

THE "FOREWORD"

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

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

¹ MB XVII, 258

² cf. DON RUA, 1 Dec. 1909

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

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

Don Bosco too wanted to premise the Text of the Constitutions he had written with an introduction, which we find in all the editions from the first draft of 1858 to that of 1873 (the second printed Latin text, after the re-presentation of the Roman "animadversiones"). This Introduction was made up of a Foreword on the importance of educating the young and a chapter headed "Origins of this Society" in which the Founder tried to emphasize the continuity between what had been

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ Cf. *Costituzioni* 1984, Appendix, pp. 267-270

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

⁵ MB XVII, 258

⁶ MB XVII, 296

⁷ BM X, 293

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

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

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

⁸ Cf. ASC, n. 23, 24 January 1924, p. 177

⁹ D. RUA, Letter of 1.12.1909 in *Lettere Circolari*, p. 498.

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

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

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

FIRST PART

THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN THE CHURCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Ibid. E. VIGANÒ, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312, 1985, p. 22

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

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

— fulfils her mission in *service of ministry to mankind*, since she is the "universal sacrament of salvation";

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

The Church, according to the conciliar doctrine:

¹ Cf. AGC 316, (1986) pp. 15-18

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

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

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

— affirms that the salesian vocation, by calling us to be “evangelizers of the young”, inserts us in the great “sacrament of salvation” for the world (C 6, 7), in union with other groups of the Salesian Family (C 5);

— recalls, in consequence, that the Salesian Society, a living part of the Church, is in her and with her as a pilgrim in time and going forward in hope: in this process it has at its side Mary, Mother and Helper, and the Saints who have been given to it as Patrons and Protectors (C 8, 9).

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

- *The charismatic origin of our Society*

- God’s action in the foundation and life of our Society: *art. 1*

- *The identity of our Society*

- at the level of being and action: *art. 2*

- at the ecclesial level: *art. 3*

- at the juridical and institutional level: *art. 4*

- *The position and role of our Society*

- in the service of the Salesian Family: *art. 5*

- in the service of the Church: *art. 6*

- in the service of the contemporary world: *art. 7*

- *Our Society in communion with the heavenly Jerusalem*

- the singular presence of Mary: *art. 8*

- the intercession of Patrons and Protectors: *art. 9*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² BM XII, 52

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

⁴ BM IX, 267

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ cf. MO 16

² MB II, 45. BM II, 35

³ MB XVIII, 258

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

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

The initiative of God in the foundation of our Society

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

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

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

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

² BM IV, 411

³ BM XII, 52

⁴ Cf. BM I, 95

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

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

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

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

⁵ BM XIII, 62

¹ F STELLA, Don Bosco nella storia della religione cattolica, II, PAS - Vicenza 1969, p. 32
² BM IV, 411
³ BM XII, 52
⁴ CE BM I, 95

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ BM I, 95

⁷ Entrance antiphon of the former liturgy in honour of St John Bosco

⁸ From the collect of the old Mass of St John Bosco

⁹ MB XVIII, 258

The various apostolic forces to which Don Bosco gave rise

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

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

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

In the Church and for the Church

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

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

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

¹¹ BM XII, 64

¹² BM IX, 334

¹³ BM XII, 338

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ D. RINALDI, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 180

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ D. RINALDI, ASC 13, 14 January 1974, p. 180.

¹² D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, 17 August 1875; cf. appendix to the Constitutions, 1875, p. 180.

¹³ BM XX MB 383, 1984, p. 257.

ART. 2 NATURE AND MISSION OF OUR SOCIETY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Cf. IC, 2, 48

³ Cf. SGC, 23-30

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

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

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

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

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

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

² MB VII, 622

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

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

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

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

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

³ *Costituzioni* 1875, I,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 73)

⁴ Cf. LG, I, 9. 48

⁵ Cf. C 8. 14. 20. 49. 61. 81. 195

— *In a specific form of religious life.*

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

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

Our way to holiness in the realization of our mission

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

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

⁶ *Constitutions 1966*, art. 1

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

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

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

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

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

precise global meaning. We know, in fact, that in the period that has followed the Council the concept of consecration, in the sense of a consecrating action on the part of God through the mediation of the Church, has become progressively clearer: to it there corresponds the free commitment of the religious, who offers all his person and his life to God and the Kingdom. Celebration of profession implies these two inseparable aspects, which are the expression of the covenant pact between the Lord and the disciple.

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

⁸ *Costituzioni 1858*, I,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 72)

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

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

ART. 3 OUR APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION

We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us¹ through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young.

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

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

¹ cf. LG 44

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

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

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

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

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

"Consecration", a gift of the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two further reflections will not be out of place.

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

² The profound unity of the fundamental elements of our life is well expressed in the formula of profession (C 24); cf. also C 44, 50, 61 which show clearly the correlation between mission, community and the practice of the evangelical counsels

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

³ Cf. PC 8

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

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

The three constituent elements of the unity of profession

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

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

⁴ Cf. LG 44; PC 5; ET 7; RD 7

⁵ Cf. AGC 312 (1985) pp. 32-33

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷ Cf. LG 46

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

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

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

The element which specifies salesian life: the mission

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

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

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

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

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

⁹ Cf. IG 44

¹⁰ These expressions were contained in art. 70 of the Constitutions of 1972

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

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

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

Father,

we give you thanks

for having called us and consecrated us

by the gift of your Spirit

and for sending us to the young

as bearers of the Gospel

of your Son Jesus Christ.

With the day of our profession in mind

we now renew the complete offering of ourselves to you,

¹¹ Cf. SGC, pp. xv-xvi

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

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

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

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 4 THE FORM OF OUR SOCIETY

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

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

Inspired by the goodness and zeal of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco called us Salesians² and gave us a programme of life in the motto: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".³

¹ cf. PC 8; CIC, can 675,1

² cf. MB V, 9; BM V, 8

³ cf. MB XVII, 365, 366, 280

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

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

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

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

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

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

Salesian form of the Society

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

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

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

¹ cf. ES II, 13

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

³ *Costituzioni 1875*, II, 1 (cf. E. MOITO, p. 83)

⁴ GC21, 196

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

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

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

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

⁵ Cf. MR 11

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ E. VIGANÒ, GC22, 80

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

The institutional and juridical form of the Congregation in the Church

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

— We are a *"religious institute"*.

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

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

— We are a *"clerical" institute*.

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

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

⁷ CIC, can. 588, 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The name and the motto

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

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

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

⁹ Cf. PC 8; CIC, can. 675

¹⁰ BM V, 8

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

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

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

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

ART. 5 OUR SOCIETY IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY

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

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

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

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

¹ cf. ASC Progetto GC1, ms DB; MB XVII, 25

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

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

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

The salesian "movement"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "Salesian Family"

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

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

After being relaunched during the SGC in the form of a new project¹, the Salesian Family has given a marked impetus to pastoral activity. It has given rise to initiatives, mobilized forces, and rediscovered all the riches of its particular spiritual identity.² The Rector Major and his Council have indicated some criteria for membership: the specific vocation, participation in the mission to the young and the poor, the sharing in the salesian spirit and in the pastoral and educational plan, adherence to the preventive system, and a family style of acting together.³

¹ SGC, 151-157

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

³ Cf. ASC 304 (1982), p. 61 ff.

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

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

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

⁴ SGC, 151

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

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

- The *elements common* to all the Groups⁶ are the following:
 - the call to share the 'charism' given to Don Bosco and his Family, in some important aspect of the human and supernatural experience of the Saint;
 - the apostolic mission to the young and the poor;
 - the style of life and activity (salesian spirit);
 - reference to the Founder of the Family and to his successors as the centre of unity.

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

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

The Society of St Francis de Sales in the Salesian Family

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

⁶ Cf. ASC 304 (1982), loc.cit.

⁷ SGC, 739

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

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

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

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

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

According to the Constitutions we are obliged:

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

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

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

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, ch. II

¹⁰ Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1877

¹¹ Cf. SGC, 173. 189; GC21, 75. 79. 588

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

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

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

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

The Past Pupils

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

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

¹³ D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, ch. IV

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ GC21, 516

¹⁵ GC21, 69

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

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

And here there comes spontaneously to mind a thought pregnant with implications for the future, concerning the nature and role of the "Cooperators' Association" in the Salesian Family. The Rector Major wrote: "There exists an outstanding Association, that of the Salesian Cooperators. From the point of view of the vocation of the lay person in our Family, this must be considered the centre of reference for all such possibilities, because it is not an alternative to other associations but rather aims at animating those others. The Cooperators are not an association which, as such, organizes works and specific initiatives; the Association is aware that it shares responsibility with us in preserving in all its members and in our Family the vitality of Don Bosco's plan, bringing to it the riches of its own secular condition. In doing this it retains the possibility of offering animators for the identity of our community 'expresses in a visible manner the mystery of the Church' (C 85) and becomes for both young and old 'a living experience of Church' (C 47). All this comes down to the fact that to live as Salesians is a way of 'being Church'.

¹⁶ Cf. GC21, 517

¹⁷ SGC, 157

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

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

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

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

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

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

ART. 6 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CHURCH

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

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

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

¹ IG 48; GS 45

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

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

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

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

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

At the heart of the Church and at her service

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

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

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

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

¹ Cf. PC 1; MR 10

² MR 11

³ Cf. LG 44

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

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

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

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

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

The four principal objectives of the salesian mission

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

⁴ LG 44; cf. RD 14

⁵ PC 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷ Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22: GC22, 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹ PC 2

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

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

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

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

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

Through Christ our Lord.

⁴ GS 1

⁵ The Constitutions indicate that our mission, sharing in that of the Church, links with the commitment to evangelization that of the development of the temporal order (cf. C 12:CF 13:2) (cf. the document "The Salesian Charisma and its Missionary Dimension" in the Salesian Yearbook of Education, 1997, pp. 11-12).

ART. 7 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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

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

¹ cf. GS 1

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

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

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

¹ GS 3

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

³ EN 20

Intimately solid with the world and its history

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ GS 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ Cf. GS 54 ff.

⁷ Cf. GS 58

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹ Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22. GC22, 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² GS 4

¹³ GS 11

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

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

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

Mary, the Mother of God, who is also the Mother of the young, has shown a special concern for them: in John Bosco's dream at the age of nine and repeated more than once in later years, she herself

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

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

Through Christ our Lord.

¹ LG 62

² MB XVIII, 339

³ Cf. BM VII, 197; MB XVIII, 339

⁴ Cf. BM VII, 406

¹ MB IX, 341

² MB XVII, 258

ART. 8 THE PRESENCE OF MARY IN OUR SOCIETY

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

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

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

¹ MB VII, 334; XVII, 258; XVIII, 439; BM VII, 197

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

³ cf. Lk 1, 48-49

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

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

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

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

¹ MB IX, 347

² MB XVII, 258

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

Mary present at the foundation of the Society

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

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

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

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

— As "*mother and teacher*" she supported Don Bosco with the thoughtful kindness⁶ she had once shown at Cana (cf. Jn 2), and with

¹ BM VII, 197

² Cf. E. VIGANO, *Mary renews the Salesian Family*, ASC 289 (1978)

³ LG 62

⁴ MB XVIII, 439

⁵ Cf. BM VII, 197; MB XVIII, 439

⁶ Cf. BM VII, 406

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

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

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

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

Mary present in our vocation

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

⁷ BM VI, 183

⁸ MB XVIII, 531

⁹ BM III, 25

¹⁰ GC 21, 589

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ BM VII, 197

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

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

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

¹⁵ John Paul II, 1979

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

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

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

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

We entrust ourselves to Mary

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

¹⁶ MC 37

¹⁷ MB XVI, 269

¹⁸ MB XVI, 212

¹⁹ P. ALBERA, Letter of 31.3.1918, *Circulars*, p. 286

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

... All you lack is a small dose of good will. ... Ask the Lord for it, ask insistently and he will grant it. And if your prayers prove insuffi-

²⁰ D. BOSCO, *Spiritual Testament*, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 268

²¹ D. BOSCO, *Catholic Readings* 1869, p. 57

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

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

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

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

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

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

ART. 9 PATRONS AND PROTECTORS OF OUR SOCIETY

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

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

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

¹ cf. IG 49

² cf. C 1875, V, 6

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

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

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

IG 49, p. IG 50

384, VI, 384

IG 49

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² BM XII, 407

³ Cf. PC 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ LG 49; cf. IG 50

⁵ BM VI, 384

⁶ BM VI, 58

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

— *St Joseph*

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

— *St Francis de Sales*

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

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

⁷ Cf. BM I, 182

⁸ BM IV, 175

⁹ Cf. BM VI, 103

¹⁰ Cf. BM VI, 104

¹¹ BM VII, 382

¹² BM I, 385

¹³ Cf. BM IX, 84

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

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

As a Society we venerate as protectors our glorified members

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ BM II, 197

¹⁵ MB XVI, 394.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁷ Cf. MB XVIII, 550

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

² BC 2, cf. also MR II

³ SGC, 68

⁴ C.C. chap. VI, clasp. IX and C IV, 34-100; E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana* I, pp. 722