³ GC21, 149

It seems evident that our Founder considered social communication a practical and authentic means of mass education, a parallel school of great efficacy and power. At the present day we hear his appeals in this regard with a new interest: "I beg and implore you not to neglect this most important aspect of our mission";⁴ "this was one of the main tasks given to me by Divine Providence".⁵ "I do not hesitate to call this means divine, since God himself made use of it for the regeneration of man".⁶ Moreover Don Bosco has told us in writing that the spreading of good literature is "one of the principal aims of our Congregation".⁷

The oldest version of the Constitutions in Italian is very interesting for the space given to this matter, having regard to the undeveloped nature of the means available at the time: "... the members shall strive to preach retreats, spread good books, and use all the means that unflagging charity shall inspire, so that by means of the spoken and printed word a barrier may be raised against the heresy and irreligion which is trying to find its way by so many means among the ignorant and uneducated; that is what we are doing at present through the publication of the Catholic Readings".⁸

Our Father was well aware of the great power of the mass media for reaching people and of their limitless persuasive capabilities, so much so in fact that he urged the use of "every means that christian charity inspires" for promoting the faith.⁹

He looked to the future, undertaking also "new and original apostolic enterprises for defending and sustaining the faith of the people".

⁴ *Collected letters*, vol. IV, p. 321

⁵ *ibid.* p. 319

⁶ *ibid.* p. 318

⁷ *ibid.* p. 320

⁸ *Costituzioni 1858*, I,5 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 78)

⁹ *Costituzioni 1875*, I,7 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 79)

Salesian commitment in the field of communication

The reference made in the article to "his example" is for today's Salesians the strongest motive for continuing along the road Don Bosco has pointed out.

The field is a vast one; new techniques for transmitting messages and news are appearing every day. We must not be found wanting in the courage shown by our Founder, who saw all the great possibilities offered by this phenomenon as so many "gifts of God".

The article invites us to think in renewed terms and to be creative in the use of means of communication. It is a case of developing our commitment to a mature and fruitful use of the mass media, understood as an ensemble of instruments, and to introduce the language of communications into our educational and pastoral work.

The salesian is a *communicator who draws his inspiration from the "perfect communicator"*,¹⁰ the exemplary cause of every expression, every image and every technique. He does not consider the creative expression and use of the media as something merely incidental or subsidiary in educational projects, but is convinced that these possibilities of expression add up to a genuine new method of communication, a real language which must not be undervalued, especially in educational dialogue with the rising generations. And so he employs every means of communication relevant to his particular situation: he makes intelligent and competent use of the cinema, local TV and radio transmissions, together with other items like audiovisuals, the theatre, music, the so-called 'body language' etc.¹¹

It was precisely "to sensitize our various fields of apostolate to this new language and to change the attitudes of those working in them" that the GC21 asked that courses should be promoted for systematic

¹⁰ CP 11

¹¹ Cf. concluding address of Rector Major to GC22 (GC22, 73)

training in critical approach to the mass media's programmes and their use as normal means of educative communication.¹²

We note that the article indicates clearly what our objective must be as qualified communicators: *for education and evangelization*.

The first purpose is *education*. In this connection the SGC speaks of our threefold task: of liberation, of co-responsibility, and of creativity.¹³ The influence of the mass media on youngsters and on ordinary people is enormous: they read all kinds of printed matter, they listen to all sorts of transmissions, and flock into theatres and cinemas. Often it happens that fundamental principles become distorted and even repudiated beneath the deluge of messages received every day.

From this a specific task derives for us, a work of liberation to free people from the conditioning effects of all these factors and form them to an attitude of critical appraisal in the face of the violence of hidden persuasion.

But this is not enough. We have to educate to a constructive attitude of shared responsibility, to active intervention with positive follow-up. It is a matter of developing in young people a critical aesthetic and moral sense to set them on the road to a "personal and free choice".¹⁴

The youngster must be helped to an understanding of the language, to a critical assessment of the message (which is often the expression of some ideology or mentality), and to dialogue by means of the various forms of comparison and discussion. The educator should also aim at stimulating creative imagination in this field: it is up to him to make the guiding intervention of one who is not only able to discern the underlying reality, but wants to bring his influence to bear in its regard.

The second purpose is *evangelization*.

¹² Collected letters, vol. IV, p. 321.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 319.

¹⁴ GC21, 152. In the "Ratio" the study of social communication forms part of every phase of initial formation (cf. FSDB, *passim*)

¹³ SGC, 456-458

¹⁴ IM 9

Every form of social communication represents a value to be cultivated in its own right, because it is the expression of human words which are anchored in the divine Word, the Word of God. But social communication can be put at the specific service of the spreading of the evangelical message, "at the service of the Gospel", to increase "almost infinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard, and to enable the Good News to reach millions of people".¹⁵

Experience shows that the use of the new language proves fruitful and efficacious not only at the strictly educational level but also for purposes of liturgical and catechetical animation, in formation to prayer, and in living the encounter with Christ in the sacraments.

In conclusion we may recall what the Rector Major said in his circular letter *"The challenge of the media"*. After discussing the salesian dimension, he wrote: "Social communication is a 'new presence' for us".¹⁶ We should be prompted to accept it by the open and courageous attitude adopted by Don Bosco in the last century.

"Don Bosco, man of vision that he was, was well aware of the ever increasing impact of social communication. Right from the early years of his apostolate he worked with enthusiasm in this particular field. He said of the printed word: 'In these matters Don Bosco wants to be in the vanguard of progress'. He was possessed of a saintly daring".¹⁷

*Let us praise the Lord
who for the salvation of men
provides means in every age
for the communication of his Gospel,
and entrusts them to the hands of his disciples.*

¹⁵ EN 45

¹⁶ Cf. ASC 302 (1981), p. 6-8

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 30

*For our Congregation
that it may be able
to communicate the message of salvation
by expressing it in every language
and inserting it in every culture,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*For all those who with us and like us
are called to spread the faith in the world,
that they may be able to find in their environments
apt instruments
for the efficacious transmission of your Gospel,
through a harmonious unity of faith and cultures,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Grant, O Lord, to the sons of Don Bosco,
and to all our collaborators in the work of education
the creativity and courage of our Founder,
with the ability to accept and use for your Kingdom
the riches of the means of communication
which our times provide,
so that we may be
authentic communicators for the masses,
to the praise of your glory
and for the salvation of the world.*

THOSE WHO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MISSION

"He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labour. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3,8-9)

Parties had sprung up in the community of Corinth: "I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Cephas, I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1,12). Worldly wisdom, divorced from the logic of the cross, could not recognize in the multiple ministerial expressions the unity of the gift of faith given by God in Jesus Christ. "You are still of the flesh... are you not merely men?" (1 Cor 3,3-4) asks Paul, and he goes on to specify in vv. 5-9 the sense of the roles of preachers and teachers, or more simply of the different ministries in the one Church.

At the centre stands God in Christ, the absolute protagonist of man's salvation or, to put it in the terms of the Gospel, the coming of the Kingdom. In the parables Jesus uses the image of a field to indicate humanity as the place of the Kingdom (Mt 13, but v. also the connection between people and vineyard in Is 5, or plantation in Ezek 17,7); the ministers are collaborators ("synergoi"), equally indispensable for the divine choice and for service of that choice. At this level the various interventions in God's field (planting, watering) are secondary and subaltern to the unity of the project; it may be that the difference will appear from the sense of responsibility and purity of intention with which each minister will have done what was given him to do (1 Cor 3,10-17). Paul is forthright in his admonition: "You are God's field, God's building". And the warning is addressed to the ministers, because he is saying in fact: in your different kinds of service in the one field of God, remember that that is the community in which you have to work, those are the people you have to evangelize, and above all do not forget that God is its *raison d'être* and its principle of belonging.

The pauline text is much more than a statement of principle: it is a strong warning based on concrete facts, on things which happen and bring to mind the final result, a just judgement on the validity of the service rendered. But still more it is a stimulus to grow in stature as spiritual men recognizing their common equality, though in different roles, before the one God who is the Father of all and works in all.

The Constitutions apply this teaching of Paul within the Congregation and the Salesian Family. We can never forget Don Bosco who unified everything in his "Da mihi animas", and at the same time did so much to bring his collaborators to understand and practise unity in brotherhood as they worked at different tasks for the salvation of the young.

The apostolic mandate which the Church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility.

The provincial and the rector, as promoters of dialogue and team work, guide the community in pastoral discernment, so that it may accomplish its apostolic plan in unity and fidelity.

The community the subject of the mission

The title given to this section reveals at once the perspective of the articles which make it up (C 44-48). We are concerned with defining the *subject of the mission*, or in other words to whom the apostolic mission is confided. And the answer is clear: it is given to the community.

The community takes up and puts into effect the apostolic mandate received from the Church. The salesian mission is not something entrusted to the responsibility of individuals, but is a reality involving a group of people who share responsibility.

Among Salesians, therefore, there is neither room nor justification for individualism in apostolic work. Each member obviously brings his own talents to the mission and plays his part in the responsibility for its fulfilment (cf. C 22). But his indispensable personal task forms part of a community commitment. Here we have a first decisive statement about the community dimension which gives the hallmark to our apostolic work and style of education. We are not speaking of a generic kind of community concern, but of being clearly aware that it is the community as a whole that takes up the mission received, and that puts it into practice as a group.

Those therefore to whom the mission is given in a particular place are at a practical level "the provincial and local communities" concerned.

The "*provincial community*" has a particular importance as regards responsibility for apostolic work. It is in fact "the institutional salesian unit which best corresponds to the local Church".¹

As will be said later and more explicitly (cf. C 58 and 157), the province is not to be considered simply as an administrative entity, but as a "communion of local communities" which recognize that they share responsibility for the salesian mission in a particular region.

This permits the offering of a specific and diversified service to the particular Church, thus manifesting the life and pluriform mission of the Congregation.

The "*local community*" carries the responsibility at a more restricted level, defined by the neighbourhood in which it is situated and carries out its specific apostolic tasks.

It follows that each member and each local community, while carrying out a particular activity, acts in the awareness of being solid with other members for the fulfilment of a common mission of wider extension.

Unity and joint responsibility

In the community which is responsible for the mission "*the members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important*" like living organs of a single body. This was an image dear to Don Bosco,² and it expresses very well the idea, on the one hand that the fulfilment of the mission depends on many functions which differ one from another, and on the other that these functions cannot be understood in isolation from each other and from the whole organism.

¹ SGC, 84

² V. conference of Don Bosco to the salesians, 11.03.1869: BM IX, 267-271

According to the law of enriching diversity and mutual complementarity, we find in the salesian community confreres with different tasks to carry out and with widely differing talents, abilities and qualifications.

Each of them needs the others because the contributions of all of them are important, even though they differ in nature and prominence.

Each one, in line with what was said in art. 22, should feel a correlative relationship with the other members of the community.

But for the achievement of pastoral objectives a mere structural arrangement of tasks and roles is insufficient. It is of much greater importance that the members be conscious of their dependence on each other, and that they accept the implications of this. This is what the text means by the phrase "*through unity and joint brotherly responsibility*".

The word 'unity' here refers particularly to an objective situation of working together and the sense of mutual belonging; and on the other hand the phrase 'joint brotherly responsibility' expresses more particularly the subjective attitude in conscience of the various members, each of whom shares the responsibility of his confreres, and carries out his own task in a responsible manner and with the intention of building unity and working coherently with the others.

The Constitutions take up this concept again in the chapter on the fraternal community (chap. V), when dealing with the community obedient to the will of the Lord, and also in connection with the service of authority (cf. especially C 66 and C 123).

The pastoral guide

The second part of the article is closely linked with the first.

Action by the community implies the unity of the members in the diversity of their individual tasks. This obviously requires a guide in pastoral discernment so as to ensure union and fidelity in carrying out the apostolic plan.

Who is this guide foreseen by the Rule for these apostles who share responsibility for their community operations? He is the Provincial in the provincial community and the Rector in the local community.

But shared responsibility means more than the members just waiting for or receiving directives; they have to work together in appraising situations and studying possible options. The superiors, therefore, are to be regarded as "promoters of dialogue and teamwork".

We must not look on them simply as works-managers, but be aware that they are called to *guide an apostolic community* so that the latter may proceed in united fidelity to their specific salesian mission, without which it would not be possible to achieve the objective of the apostolic plan conceived by Don Bosco.

The article points to a central trait in the physiognomy of the salesian superior, which will be completed in due course by other aspects in later parts of the Rule (cf. C 55, 121, 161, 176). The one who presides, in his capacity as salesian superior and coordinator of the community's religious life, is essentially the one who gives orientation to its educational and pastoral commitments. In him religious authority implies, and even demands, his role as a pastoral guide and vice versa. In Don Bosco's plan the guide of the salesian community is the apostolic and spiritual educator of a group of other pastors and educators, the coordinator of their individual efforts, the animator of the spirit which prompts missionary activity considered in its totality.

The GC21, in depicting the figure of the rector, says that he is "the pastoral guide of the salesian mission in a threefold function, as teacher of the Word, as sanctifier through the ministry of the sacraments and as a coordinator of apostolic activity. He holds principal responsibility for the mission among the young and the people entrusted to his community; he preserves and renews the fidelity of the confreres in their pastoral commitment to the preventive system; he cooperates with the Bishop and the diocesan clergy in the combined pastoral action of the local Church".³

The priest or deacon and the brother are presented in the first place in their fundamental equality. *The salesian vocation, says the Rule, is the same for both.* The two figures are referred to as the "salesian

³ GC21, 52

It is a question of a skilled ecclesial service called for by the very reality of the salesian community, which in the mission received from the Church finds its tenor and specific way of life (cf. C 3).

*God our Father,
awake and develop in us
the awareness of the mission
which through the Church and our Society
you have entrusted to us to be carried out
in our local and provincial communities.*

*May your Spirit help us
to know, understand and love each other
in mutual collaboration.*

*Make us glad to have so many brothers at our side,
grant that we may be solid in our aims and efforts,
as we try to be truly united around our superiors
for the achievement of your loving designs.*

We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.

Action by the community implies the unity of the members in the diversity of their individual tasks. This obviously requires a guide in pastoral discernment so as to ensure union and fidelity in carrying out the apostolic plan.

ART. 45 COMMON AND COMPLEMENTARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one salesian vocation.

The salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life.

The salesian priest or deacon brings to the common work of promoting human development and of educating in the faith the specific quality of his ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.

The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness.

In art. 44 it was stated that the one single mission entrusted to the community is carried out by members who "have complementary

brother" and the "salesian priest": what is fundamentally common to both is that each is a "salesian" (the term being used not as an adjective but as a noun), thus expressing their fundamental equality. The manner of living the common salesian vocation, on the other hand, is spelled out by the specific characteristics which define the particular condition of each of them, priest and brother, and the respective tasks which devolve on them as a result.

The article begins by taking up again the theme of art. 44 and stating that each of us is responsible for the common mission and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts. The expression "each of us" is to be understood in a collective sense: the brother and the priest. It is another way of emphasizing the fundamental common responsibility, which is followed by the reference to the original contribution provided by each of the two figures. One and the same religious consecration, the identical apostolic mission and participation in community life are at the basis of the equality between brother and priest.

Don Rinaldi put it like this in 1927: "When Don Bosco began to think about founding a religious Society, he wanted all its members, priests, clerics and laymen, to enjoy the same rights and privileges... The brothers ... are salesians obliged to strive after the same perfection and carry out the very same apostolate which belongs to the essence of the Salesian Society".¹ Don Rinaldi's words reflect those of Don Bosco himself; when speaking of the Congregation to the young apprentices he said: "It is an association of priests, clerics and laymen, especially artisans, who want to live in unity so as to love each other and do each other good... Between the members of the Congregation there are no divisions: we all look upon ourselves as brothers..."²

And so the Constitutions give prominence to the unity of the salesian vocation, but also to the necessity of two kinds of members for the fulfilment of the original mission of the Congregation.

¹ ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574

² BM XII, 121

"The sons of Don Bosco", wrote Fr Ricaldone, "must stand side by side, complete one another, and go forward in carrying out the aims of their identical mission... they are not separate or divergent elements, but the heirs, instruments and executors of the same divine plan".³

This joint presence of laymen and clerics and their indispensability for the mission is not just something incidental but has its roots in the very identity of the Congregation.

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, wrote: "We find in the Congregation's single vocation two fundamental aspects: the sacerdotal and the lay. It is not simply a case of this or that confrere ... preferring the ministry or things temporal; it is a matter involving the salesian community as a vital organism, i.e. *the Congregation as such*, which has of its essence a peculiar and simultaneous sense of both the sacerdotal consecration and the lay dimension, each imbuing the other and forming together a unique life of communion".⁴

Specific characteristics of the two figures

But vocational unity does not deny or disregard the specific nature of the two figures, and the second and third paragraphs of the article dwell on some characteristic features of each.

1. *The salesian brother.*

The Rule presents the salesian brother in the first place in his singular salesian vocation, as a "brilliant creation of the great heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians", to use the delicately sensitive expression of the Servant of God, Fr Philip Rinaldi.⁵ The

³ ASC 93 (1939), p. 14.

⁴ E. VIGANÒ, *The lay element in the salesian community*, ASC 298 (1980), p. 15.

⁵ ACS 40, 24 July 1927, p. 574.

seventh successor of Don Bosco points out the lofty ecclesial significance of this vocation, comparing it with that of the ministerial priesthood: "Radically the difference is not one marked by any negative quality or lack of ecclesial endowment; it is a case of a different choice: the brother has opted for a positive christian ideal not determined by the sacrament of Holy Orders but constituted by a number of values which form of themselves a true vocational objective of high quality. The GC21 points out clearly the nature of this choice, calling it a 'vocation' which is in itself 'specific' (with its own special character), 'complete' (it lacks nothing), 'original' (the brilliant creation of the Founder), and 'meaningful' (of particular relevance at the present day)".⁶

As a salesian the brother is first and foremost an "educator", dedicated by vow to the overall advancement of the young and the common people. He carries out tasks of a cultural, professional, social and financial kind, in addition to those which are of a catechetical, liturgical and missionary nature; in other words he is engaged in "every field of education and pastoral activity". Because, as a religious, he does not act in his own name but receives his mission from the Church, he shares deeply in the pastoral ministry, giving a particular expression to his baptismal priesthood.

But while the salesian brother is carrying out these tasks, he is also giving his characteristic contribution to the community, a contribution which the Constitutions see as deriving precisely from his lay condition. "There are some things", said Don Bosco, "that priests and clerics cannot do, and you will do them...";⁷ they are precisely the things which his condition as a 'lay' religious enables him to do.

Hence, after stressing the authentic and fundamental salesian religious vocation and its community dimension, the text goes on to consider the specifically 'lay' form in which the brother lives it. As the GC21 said very clearly: "The lay dimension is the concrete form in which the brother lives and operates as a salesian religious".⁸ The

⁶ ASC (1980), p. 10; cf. GC21, 173 ff.

⁷ MB XVI, 313

⁸ GC21, 178

article of the Constitutions says the same thing in different words: the brother "brings ... the specific qualities of his lay status". It should be noted that precisely because of this kind of presence, as well as the traditional name of "salesian brother" the Constitutions and Regulations in certain contexts use the term "lay salesian".

We may ask: in what precisely do the "specific qualities of his lay status" consist, that distinguish him from the lay qualities of the man living in the world?⁹

The SGC gives the following answer: "With the characteristics proper to religious life, he lives his vocation as a member of the laity, seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to God's plan; he exercises his baptismal priesthood, prophetic witness and kingly service, and in this way truly shares in

⁹ It will be useful to keep in mind the significance of some terms in frequent use. "*Laity*", according to the accepted usage in ecclesial documents (cf. especially IG chap. IV and AA) refers to those who through Baptism have been incorporated into Christ and constituted members of the People of God; in their own way they share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole christian people in the Church and in the world (cf. IG 31). In the Council documents and in the CIC the layman is considered from the vocation standpoint as a member of the faithful distinct from clerics, who are in sacred Orders (cf. IG 31; CIC, can. 207). The religious state is one with peculiar characteristics in the Church, linked with a charism of the Spirit; the conciliar documents explicitly state that the faithful who are either clerics or lay can become religious. (cf. IG 43; CIC, can. 588).

In the documents of the magisterium frequent reference is made to secular tasks as belonging to the laity (cf. IG 31: "Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity"). The term "*secular*" (and related terms) refers to tasks connected with the "secular" reality, i.e. all temporal realities which concern the present age (as distinct from the realities which directly concern the last end). In one sense the whole Church, because of its pilgrim nature, has a secular character, and therefore all its members are linked to some extent with secular realities. But the laity are more specifically inserted in such realities and it belongs to the laity to insert in them the gospel ferment through their professional contributions.

A distinction needs to be made between *secular laity*, who foster secular realities and raise their level in a christian fashion, acting within them in virtue of their own duties and laws, and *religious laity* (which include the salesian brother) who work in specific sectors of the secular realities in virtue of their consecrated status and according to the spirit of their Founder (cf. ASC 298, p. 25 ff.), and bring to them through their professional competence the charitable activity of the Church, offering a living witness to the fact that "the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes" (cf. IG 31)

the life and mission of Christ in the Church; with the intensity that derives from his specific consecration, and by 'mandate' of the Church (and not merely as a private individual), he fulfils the mission of spreading the Gospel and of sanctifying in a non-sacramental manner; his works of charity are undertaken with greater dedication within a Congregation devoted to the integral education of youth, especially those in need; finally, as regards the christian renewal of the temporal order, since he has renounced worldliness he exercises this form of apostolate as a religious in a most efficacious manner, educating youth to the christian renewal of work and to other human values".¹⁰

The salesian brother is called to live his lay condition according to the salesian charism and in the context of his community.¹¹ The reality of his lay status is not cancelled by his religious profession, but rather gives a special slant to every aspect of the confrere's life: the salesian mission, life of community, apostolic activity, profession of the counsels, prayer and the spiritual life.

It gives to the salesian community too its characteristic aspect that Don Bosco wanted: enriched by its lay aspect the community is able to approach the world more validly as regards its apostolic objectives.

The text does not refer directly to the different roles of the salesian brother, but stresses that his lay condition and his experience, united with a deeply salesian heart, make him particularly "*close ... to the young and to the realities of working life*". History bears witness to the fact that in the Oratories, in technical and trade schools, in the missions the brothers have carried out a very rich apostolate and have had a most efficacious influence!

We may well think that in the ever more secularized world in which we are living, the presence of the salesian brother becomes correspondingly more urgent and valuable.¹²

We may note finally that the entire text of the Constitutions reveals the interior attitude which underlies the characteristic vocation of the

¹⁰ SGC, 149

¹¹ Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 29-30

¹² Cf. ASC 298 (1980), p. 47-49; the Rector Major presents two authoritative appeals, quoting Don Albera and Don Rinaldi

brother, on account of which his salesian heart is anchored in the transcendence he lives in temporal realities, into which he injects the radical power of the Gospel. This enables him to move in a secular context with a mentality which is at the same time both technical and pastoral, and this is of great value to the community!

2. *The salesian priest or deacon.*

The "*salesian priest or deacon*" is the sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, the sacrament of his ministry as Head of the Church.

Priests, according to Vatican II, exercise the function of Christ as Pastor and Head in proportion to their share of authority".¹³ In fact, "by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, priests are signed with a special character, and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the Head".¹⁴

Between the ministerial priesthood (deriving from the sacrament of Order) and the common priesthood of the faithful (deriving from the sacrament of Baptism) there is a mutual complementarity: they are ordered one to another.¹⁵ From the standpoint of the final purpose of christian life, primacy belongs to the common priesthood: "All the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God. They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs."¹⁶

But from the point of view of the sacramental efficacy of their insertion in the sacrifice of Christ, the priestly ministry has an essential role on account of the "sacred power" of which it is the bearer:

¹³ PO 6

¹⁴ PO 2

¹⁵ Cf. LG 10

¹⁶ *ibid.*

priests, in fact, "exercise within the limits of their authority the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head".¹⁷

What happens is that the service of the priestly ministry renders efficacious in the Church the common priesthood of all the faithful. But if priests exercise their role of presiding they must also, as St Peter warns in his first letter, avoid acting "as domineering over those in (their) charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5,3): they must be able to show that they are at the same time both "leaders and members"; "truly 'fathers', but also 'brothers'; teachers of the faith, but mostly 'fellow-disciples' of Christ; 'masters of perfection' for the faithful, but 'witnesses' also by their personal holiness".¹⁸

On the basis of this doctrine of the Council, the Constitutions ask in the first place that salesian priests be all that they should be.

It is both pleasing and significant to recall what Don Bosco said to the Minister Ricasoli who had invited him to Palazzo Pitti at Florence on 12 December 1866: "Your Excellency, I want you to know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys, a priest in Turin, and a priest in Florence. He is a priest in the house of the poor and a priest in the palace of the king and his ministers".¹⁹

This is a wonderful indication of personal identity and unity of life in Don Bosco. "In this way", declares the Council, speaking of priests, "by adopting the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity".²⁰

The salesian priest feeds his heart on pastoral charity which can only come from Christ the Shepherd. This is a basic attitude which prompts him to seek through his every word and gesture to be an *authentic pastor* with the heart of Christ himself. It is his first and chief task!

¹⁷ LG 28

¹⁸ MR 9

¹⁹ BM VIII, 239

²⁰ PO 14

Recalling the decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis", the SGC had this to say: "The priest is the spiritual man and must always have before his eyes the image of Christ, servant and shepherd. His ministry is an act of service, eschatological in character, the visible signs of which are his preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. In virtue of his office he publicly proclaims Christ as Saviour of today's world; he gathers together the christian community, uniting them in Christ's sacrifice, and as their guide he leads them to the Father through Christ in the Spirit".²¹

But the Constitutions emphasize that the salesian priest is called to exercise his ministry *according to the salesian charism in the context of his community*. His model is Don Bosco, whom Pius XI in his Encyclical on the priesthood cited with John Mary Vianney and Joseph Cottolengo as a "star of the first order" and a "true giant of holiness". The salesian priest is a priest according to the spirit and apostolic guidelines which made of our Father a sign of Christ for the young and the common people.

The Council itself recognized that within the one priesthood there could be different roles: "All priests contribute to the same purpose, the building up of the Body of Christ, and this demands many kinds of duties and fresh adaptations, especially in our own times".²²

There are therefore different ways of exercising one and the same priestly ministry.

There are many tasks which may await the salesian priest: responsibility for a youth centre, preacher and catechist, teacher and educator, work in a parish, chaplain, group animator, missionary, superior of a community, etc.

The common denominator is the fulfilment of his task with a priestly heart; that he proclaim the Word, that he sanctify and animate a community. The text expresses these intentions and tasks by the word "especially".

²¹ SGC, 142

²² PO 8, 80; cf. also GC21, 194-196

The salesian priestly ministry is not something isolated and practised individually. It enters into the communion of pastoral objectives for the complete christian education of the young which involves also other equally indispensable contributions.

Nevertheless the text emphasizes a basic orientation. Among all their tasks, salesian priests give priority to those characteristic of their ministry, because "it is the first task of priests to preach the Gospel of God to all men",²³ and they are ministers of the sacraments, particularly of the Eucharist and Penance. And so the Gospel, the altar and the confessional represent the priorities for the ministry of every salesian priest.

Essential reciprocal relationship

The last paragraph of the article emphasizes the *essential mutual relationship* that must exist between the lay salesian and the salesian priest in the community, if the latter is to assume its full apostolic physiognomy. This means that in the salesian priest must be found some of the aspects found in eminent form in the vocation of the brother and vice versa, and this to such an extent that the priesthood has no meaning from a salesian point of view if it is not seen in relationship with the figure and contribution of the lay salesian.

On the other hand the lay religious character of the brother does not find its true meaning without conscious reference to the figure and ministry of his priest confreres; the brother lives and works in spiritual and pastoral communion with them.

The article ends with the statement that *the significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness*. This is an expression in other words of Don Bosco's explicit desire concerning the "form" of the Salesian Society (cf. C 4): the Salesian Congregation would no longer be itself if one of its components

²³ PO 4

were missing; in every provincial and local community the presence together of clerics and lay members is needed for its "apostolic completeness".

The priestly and lay dimensions require each other and penetrate in a specific spirituality of apostolic activity. Each is in so strict an integrational relationship with the other that they become mutually essential. In the salesian community priests and brothers take part in a vital exchange of their different aspects, and forge the bond of an intrinsic inter-relationship for carrying out their common mission.

As the Rector Major said at the end of the GC22: "Every confrere, be he cleric or lay, if he has the true awareness of being a 'member', will feel that he shares the responsibility for everything, bringing to it the gift of himself and his particular vocation. The priestly and lay components do not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, running on parallel lines and eventually putting together the efforts of each group, but rather a single community which is the true recipient of the one salesian mission. This requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each clerical salesian there is an intimate feeling of being linked to and coinvolved with the lay dimension of the community, and in the heart of each lay salesian in turn there is the same feeling in respect of the community's priestly dimension. It is the salesian community, in each of its members, which bears witness to these sensitivities and carries out undertakings which are at the same time both 'priestly' and 'lay.'"²⁴

From all this it is not difficult to understand why the Constitutions indicate the "significant and complementary presence" of clerics and laymen as an "essential element" for the "apostolic completeness" of the salesian community. And one can understand too the importance, in pastoral work for vocations, of presenting and illustrating adequately the two figures of salesians, with the specific and rich contribution that each of them brings to the common mission for the young and the poor.

²⁴ GC22, 80; cf. also GC21, 194-196

*God our Father,
you distribute your gifts in a variety of ways,
and direct them all to the common end of salvation.*

*Grant that in our communities
the common riches and diverse gifts
with which you endow lay and priestly members
may be received by each one with gratitude
and used to good effect
for the harmonious building of your Kingdom,
especially among young people.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 46 YOUNG SALESIANS

The family spirit and the dynamic drive which is characteristic of our mission among young people make particularly important the contribution of young salesians in the apostolate.

They are closer to the rising generations; they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm; they are ready to try new solutions.

The community, by encouraging and guiding this generosity, helps them to mature as religious and apostles.

This article assigns a particular function to young salesians, clerics and young coadjutor brothers, in the realization of the salesian mission. They are deeply involved in apostolic responsibility, even though still in their period of formation. Don Bosco showed a great capacity "for sharing responsibility, even with the youngest of his helpers...; he could find for everyone the right job, suited to his temperament, ability and formation, so that all felt satisfied".¹

Don Bosco's example brings us to the two main points of the present article: the apostolic contribution of young confreres and the attitude of the community in their regard.

The contribution of young salesians

The tremendous importance which the Church today, and Don Bosco yesterday, attribute to the period of youth is undeniable. It is important to the existence of individuals and to the future of humanity; it is a benefit for all, a benefit for humanity itself. "Youth" in fact

¹ SGC, 498

"represents a heritage of values for the individual, for society and for the Church. It is a treasure in itself for what it is and for what it gives: the richness of its 'being' and the fruitfulness of its 'sharing'. ... Youth is a time for making discoveries, a time when future prospects are seen, a time for making choices, for planning, a time for making responsible and fruitful personal decisions. All this, it is true, is a possibility that in practice is not always realized; but the possibility is nevertheless an objective one, especially in the light of the additional energy and life enjoyed by the 'new man' risen through baptism".²

These considerations are even more valid in the case of our young confreres and well explain the significance of their presence in our communities. They represent the offering of fresh possibilities, a sowing for the future, a springtime of ideals, a flourishing of life.

It is not a matter of fostering idyllic visions. We know that in their heart is found the true measure of what they are, but their eager desires and their freshness of approach have a significant effect in the community. The article of the Constitutions gives prominence to this, without at the same time getting starry-eyed about it.

The text recalls two characteristic aspects of our spirit and mission to explain what it is that makes the apostolic contribution of young salesians particularly valid.

Every community is committed to the building of a "*family*": every member can contribute efficaciously to this objective. But it is evident that young confreres through their joy and enthusiasm their spontaneity and expansive nature, and their generosity, are the most lively element in our communities: they are the ones who help most in maintaining the family spirit which renders the communities attractive.

The other reason which makes the contribution of young confreres so valid concerns apostolic activity. Dynamism is a characteristic trait in salesians: by the very fact that our mission is addressed to youth, it must necessarily be carried out with a spirit of initiative and renewed enthusiasm. Moreover, art. 10 of the Constitutions says that the centre

² E. VIGANÒ, AGC 314 (1985), p. 6-7

and synthesis of the salesian spirit is "pastoral charity characterized by youthful dynamism". Our young confreres are best fitted for maintaining and fostering the "youthful" style of our apostolic activity.

The value of their contribution is expressed in three traits which they exhibit.

In the first place the Rule states that the young confreres are "*closer to the rising generations*". We know how difficult it is at the present day, and at the same time how important, for an educator to remain sensitive to young people; and a basic attitude of this kind is obligatory for the salesian; "an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them", so as to be able to understand them and share with them (C 39).

Young confreres achieve this spontaneously and without any difficulty, because of their infectious cordiality and their own youthful tastes and interests. They help the community, therefore, to keep in touch with the young; they provide a natural bridge between youngsters and older educators.

The text adds a second trait: "*they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm*". This is furnished by the novelty of their first pastoral experience, their desire to respond with all their strength to the Lord's call, and the creative freshness natural to their age.

Finally, says the article, "*they are ready to try new solutions*". In apostolic work continuity is a good thing, but not obstinate rigidity. Dialogue between older and younger confreres helps in the finding of adequate solutions which are based on experience but at the same time open to new ideas and initiatives.

We should never forget that our Congregation was founded with young people, and that the daring missionary endeavours of the first generations were the work of young salesians!

Welcome by the community

The community welcomes the young confreres as members sharing the common responsibility. It is in its own interest not to waste

but rather to develop this new strength given by God to the Congregation. The community must therefore foster their maturing as religious and their apostolic growth, so that their valuable contribution be not lost.

To attain this end the members encourage the young confreres in their generosity, help them to overcome any misgivings, support their initiatives even in the face of passing frustrations, willingly receive their suggestions and new ideas, and bring them in when plans are being made or programmes drawn up.

It is of interest here and much to the point to quote a famous passage from the Benedictine Rule. "... If we have said that we are all called upon to express our opinion, it is because very often the Lord reveals the best decision to one of the younger members".³

Don Bosco's style was no different. His biographer writes: "Thus Don Bosco trained his clerics to use their talents, contenting himself with laying down guidelines and then letting them pursue the goal. Nevertheless he was always ready to come to their assistance".⁴

As well as encouraging the young confreres in their activity, the community is also called upon to guide the direction in which their youthful energies are expended. Apostolic activity needs care and is accompanied by certain risks: that of individualism which separates the confrere from the community, activism which leads to superficiality, and fragmentation which is an obstacle to growth in internal unity.

The wealth of pastoral experience already gained by the community should help to strengthen the favourable conditions and lessen the risks, by example, by advice, but especially by the full insertion of the young confreres in well planned pastoral activity.

These considerations make very clear the urgent need for a real family spirit between salesians of different ages. A happy formula to keep in mind is: Let the older confreres remember that the Congregation

³ *Rule of St Benedict*, chap. III, "The calling of the brethren to council"

⁴ BM V, 26

tion does not end with them, and let the younger ones not forget that with them it does not begin!

because it implies a tissue of relationships and active involvement on the part of all concerned.

*God our Father,
you sow the seeds and a sign of hope
in those who are young.*

*Bless our young confreres,
guide them in their choices
and sustain them in their difficulties,
so that in generous self-donation
and in more direct contact with the rising generations,
they may be efficacious mediators of the Gospel,
and give to our communities new enthusiasm
in the spirit and style of Don Bosco.*

Through Christ our Lord.

As the educational community is characterized more by its spirit and structures (which are necessary nonetheless) than by the spirit that animates it and by its family atmosphere. The ability to meet together, cordial collaboration, simplicity and spontaneity of style, all come together in a natural atmosphere of kindness and goodwill. But above all it tends naturally to the articulation of a common life, a common work, a common mission. The articulation of a common life, a common work, a common mission, is the essential element in the formation of a community. The articulation of a common life, a common work, a common mission, is the essential element in the formation of a community. The articulation of a common life, a common work, a common mission, is the essential element in the formation of a community.

Don Bosco did not use the kind of terminology we use today, but in practice he adapted the idea of the educative community by gathering collaborators around him and involving the youngsters themselves in a deeply educational setting. The educative community therefore is a deeply educational setting, which requires a vigorous environment of participation and consociative relationships, and associates everyone, educators and youngsters alike in a single dynamic experience. All educational and pastoral activity inevitably requires

¹ Cf. GC 102.

ART. 47 THE EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY AND LAY PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR WORK

We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us.

In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all their own, because of their experience and pattern of life.

We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system.

We foster the spiritual growth of each of them, and to those who may be so inclined we suggest a closer sharing of our mission in the Salesian Family.

The educative and pastoral community

The article opens with a very simple statement: "*We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community*". This takes on particular importance in putting our educational plan into effect, by contributing to the attainment of the objectives of our apostolic action.

For this reason the salesian community does not close itself in the religious group, but rather expands its communion in ever-widening concentric circles.

Don Bosco did not use the kind of terminology we use today, but in practice he adopted the idea of the educative community by gathering collaborators around him and involving the youngsters themselves in a deeply educational setting. The educative community, therefore, is a characteristic need of our system, which requires a vigorous environment of participation and constructive relationships, and associates everyone, educators and youngsters alike in a single dynamic experience.¹ All educational and pastoral activity inevitably requires

¹ Cf. GC21, 102

a community structure, not only because of the multiplicity and necessary convergence of the different factors involved, but especially because it implies a tissue of relationships and active involvement on the part of all concerned.

The educative community is also a decisive factor in evangelization. The strength of unity lived in an evangelical spirit is already in itself a living testimony, as well as an efficacious way of announcing the Gospel. An evangelized community is of itself an evangelizing power.²

Finally, as the goal ultimately sought, the educative community is a manifestation of Church, which is a reality of communion. This is why in the concrete realization of such a community the ideal should always be aimed at making of it a true "Church experience".

As the Constitutions point out, the educative community is characterized less by the organization of its roles and structures (which are necessary nonetheless) than by the spirit that animates it and by its *family atmosphere*. The ability to meet together, cordial collaboration, simplicity and spontaneity of style, all come together in a family atmosphere of kindness and goodwill. But above all it tends naturally to become a community of faith, where God is present and communicates himself, where there is the ability to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel, where is possible an authentic experience of Church as a place of communion and participation, so that the young may feel for themselves the worth and significance of human and christian communion with God and with their fellow men.

And so the community should be seen as a continually growing reality, advancing in form and achievement.

Who are the members of this progressively developing community?

The constitutional text replies: "*young people and adults, parents and educators*"; or in other words all those concerned in the educational and pastoral work. These are involved and must allow themselves to be involved, they must share and collaborate in the work.

² Cf. GC21, 62

There would be little point in giving a longer list. The salesians have a great work facing them: many people are required for a work of education and all are called upon to make their contribution, even though at different levels and with different roles. It is a question of uniting all their efforts for the realization of a common project for the benefit of the young.

To bring this about, clarity must be maintained concerning the plan's inspiration, organic unity and consistency, and its practical influence on the programming of various initiatives.³ The awareness of the common mission must be developed; the shared responsibility must be recognized of all who take part in the planning of the work, and the collaboration of each one must be encouraged according to his abilities and the possibilities for personal fulfilment and the sharing of experiences.

The lay people

In the life of the educative and pastoral community valuable and indispensable strength is provided by the *"lay people associated with our work"*. The article makes special mention of them and gives prominence to their distinctive contribution.

There are many reasons why we should give careful consideration to their presence: their large number in both educational and pastoral structures; the important contribution they make as professional people; their willingness to collaborate in passing on the educative message.

But above all these stands a reason of an ecclesial nature. Vatican II provides a rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral teaching on the theme of the laity. They are the basic element in the People of God,⁴ called

³ Cf. GC21, 68

⁴ It should be noted that the term 'lay' (or 'layman', 'lay person', 'laity' etc.) as currently used in some environments can be ambiguous. We use the term in the conciliar meaning of 'member of the People of God'. Cf. in this connection the Rector Major's letter on *The*

to a prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry which they exercise by giving christian animation to the temporal order. The decree "Apostolicam actuositatem" indicates active and responsible participation in the Church's mission as being proper to them and absolutely necessary;⁵ the decree "Ad gentes" points to the importance and even indispensability of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church;⁶ the Constitution "Gaudium et spes" describes the commitment of lay people as significant and decisive in the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world. Without their presence, in fact, the many secular environments would not have the benefit of christian witness and action. In particular the Church's magisterium has made abundantly clear the role of the laity in educational structures.⁷

These authoritative indications have contributed to the profile of the layman and recognition of his specific function.

It is not the intention of our Constitutions to summarize the conciliar doctrine on the laity, but to make clear that their presence in salesian work is not just instrumental.⁸ They are there because of an intrinsic need in our Family: Don Bosco recognized and passed on to us the urgent necessity "of uniting the efforts of good people in helping each other to do good".⁹ Lay people therefore are actively present in the salesian educative and pastoral community, in which they have a specific role because of the "*contribution all their own*" which only they can give. Their experience, professional ability and the model of life they provide represent a great and indispensable element in education and pastoral work. The figure of the layman provides young people with a more complete range of models of christian life, allows for a more wide-ranging dialogue on contemporary problems regarding the family and the professions, and gives greater opportunity to the

lay person in the Salesian Family, in AGC 317 (1986)

⁵ Cf. AA 2-3; cf. also LG 31

⁶ Cf. AG 41

⁷ V. "*Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith*", CEC, Rome 1982

⁸ Cf. The Rector Major: "The fact that the laity are in the mission with us, and we with them, is not simply a matter of a quantitative summation of forces, and still less is it an addition forced upon us by our losses and absences"; in AGC 317 (1986), p. 14; cf. also GC21, 66

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, I

salesians to dedicate themselves to the specific field of animation; the layman exercises an educational role all his own, different from ours but capable of integration with it.

The Constitutions are referring particularly here to the laity who participate fully in the mission of the Salesian Family, but are addressed too to all those lay people who, even though not belonging to our Family, share with us the responsibility for putting our plan into effect. Lay people can be valid and necessary collaborators who efficaciously complement our educational, pastoral and evangelizing work. In the common task each one maintains his own identity, because from this stems the educational and pastoral richness. But it is also indispensable to cultivate a mutual communion for reciprocal enrichment. As the Rector Major wrote: "It is evidently necessary to be able to bring about between lay and consecrated persons a true ecclesial communion of complementary vocations, founded on Christ, moved by his Spirit, and nourished by convictions of faith, by mutual witness, and by a concrete and practical choice of tasks. In other words it is a question of a deep communion in the same apostolic spirituality".¹⁰

The animating role of the Salesians

The salesian community has a particular task in respect of the educative community as a whole and of each of its members.

The apostolic plan entrusted to the community requires the salesians to take on the role of animators of all the forces which collaborate. This is said explicitly in art. 5 of the General Regulations which describes the salesian religious community as the "*animating nucleus*" of the educative community.

The constitutional text speaks of three specific tasks in this work of animation: the involvement of all the collaborators, their formation, and the proposal of a salesian vocation.

¹⁰ AGC 317 (1986), p. 14

ART. 48. SOLIDARITY WITH THE PARTICULAR CHURCH
12 V. 1

— The community of salesians undertakes in the first place to *welcome and encourage their collaboration*. With regard to the lay person associated with the community's work, the salesian is called on to adopt a positive attitude of welcome acceptance in a family spirit for the contribution given to the realization of the educational project. But that is not sufficient. The authenticity of the welcome and the sense of belonging to a human group are measured by the degree of participation. This is a need at the present day of all associations, and implies a style of involvement in programming and evaluation. The salesian therefore is asked for a creative and positive attitude, able to promote convinced adherence and to open possibilities and space for active participation.

— But participation means more than a quantitative calculation of convergent elements. It implies a common and constantly developed frame of reference, and aims which are shared by all; otherwise it can end up in harmful conflict. And so the second recommendation comes in: *we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the preventive system and foster the spiritual growth of each one*.

The salesian spirit and the preventive system are the key points in educational and pastoral sharing. No intervention can possibly be efficacious without a frame of reference that is valid for all and a common system of values to put before the youngsters. The preventive system ensures common action and unity of intention; the salesian spirit creates harmony of heart and feeling.

— The final paragraph of the article extends the formation aspect to the vocational field. Our lay collaborators are not only our fellow educators, but are also christians in need of continual spiritual growth and of care in the process of their vocational maturing. As salesians, bearers of a charisma which fosters the growth of individuals to full maturity in Christ, we feel responsible for sharing our charism first of all with those who collaborate with us in educational and pastoral work: lay people have the right to expect from us encouragement and an example of holiness.

In particular the text emphasizes the logical consequence of the path which the salesians and their lay collaborators follow together: *a closer sharing of our mission and of Don Bosco's spirit in the Sale-*

sian Family. If lay people find themselves welcome in a family atmosphere and environment, if they are formed to the values of the preventive system and the salesian spirit, if they feel personally involved in the great objectives of the education and evangelization of youth, it is natural that they may wish to join those lay Associations which Don Bosco himself thought up for uniting all those who wanted to share in his mission. It is the responsibility of the salesians to foster the process and suggest to them a salesian vocation.¹¹

God our Father,

*raise up in our communities
able and generous lay christians.*

*May your Spirit inspire and guide them
in sharing with us the education of young people,
and the advancement of your Kingdom in their hearts.*

*Help parents to be fully aware of their responsibility
as the first educators of their children.*

*May faith and charity inspire our relationships,
so that we may be able to realize with them
a true Church experience.*

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹¹ Concerning the significance of the Association of Salesian Cooperators for those who are in the mission with us, cf. AGC 317 (1986), p. 19-21.

ART. 48 SOLIDARITY WITH THE PARTICULAR CHURCH

The community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment within the particular Church. We become part of its pastoral action which has the Bishop at its head¹ and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as a springboard for action on a wider scale.

We offer the particular Church the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy, and we receive from it direction and support.

To forge more systematic links we share initiatives with other groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes.

We are ready to cooperate with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development.

¹ cf. CIC, can. 678.1

In the Church

Articles 6, 31 and 44 of the Constitutions have already spoken of our participation in the Church's mission. This article gives special prominence to the place of our apostolic service in the local Church.

The opening statement emphasizes the rich theological content of the theme. The Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" made the forthright statement: "This is how the Lord wanted his Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind or which Peter drew in with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, a flock which a single shepherd pastures. A universal Church without boundaries or frontiers..."¹ "Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of

¹ EN 61 CO, Regulations for Salesian Cooperators 1876, V, 2

a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum".²

It is in this perspective that the article asserts, as though as a premise to what comes later, that the salesian community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment in the particular Church, echoing in this way what is said in the document "Mutuae relationes": "The particular Church is the frame of history in which a vocation expresses itself in concrete form and fulfils its apostolic responsibility. It is here, within the ambit of a definite culture, that the Gospel is preached and received".³

Our vocation as salesian religious has a universal character. To quote "Evangelii nuntiandi" again: "The individual Churches should keep their profound openness towards the universal Church. It is quite remarkable, moreover, that the most simple christians, the ones who are most faithful to the Gospel and most open to the true meaning of the Church, have a completely spontaneous sensitivity to this universal dimension".⁴

"But, at the same time, a Church 'toto orbe diffusa' would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship between the universal Church and the individual Churches".⁵

It is in the light of these considerations that we accept the reference to the Bishop as bearing the first responsibility and the directives of the Bishops' Conference as indispensable guidelines in our apostolic action. In fact, the individual Bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church".⁶ For this reason the Council recommends religious to collaborate in the various pastoral ministries,

² EN 62

³ MR 23

⁴ EN 64

⁵ EN 62

⁶ LG 23

due consideration being given to the particular character of each institute.⁷

The article makes these exhortations of the Council concrete for us salesians by means of two guiding statements: to be faithful to our own charism "*we offer the contribution of our work and salesian pedagogy*"; and to be attentive to the Church "*we receive from it direction and support*".

The first point emphasizes the special values we are to bring to the particular Church: the kind of pastoral activity which is typical of Don Bosco and his preventive system.

The second, on the other hand, urges us to accept the guidance of the Bishops, to enable us to play a consistent part in the combined pastoral work and to have the whole particular Church behind us in our own work.

In communion with the groups belonging to the Salesian Family and with other religious institutes

Within the particular Church our Constitutions emphasize the fact that if our pastoral service is to be coherent it must be organically connected with two realities: the Salesian Family and the religious life as a whole.

— The different groups of the Salesian Family are at the service of the local Churches just as we are. Don Bosco said, for instance, of the Cooperators: "The Association will depend absolutely on the Supreme Pontiff, the Bishops and the Parish Priests in everything appertaining to religion".⁸ Don Bosco's charism is a *single unified reality* and must be offered as such in the Church; its visible manifestation is the *Salesian Family*, which must be ever more present in the Church

⁷ CD 35

⁸ D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, V, 2

as a united group. The linkage and coordination, therefore, between its component groups is important for fostering a better insertion and more efficacious salesian service: this is what was already suggested in art. 5.

— As regards the connection with other *institutes of religious life*, the Church herself has given norms indicating how this is to be done: it consists in sharing, through appropriate organisms, in common initiatives for the increase of religious life in the Church.⁹ In our case this is also a precious heritage left to us by the Founder, who was always attentive to every charism given by the Lord's Spirit for the good of his Church (cf. C 13).

With this text the Congregation intends explicitly to make its own the doctrine of Vatican II on the mystical greatness of the particular Church and on its pastoral reality, and indicates some practical consequences.

The organization of any pastoral plan takes place at two levels:

- at the diocesan level in so far as the Church finds its centre of unity in the Bishop;
- at national or regional level with a group of dioceses which have social and cultural affinity with each other, and common traditions of a linguistic, theological and spiritual kind: episcopal conferences are the organisms best suited for the expression of common pastoral concern at national level, or at regional level covering more than one diocese.

In the neighbourhood

A fundamental norm of pastoral action is collaboration, based on common sense and humility.

⁹ V. the Council's observations on "Conferences of Major Superiors" in PC 23; cf. also MR 48. 61

CHA We do not pretend that by ourselves we can solve all the problems of youth, nor are we so ingenuous as to dissociate these problems from the intricate overall picture. We know that around us exist organisms, movements and people who are as zealous as we are for the integral development of youth. In the article, the horizons of cooperation become ever wider. Every salesian community considers it an apostolic duty to collaborate with all the active forces present in society.

Art. 57 will say that the salesian community is "attentive to the cultural milieu in which it carries out its apostolic work, at one with those among whom it lives" and that "it cultivates good relations with all". If we put alongside this note the brief practical indication in the present article regarding cooperation with civil organizations working in the fields of education and social development, there emerges the image of an *apostolic community actively inserted into its neighbourhood*, in active interaction with the dynamic factors which contribute to its development. The community is called to be a centre with open doors, ready to deal with the collective repercussions of its activities, committed to participate in the life of the human community in a give-and-take fashion, and not retreat into its own ivory castle.

The civil organizations dealing with education and social development would seem to be the most suitable organisms to which we can offer our cooperation in fulfilment of our policy of service to the young and the poor. The Rector Major said in his Report to the GC22 on the state of the Congregation: "It is not humility to have no weight at national and international level in youth problems".¹⁰

often calls for solidarity with one's brothers (i.e. the "saints") in their needs, particularly those making apostolic journeys (missionaries) and who therefore need generous hospitality (v. 13), but love means a sharing stemming from deep feelings with an intuition and delicacy coming from the heart, the mutual sharing of joys and sorrows, and at the same time the mortification of impulses to selfishness and conceit (vv. 15-16).

It is truly striking how the great axioms of evangelical love acquire concrete qualities in the light of human needs whenever people live together. The articles of the Salesian Constitutions, following Don Bosco, spell out the realism

¹⁰ GC22, RRM 1978-1983, 337; on the insertion of the salesian community into the neighbourhood, v. "Comunita salesiana nel territorio" (Department of Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1986)

*God our Father,
by virtue of its apostolic mission
you insert each of our communities in a particular Church.
Grant that under the guidance of the Bishop
and in collaboration with other forces in the Church
we may work with dedication and loyalty for its growth.
Give us the grace of faith, ardour of charity,
detachment from ourselves and zeal for your Will.
May we be able to discern what is true and good,
that we may be able to cooperate with human organizations
for the education and promotion of youth.
Above all, make us generous in our communion
with the other groups of our Family,
so that by all means and in every way
we may contribute to the building in unity of your Church,
the mystical Body of your Son,
who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.*

In the neighbourhood

A fundamental norm of pastoral action is collaboration, based on common sense and humility.