

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE FAITH: A TASK AND CHALLENGE FOR TODAY'S SALESIAN COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

1. The Salesian Congregation

The Salesian Congregation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in fidelity to the Founder's charism, has carried out in recent years a process of renewal and of defining its own identity. Let us briefly look back over it to note how we have progressed from the idea of salesian "mission" to that of the "journey of education to the faith".

The Congregation's educative and pastoral commitment is not in fact a mere agglomeration of events and activities following on one another without sense or sequence; it is the sum total of the experiences we have realized, under the animation of God's Spirit, in the history of salvation.

2. in solidarity with the world and its history

Our mission as educators keeps us deeply united with the world and its history (cf. C 7). To educate means in fact to share lovingly in the growth of individuals and in the building of their future. We approach this history in the light of the divine plan of salvation, guided by the Church's wisdom which is its sign and instrument.

Current trends in the world emphasize the centrality of the individual in all the problems that mark human events. "We are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, where man is defined before all else by his responsibility to his brothers and at the court of history" (GS 55). In this context therefore the education of the individual becomes a matter of both urgency and priority.

3. in the heart of the Church

In Vatican II the Church, guided by the Spirit, accepted the "signs" of the present time; it reawakened the awareness of its essential mystery; it renewed its internal communion and rethought its presence in the world in the light of its mission. As an expert in humanity, it felt itself called anew to educate man and remain at his side.

Authoritative documents and gatherings have offered practical guidelines for the realization of all this. Much has matured in the meantime in the life and awareness of the faithful.

4. at the service of the new evangelization

In the last few years an urgent need has arisen for a "new evangelization": "new in its enthusiasm, in its method, and in its expressions" (John Paul II, AAS 75, 1983). It finds its justification in the previously unknown "ecclesial, social, economic, political and cultural" situations, characterized by a growing rapidity of change and the accumulation of questions which are the responsibility of everyone.

Its context therefore is new, as also are the general objectives towards which it tends: it is a matter of renewing the human texture of society, by accepting as the primary task the renewal of evangelical spirit in ecclesial communities.

The "new evangelization" is addressed to the individual, "the centre and summit of all that exists on earth" (CL 37). But it is also conscious of the fact that respect for the person requires solidarity at world level too, and of this solidarity charity is the soul and support. The individual and society thus become transformed by a "new culture", attentive not only to the demands of individual morality, but also to the human being's every need.

5. starting from the mission (GC20)

The Congregation has declared itself "deeply united with the world" (C 7) and in communion with the Church (cf. C 6), placing its own brief history in the great channel of humanity's journey.

The SGC concentrated attention on "our own specific mission", and indicated two conditions for its realization.. The first was to allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit in rediscovering the Founder's charisma, in participating deeply in the Church's life, and in responding to the appeals of the young in the history of the world in which the Spirit is the hidden ferment.

The second was to be willing to follow with faith new paths and new options. In fact a timorous attitude in facing life, or one of suspicion regarding the new culture, or lack of enthusiasm in tackling the great tasks that lie ahead, would never be accepted by today's youth.

6. taken up by the community through a project

Six years later, all this had become better understood by the confreres, and so the GC21 set out to indicate the consequences in a more concrete and practical manner. It perceived that there was a happy coincidence between our mission and the expectations of the young; and that in the evangelizing mission was to be found the fundamental characteristic of our identity.

But how are we to evangelize the young?

The GC21 appealed to two priorities: the first the salesian community as the subject of the mission and animator of numerous apostolic forces; and the second an educative and pastoral project.

The community became the "centre" of communion and sharing; and the project, i.e. the preventive system rethought and brought up to date, would be our own particular way of making real the evangelization of the young.

7. as an apostolic consecration (GC22)

The GC22 completed the drawing up of our Rule of life, and recognized definitively the inseparable unity that exists between apostolic mission, community life and the profession of the evangelical counsels (cf. C 3), making of this apostolic consecration a fervent "option for God" through love for the young who are his children. By reawakening in their hearts the feelings of sonship and the conviction of the Father's presence, the salesian achieves his "radical experience of the Gospel".

8. New challenges

This reading again of our salesian history, inspired by a deep communion with the Church and solidarity with the world of the young, and especially the poorer ones among them, has made us regard them with a more practical love. Their manner of existence and life has given rise in us to some urgent and important questions:

- For them at the present day, just what is God? What effect does faith have in their lives? How do we undertake our mission as educators to the faith in these new times and situations?

These questions have made us think deeply, and our reflections have been enriched by the events and youthful manifestations of the centenary year. Young people have shown that they are sensitive to the values of a new plan of life which finds in Don Bosco a teacher capable of suggesting "a new education which is at once both creative and faithful" (IP 13).

And so the desire to accompany them in a journey of faith arises quite naturally and spreads in the light of the pedagogy of salesian youthful holiness.

9. noted by every province

The provincial chapters, prompted and guided by this sensitivity, sought to be practical in their considerations aimed at verifying the efficacy of salesian education with regard to the life of faith of youth. The disturbing questions that emerged were those that always arise; but under the pressure of the imminent new era they had a certain novelty in their tone and their demand for a practical response:

- How is faith to be understood in contexts in which it has to become both light and salt? How is the life of faith to be related to personal experience? What is meant at the present day by educating to the faith? How can we communicate the faith, and how do we accompany young people in their approach to it?

10. to which the GC23 responds

The route to be followed must be tailored to the young people concerned who have to be made able to live the demands of faith in the present phase of history. In this way the plan will attain its objective.

With this as its starting point and after long and careful reflection, the capitulars settled on three fundamental themes: the situation of the young in their own context, their faith-journey, and salesian youth spirituality.

11. drawing inspiration from the pedagogy of the Father

Education of youth to the faith takes its inspiration from the action of God: "Through a providentially gradual process, he has disclosed the mystery of his love, leading men in the course of history and the ancient covenant to meet Christ. He has given help to men through events and words with which they were familiar, speaking to his people in a manner suited to their various historical situations, and showing his greatest possible self-abasement in his Son who took flesh" (Ddb 15; cf. DV 4.7.13).

12. witnessed to by the Son

The coming of the Lord Jesus sums up all the educative work of the Father. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is recognized by his followers as "Rabbi" and "Teacher" (cf. Jn 3,2; 9,2). He is endowed with an original teaching authority; he is able to lead his disciples to reflect on human events without regard to current prejudices; he forms them with care, and is ready to use the most appropriate means of communication.

Jesus manifest the pedagogy of love in a convincing manner in the giving of himself to others, in his welcoming and defence of "sinners and little ones", and in encouraging the young to look beyond their ordinary objectives, good though they be, and set out on the higher and more demanding road of the Kingdom of God.

Certainly Christ is very much more than a genial educator. He is the Son of God who has become man, He who gives the fullest sense to everything of human value and importance. To Him as the true and definitive "Project-Man" is now addressed the fundamental work of education, which must learn to become truly christian if it is to be totally human.

13. and spread by the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit renews and diffuses in the Church this "pedagogical wisdom". He it is who leads us to rediscover Christ and his Gospel, to find once again the specific characteristics of the Founder's spirit, to grasp the pleas of the world, and to share actively in the Church's life.

The Church, already expert in humanity, becomes expert too in education. Everything in her is ordained to man's growth. Within her have always been born and formed masters, shepherds and teachers, who took up in an intense way her love for mankind and her educating ability. Through their fruitful work and by

means of instructions of inestimable human and cultural value, the history of the Church is identified to no small extent with the history of the education of many peoples.

14. that the young may have life

In this wide expanse, in this mission of infinite possibilities, we Salesians follow Don Bosco and take our place, in the conviction that faith conquers the world (cf. 1 Jn 5,4), and that "the glory of God is man fully alive" (St.Irenaeus) We want to dedicate all our efforts to the life of the young, following Christ's words: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10,10)

FIRST PART

THE YOUTH REALITY CHALLENGES THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY

1. THE CONTEXT IN WHICH SALESIAN COMMUNITIES LIVE

The Word became flesh
and dwelt among us (Jn 1,14)

15. A pastoral glance at the contexts

Our communities, located by God's will in a specific human setting, feel that the latter is the particular place where they are called to express their own faith in credible witness and the proclamation of life.

And so they are committed to a deep understanding of the context of their locality and to sharing the hopes of the people, of which they make a careful study in the light of the Word of God. In this way they discern with greater clarity the questions put to the faith today by society and culture. And they come to a better understanding of the conditions in which is realized the human and religious growth of youth, and the difficulties they meet with in their efforts to mature as christians.

16. Our study on the education of youth to the faith therefore begins from the prevailing cultural environment, i.e. from criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, and models of life (cf. EN 19).

It is a pastoral study, aimed at discerning the relationship between these elements and the "plan of salvation" that God has entrusted to his Church (cf. EN 19). It makes use with confidence of the contribution of competent sciences and is based on authoritative analysis. But it does not pretend to be exhaustive. It brings to light only those aspects singled out by our communities as having greater influence on the growth of young people in the faith.

17. The presentation of different contexts helps to an understanding of the complexity of the situations in which the communities find themselves working. And it makes them realize that they must consider seriously their own context if they want to accompany the youngsters on a faith-journey.

On the other hand we must not forget that the world, even with the differences mentioned, is becoming ever more a "global village", especially because of the mass media and ease of transport. Cultural trends, modes and ways of life rapidly become widespread. One sees lying ahead therefore an era in

which it will become necessary to be open to different contexts, get to know their problems and be solid with them.

The "types" of context we shall examine are characteristic of specific geographical areas, but in none of them are they found in an unmixed state, They quite easily become intermixed in the same geographical area, mutually conditioning and modifying each other.

Their description centres around four points of reference which interact with one another: the social, political and economic system; certain cultural trends; religious attitudes; and the youth situation.

It is precisely from the standpoint of this last one that the other three need to be considered.

18. Contexts marked by an abundance of material goods

Many communities find themselves working in **contexts marked by an abundance of material goods**. In such situations problems of food and lodging, employment, instruction and social security seem solved. The primary human requirements of the people are guaranteed; they are in an advantageous position for the acquiring and development of their own culture, and they have available the means needed for their overall development.

The political system in turn tends to ensure an ample margin of freedom and of participation in public life. The less well-to-do can attain a better economic and social growth. The role of women is also better recognized and given greater value in the various aspects of social life.

Technology is a constant spur to greater wellbeing, and removes some restrictions on freedom. But if a technological mentality be allowed to develop without due thought, it will condition ways of thinking and every other approach to life. The right to privacy seems to become ever more extensive, particularly in what concerns moral matters, and reaches a point where no restrictive norms at all are acknowledged except those concerning the regulation of social life.

When society is strongly marked by mindless profit-seeking, it leads to old and new forms of poverty. This gives rise in the same context to consistent minority groups who are dissatisfied, and poorer countries feel heavily the consequences of such policies.

All this cannot leave us indifferent because it leads to a certain manner of approach to life and to the relationship between individuals and society which has an effect on everyone, and especially on the young.

19. The Church is aware that from a quantitative point of view she is in a minority and progressively more irrelevant in the cultural field, and for this the responsibility sometimes lies to some extent at the door of Christians themselves.

But we are also witnessing a growth in the number of people able to live with coherent intensity the values of the Gospel and express their membership of the Church. They are convinced that the Church is called to be the "sign and instrument of man's salvation" (cf. LG 1), and seriously engage in projects of animation, solidarity and social advancement.

20. In such a context too we find numerous expressions of popular religious practices. They have become stronger through the centuries and have reached the level of authentic devotion. They are evident in more than a few families and can be admired in religious manifestations and in characteristic places of cult.

Also spreading are new forms of religious observance, and autonomous sects of theosophical, neo-eastern, or neo-pagan inspiration.

21. On the other hand young people are also present in a consistent manner in the social field. They are committed to movements of an ecological or pacifist nature, or for the advancement and defence of human rights, and frequently suffer unpleasant personal consequences in their struggle against various forms of injustice.

Even though, through lack of formation in political duties, some of them remain aloof from the various parties, we nevertheless find them deeply involved in voluntary work experiences to which they are committed for the transformation of society.

Young people too form a notable and significant part of ecclesial movements. On the other hand they are offered ample and even excessive opportunities for recreational experiences. It is quite easy to get involved in the pursuit of something immediate, which renders one incapable of deferring the satisfaction of one's needs, and to be obsessed with a utilitarian approach that dulls the appreciation of such values as sacrifice and giving without seeking a return. All this is made worse by the pressure of the mass-media.

In a social climate like this many are prompted to seek new experiences, to live their sexuality solely as a means of pleasure, to seek refuge in drugs and alcohol, or to have recourse to violence.

22. Contexts that give rise to poverty

Numerous salesian communities find themselves in societies which are structurally in disorder. They are societies in which it seems impossible to arrest the progress of **economic, political and cultural impoverishment** because of the combination of many factors, such as injustice and institutionalized violence, economic dependence, and foreign debt which accentuates the gap between North and South.

There is a large number of people, often the majority of the population and their number grows with every crisis, who want access to the goods indispensable for a human way of life, but they never achieve it. Essential goods are the minimum required for health and survival, economic sufficiency, work, basic instruction, professional qualification, a just retribution for work done, the recognition of elementary rights and the opportunity for the individual to defend his opinions in social life.

A determining element in a mature collective awareness and in a well formed christian conscience is the knowledge that this state of affairs is not only

provoked, but is maintained and made worse by structural factors, prevalently of an economic kind, brought about by external forces but with powerful collaboration from the reality within the various countries.

23. Despite the suffering which is a feature of their daily lives, and in the simplicity of the latter's expressions, the people preserve and manifest the patrimony of their culture. There are values rich in humanity, such as cordiality, a welcoming reception, solidarity, a sense of communion and of festivity. They live a popular religious experience with a deeply felt reference to God; they keep up their fundamental devotional practices and religious ideas, even though these may not permeate their personal life or prompt them to a serious and decisive social commitment.

24. Especially in areas where the Catholic population is in the majority, the Church has frequently become the 'voice of the poor', making her own their aspirations for liberty and freedom to defend human rights. This decisive preferential option has become her critical yardstick in respect of particular political and economic preferences.

In these difficult situations many ecclesial communities become living manifestations of the 'good news', and the expression of a Church committed to evangelization and the building of the Kingdom.

On the other hand sects which exploit the natural religious feelings of the people are becoming more numerous and widespread.

25. In these countries a large part of the population is made up of young people who suffer the consequences of the social, economic and educational extremes to which they react with different attitudes, either of hope, frustration, rebellion, and sometimes violence.

It is deeply disturbing to note how numerous are those who do not know what youth is, because they pass suddenly from a childhood of penury and want to a prematurely adult life, lived in the precarious search for the work they need so badly.

26. But despite all this there is the clear and significant phenomenon of youngsters coming together in a common commitment, both in the ecclesial environment and in social and political circles.

27. Contexts of other religions

(YY)Quite a number of communities are working in settings strongly characterized by the presence of **great and ancient religions** like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and other traditional religions. Although these differ profoundly from one another, they can be grouped under a common denominator: a religious sense towards the Transcendent.

These religions have been for hundreds, and sometimes thousands of years sources of spiritual energy.

Some of their intuitions and fundamental truths concerning human life, the world, the ultimate mystery at the basis of everything that exists, exercise a particular influence on many young people. Some religions offer motivations which are valid, and sometimes even surprising, for helping their followers to face up to the trials of life. The advent of technology and secularism has not brought about any decline or disintegration of these, but has rather led to their further development. They seem indeed to have acquired new strength and to be extending their influence beyond their traditional boundaries.

28. One of the most evident characteristics of some of these religions is their strong embodiment in culture; this enables them to blend well with the life of the people, to permeate the whole texture of society, to inspire forms of behaviour, and in this way to foster the formation of a precise identity and a well defined image.

Where there is need to live in the same plurireligious context, these religions frequently inculcate a spirit of tolerance, of peaceful coexistence, of welcoming hospitality, despite occasional outbreaks of violence caused by intransigent tendencies.

But alongside these positive effects on cultures, one cannot be blind to certain negative effects, sometimes as regards principles but more often in the ways in which in practice these beliefs in some environments have lent support through the centuries to wait-and-see policies in strongly selective societies. In practice they have displayed a certain tendency to deny the values of freedom, and have endorsed and exasperated the division of populations into castes and social classes, or the discrimination between men and women, adults and youth.

29. The social and economic picture of the societies in which such religions are inserted varies a good deal.

Some countries have attained a high technological and economic level; others have set out to achieve significant development objectives; still others display serious forms of collective poverty and grave shortcomings in political structures. In this last case a struggle is in progress to enable the majority to enjoy a dignified way of life.

30. In contexts of this kind the Church is in fact a minority. Her presence is unwanted or even obstructed. And so it becomes difficult, and sometimes impossible, to proclaim the Gospel openly and preach christianity.

Salesian communities are generally accepted because of the social and cultural service they offer.

Situations like this can lead to suffering and discouragement in the confreres, but they do not close the door on dialogue, though it must be admitted that this is not always easy, because not everyone is open to it and it is often difficult to find appropriate expressions.

31. For their part, young people often suffer from the complexity of such situations.

The great majority of populations are now below 24 years of age. Many youngsters, because of their poverty, live in very precarious conditions and have no possibility of achieving even a minimal level of instruction and preparation for work.

Insecurity about their future, coupled with present dissatisfaction and other forms of pressure, prompt some of them to seek relief in drugs, alcohol, delinquency, suicide, or emigration.

Those on the other hand who live in favourable economic situations can profit by social services of education and advancement. But although they may be committed to improving their state of life, they easily become exposed to the temptations that go with the consumer society.

32. But there is also a positive aspect that emerges from the life of these youngsters: in the present struggle for social transformation many of them play a role which gives a thrust to progress. They set about reawakening people's consciences by gathering together and organizing groups that work for justice and peace, and by themselves becoming social workers and community animators.

33. Newly independent countries

(YY)Because of the large-scale commitment of the Congregation in recent years to extending its presence in the African area, there has been an increase in the number of salesian communities working in contexts in which an **irreversible process of decolonization** is in progress. It is a process set in motion by the recent gaining of political independence, but it requires too that a certain cultural and political servitude be overcome.

In the development of social life in such a context, it is quite easy to meet a series of difficulties resulting from political instability, the consequences of inefficiency, corruption at leadership levels, and the interference of foreign powers.

In an attempt to promote a national cultural unity, evident efforts are being made to integrate group sensitivities and tribal traditions which stem from different cultural heritages..

Important attempts are also in progress to amalgamate local cultural demands with forms of life imported from outside, but results are not always satisfactory. And then there are also real tensions, which occasionally break out into conflicts, between fidelity to one's own roots and the process of modernization which rolls relentlessly on and is accompanied by the myth of consumerism. This delusion, which drives people to the adoption of western ideas and behaviour even in the most remote villages, can result in an almost complete loss of tribal values.

34. In general education has not been successful in putting forward real models, able to harmonize with the situation of individuals and of local society. Those that have been suggested appear rather as the embodiment of aspirations and programmes transferred from other contexts, for which they were originally designed.

All this has happened while the need for educational services was erupting; and in the feverish desire to meet such requests insufficient attention was given to the respective cultural and pedagogical quality.

35. Society in these newly independent countries is characterized by a widespread religious atmosphere, which extends to every aspect of existence and is evident in both personal and public life. It appears as an attitude of esteem and openness to the religious world, mixed in with forms of fear and submission to unrecognized forces which have something in common with magic.

36. The christian faith, and the Catholic Church in particular, have spread rapidly in the brief space of a century of evangelization since its establishment in the country concerned.

The christian communities and ecclesiastical organization have begun a progressive consolidation and indigenization. Slowly but surely the faith has become embodied in local culture. Vocations are plentiful and charismata abound.

But where evangelization is of too recent origin, a growing adherence to the Church has been accompanied by situations in which the faith is still superficial, and a facile syncretism has become part of life. As far as adherence to christianity is concerned, unity between faith and life is still weak and equivocal, especially in the fields of family morality, economy and politics. In many cases the sore point is a plan for a solid catechumenate.

Independent christian churches are numerous in Africa, as also are sects and movements based on a strong religious syncretism.

The proclamation of the Gospel still finds fertile soil, as is evident from the progress in evangelization in individual countries. It is accompanied on the part of christian communities by the seeking of their own characteristic expression of faith.

37. The great majority of the population are young people. But they live in a disturbing and radically precarious state which has a negative influence on growth, education, work, religious options and moral life. A determining factor is their strongly subordinate position with regard to adults: an African boy counts for next to nothing and a girl still less, while the salesian presence aims at boosting their worth and importance.

Other determining elements are the massive movement from the villages to the outskirts of the towns - an uncontrolled urbanization that has run riot, and the double mentality (traditional and modern) evident in society. There is a desire to

shake off models of life of their own culture so as to take on others, and this change is looked on as cultural advancement.

38. Exodus from authoritarian regimes

(YY)Other communities are rebuilding or reshaping after long and difficult years in **societies firmly controlled by authoritarian regimes**. At the present time they are willing to go along with a rapid and unforeseen change towards a different system of social and political life. The situation is redolent with hope but is fluid and still evolving.

The new climate of freedom allows of political participation and of cultural and religious expressions of many kinds. There is a commitment to the building up of society in this direction.

At the same time there is emerging a strong desire for economic wellbeing, for so long beyond the bounds of possibility, which hankers after a style of life typical of developed countries. Warnings have not been lacking against the risk of assuming the accompanying negative aspects at the same time.

39. The religious phenomenon does not appear in the same guise in every country. Various components enter into its definition: tradition, the role of the Church as the defender of human rights in the preceding period, the integration of christian practice with popular culture, the adherence to the faith by the majority of the population, the defence of christian values, and the continual persevering effort of the Church to educate in the faith.

Without prejudice to the fundamental sense found in the majority, it is quite clear that the long period of "official atheism" imposed through the scholastic system and cultural pressure, and propagated by every means of social communication and by political and social discrimination against believers, has left deep marks.

Respect for cultural heritage has been weakened to a great extent, and for this reason religious sects find fertile ground among the young who are looking for permanent values.

40. It is accepted nowadays that communities, signs and personalities linked with the religious world have been valid points of reference and support for the forces that have prompted and sustained the exodus from such a system.

In this way the christian faith has come to be seen as a historic force, able to stir up cohesion and resistance, and committed to the efficacious promotion of freedom and human dignity.

41. In all this the young have played an important part.

From their adolescent years they have been compelled to live within a framework of political power, expressed in a rigid style of education and in organizations of the regime. Many of them however have not only resisted

various kinds of oppression, but have become real apostles among their companions. They have become leaders and have instigated social change, especially in universities and factories.

Today many cultural possibilities lie open to them, despite the limitations imposed by economic difficulties. Their research continues into what kind of options they should make at present and what direction their future aims should take. It is a research which is obligatory, especially in face of the vacuum of ideals and culture left behind by the collapse of the (marxist) ideological system, and which needs to be rapidly refilled.

42. Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities

(YY)A further context to which we draw attention as significant for the salesian presence among youth is that in which live certain confreres who work with **indigenous groups**, and to them may be linked the situation of some **ethnic minorities**. These groups belong to wider social and political contexts which, however, keep them on the margin if they do not exclude them entirely.

Their lives and social organization differ from the norm in the context to which they belong. Their traditional form of life is not generally considered of any importance, and they are merely tolerated by the majority. They are considered as a kind of 'archaeological reserve', of 'foreign presence': they are looked on as a reality on the way to extinction, as elements to be integrated into social life or expelled from it.

And yet they present notable qualities and have their own particular view of the world, which it is of interest at the present day to know and understand more deeply.

Among the characteristics of these groups there is found a great love for what they look upon as "mother earth", a vital living space which guarantees their identity as a group of humanity, a true people and authentic nation. The role of the family is to be a unit of work, the centre of communal values, and a defence against disruption and colonialism.

They are able to express profound human and social qualities in their lives, and have a marked religious sense. A contemplative attitude comes natural to them, in a simple style of life in which they are aesthetically sensitive to the beauties of nature.

Their group characteristics are best expressed when they form federations which are able to create a strong solidarity for the defence of their rights.

43. The Church is present among them through numerous communities of men and women religious. In recent times, in fact, she has become a courageous 'sign and reality of salvation' against repeated attempts to despoil and destroy them.

The missionaries have become active promoters of their development; they help them to play a leading part in the making of their own history, to be aware of their own cultural identity and to salvage their roots.

Catechists and other ministries are a great help in the launching of a catechumenal pilgrimage that will lead them to faith without uprooting their culture.

Many young people, animated and supported by the presence of missionaries and volunteers, have organized themselves into cooperatives, able to make careful critical judgements and ready for insertion into the local context.

44. The younger generations have had the benefit of better instruction, and sometimes this has led to a tendency for them to abandon their groups of origin.

Some of them, attracted by greater possibilities of wellbeing, emigrate towards the towns; in this way they jeopardize their patrimony of humanity and faith, as well as running the risk of picking up the worst elements of the new environment.

2. THE YOUTH SITUATION

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one (1 Jn 2,14)

45. The salesian community investigates different contexts because it is concerned to understand the circumstances in which young people live and how they react to them. It is not always easy to do this. Educational and pastoral ability seems to get lost in the face of the life of the young which varies so widely in its elements, but which at the same time has so many points of convergence. This variety of situations includes both positive and negative aspects which open up perspectives and also imply risks for education to the faith.

SOME FACTS OF THE YOUTH SITUATION

46. Forms of poverty

In every context are to be found various forms of poverty, which often take on alarming dimensions because of their extension or devastating effects.

For those who suffer them they represent a snare and, to some extent, an obstacle to development, while for others they can produce a new sensitivity as regards the forms lived in the adult world around them.

47. The reaction of the young to so many forms of poverty varies widely.

Some of them become hostile, and occasionally violent, towards those responsible for social organization. They strive by every means to emerge from their situation of need and organize forms of struggle. They are in permanent conflict with society, and have no time to open themselves to any beliefs other than their dominating ideology.

A considerable part of youth on the other hand wait passively for a solution to the problems, not finding in themselves sufficient will or energy to plan any different future. They are youngsters with no ideas for their tomorrow, concerned only about the present and their survival.

But there is also a growing number of young people who play the part of the critical conscience of civil and religious society, and do their utmost to spread the awareness of the real possibilities of change. They point out the more immediate problems of their society and are alert to world requirements in such dramatic matters as the economic gap between North and South, military spending, peaceful coexistence of peoples, and social discrimination. They are looking for new ways to liberation, seeking support from civil and ecclesial communities. They are generous, and solid with their fellow men, to whose good they are deeply committed.

Among them are born and develop many vocations, and the Church finds them a source of pastoral workers, catechists, community animators, volunteers, etc.

48. The desire to build

An interesting objective which involves to a large extent youth of every context is the desire to build a valid human personality for the present day.

Many of the traditional models are fading away; and when faced by the multiplicity of new models, the young find themselves alone in trying to make sense of the situation. An ever growing number of groups and places are offering proposals for formation, with the result that various influences and kinds of dependence are emerging which are difficult to handle.

Messages technically and psychologically tailored to youthful requirements serve only to fragment their interior world and produce individuals with a weak identity.

Many youngsters seem timorous and uncertain about their future and unable to make any clear and enduring decisions.

49. The search for new values

There are many others nevertheless who refuse to throw up the sponge and abandon in this easy fashion their dream of building a new and different society. They appeal to new values, able to regenerate personal relationships and which offer a richer social structure.

Some emphatic points are emerging from the world of youth: the centrality of the individual as the beginning, subject and end of all social institutions; the rediscovery of the values of equal dignity and reciprocal relationship between

man and woman; a new way of building rapport based on freedom and justice; a collection of values linked with diversity (e.g. tolerance, ecumenism, respect for what is different) and solidarity (the new vision of peace and development, the totality and universality of growth); renewed attention to cultural and religious realities, beyond purely technical aspects; a marked sensitivity to the great problems of the world, fostered also by the notable possibilities young people now have of making contact with other realities and with different cultural and religious traditions; a significant rediscovery of the environment and the need to safeguard it.

50. Finally, there are two attitudes that strongly condition the building of "new identities". They are "conformism", understood as an irresponsible and non-critical adaptation made without giving thought to originality and novelty; and "pragmatism", which is over-concerned with the immediate present.

51. A call for new relationships

Everywhere there is a strong appeal for new relationships. This is primarily a seeking for communication, to overcome isolation and establish contacts. It may also include the desire to satisfy immediate needs and requirements, in the hope of solving more easily the trials and problems of daily life. But frequently the tendency is towards interpersonal relationships that are stable and productive of practical commitments.

52. The linkage with the adult world, though not without its problems, is now marked by less tension and aggression, though these are sometimes replaced by various kinds of apathy and embarrassment. At any rate we are living through a period of greater tranquility.

With other young people the relationship is expressed spontaneously in ways in which there is intense co-involvement.

The "getting together" of boys and girls is a fact which at the present day is becoming ever more universal and takes place quite naturally. The sharing of experiences and of formation processes fosters a mutual complementarity which is enriching. But there are times when promiscuity trivializes the relationship. Even a strong affective bond can be broken when another relationship seems to respond better to one's expectations.

EDUCATIVE INSTITUTIONS

53. Worthy of special attention in the youth situation is the relationship established by young people with institutions known today as 'educative agencies'.

A common factor to keep in mind is that youngsters feel themselves to be part of these, and at the same time to be outside them. They feel part of them, and despite all appearances the relationship is a consistent one. They try to use them to the maximum for their own personal growth. At the same time they are outside them, in the sense that these 'agencies' exert only a relative influence on their life options, which are based on criteria other than those of the institutions.

54. The family

In the present-day crisis of institutions, the family can provide a firm anchorage for the young. It represents a calm and peaceful place of refuge, and a sincerely affective environment that normally ensures a positive relationship of mutual respect and autonomy between adults and young people. But its educative and religious value has fallen off considerably. The new ties a youngster makes outside the family, the cultural divide that separates youth and adults, the impossibility for parents to follow up on their children after adolescence, all tend to exclude the family from the growth process. As a place of affection and understanding, it is no longer experienced as a primary environment for cultural elaboration.

55. At the present day many families in different contexts are passing through a grave crisis marked by a weakening of internal bonds and an exaggerated desire for autonomy.

Many young people are suffering the consequences of this kind of family breakdown, caused by infidelity, superficial relationships, divorce, distress, alcoholism and drugs.

A growing number of people are psychologically unprepared to be fathers or mothers, and are incapable of showing affection for their partner or their children.

Situations like these create in many young people serious consequences which appear as an enormous affective inadequacy, insecurity, maladjustment, and the risk of aberrancy.

56. The scholastic institution

In the educational system of our complex societies one notes a prevalence of instruction and scientific data over educational intentions and the overall formation of the individual. This is something which creates a separation between educational system and life, between teaching and the integral formation of the person, and makes difficult the elaboration of a personal culture. The interference also of numerous other 'educational agencies' reduces the influence of all of them and detracts from the value and content of proposals offered to the young.

57. Religious institutions

religious structures are today meeting with growing interest and renewed confidence, even though their influence on the decisions and life choices of the young is only partial and sectorial.

For ease of analysis we may reduce the complex and fretted religious world of the young to two basic categories.

58. A majority of young people find their seeking of a new way of life incompatible with the lack of flexibility of a religious institution, which does not in fact seem to favour the innovations continually called for by daily life. And so these youngsters are led to distance themselves from the institution and live the religious experience as something internal and private, without any significant influence on their practical life.

59. A minority, on the other hand, feel a strong communion with others who share the same feelings and cultural and religious traits. They are able to give strong and tenacious expression to a commitment consistent with their own religious faith. They manifest it publicly and strive to renew its gestures, symbolism and content to make it more expressive in a changing world.

OTHER SITUATIONS INFLUENCING YOUTH

60. Work

The place and kind of work exert a considerable influence on the young and on their personal and social identity.

For many of them work is an indispensable condition for the survival of themselves and their families. It marks a new relationship with the adult world and secures a place for the youngster in social life. For others work means leaving the family, beginning the independent management of their own lives and the social confirmation of their own abilities.

In either case, work creates in the youngster a sense of greater self-security and new attitudes: at the workplace solidarity and friendships are born, experiences exchanged and influences met with.

In many cases entry into the world of work breaks the weak attachment to the christian community, and there is the risk that faith itself will exert a diminishing influence until it becomes totally extraneous to life. But on the other side of the picture there is a growing number of youngsters who at their place of work manage to translate their faith into practical social commitment.

There are two aspects that should not be overlooked. In some countries there are many young people who are condemned to long periods of unemployment or only casual work; they suffer from a sense of personal failure or social ineffectiveness and remain in a state of economic and family dependence.

For many boys on the other hand the work experience comes before they are ready for it, and you have the phenomenon of child labour, often in precarious conditions and situations of exploitation, without any guarantee of physical safety or the safeguarding of personal rights. These youngsters have no access to educative institutions or even a minimum of culture. They can quite easily take refuge therefore in escapism or even delinquency.

61. The youth group

In the formation process particular importance attaches to the youth group. There is no doubt that this is a widespread reality with rich perspectives.

In contact with his peers the young person finds criteria and practical guidelines for life, looks at the facts of his experience and compares them with the past, and expresses himself with gratifying self-confidence.

For many youngsters the group represents the only means for bringing together the results of the scattered fragmentation that continually besets their lives; it makes it easier to overcome the loneliness which is an integral part of the process of self-development.

Sometimes adherence to the group ideals is only partial, and the group itself can then become more of a refuge or way of escape from the difficulties that life presents.

62. The "street"

The "street" is always there as a place of refuge for poor youngsters separated from their families or on the fringe of society, who are driven to use any means for survival. In contexts of poverty it is for many of them their only home, their only place of work, and their only school of life.

But at the present day the street has taken on a new dimension. The search for new relationships and the desire for freedom leads youngsters to find places where they can meet together that are both simple and of easy access. Indications of this are the strong influence of the street and of places for meeting and recreation, where ideas are formed and multiply or cancel each other out.

In such places the young people seek the pleasure of meeting others and feeling happy together. Their purpose is not to do anything in particular but just to talk and share ideas, and most of all to amuse themselves. The force and incidence of free time on the formation of the personal identity of the young person grows to such an extent that it eventually outstrips the importance of the classical educative agencies.

The street and other places for getting together help to overcome the loneliness which is a characteristic feature of present-day society; they make up for the lack of family affection; they provide personal security and the possibility of meeting and friendship.

But when considering the street, or the other environments in which youngsters come together spontaneously, it is easy to be carried away by messages that are ambiguous in their consequences, that encourage the seeking

of immediate enjoyment, that lead to mob behaviour, or to escapism through the use of alcohol or drugs, and to other forms of deviant behaviour.

63. Social communication

Young people communicate quite easily through the new kinds of language (music, TV, videocassette), which are creating a new culture, often unknown and incomprehensible to adults, but within which they themselves get along quite naturally. These languages spread models of life (cf. C 43) and provide a continuous and copious flow of information on the world and its problems.

The young in general make great use of them. For some of them the mass media are positive occasions of growth. By their intelligent use they can form a critical conscience and an open mentality. They lead to the making of better documented and committed options, and develop a sensitivity to the values of peace, justice and tolerance.

But there are other youngsters, and they are many, who approach the mass media in an uncritical fashion, leaving themselves open to the risk of ever greater dependence. For them they are a means of escapism, occasions for becoming conditioned, for the formation of false needs and mistaken life models.

3. YOUTH AND THE FAITH

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path... other seed fell on rocky ground... other seed fell among thorns... and other seed fell into good soil... (Mk 4, 3-8)

In the contexts and situations we have just described, how do young people see the faith? What do they ask of it?

Their hopes and expectations vary a great deal.

64. Those far from the Church

Young people not in touch with the Church at all form the largest category, but the reasons for their separation are varied and manifested in different ways.

Some have moved away because, although they live in families basically sensitive to religious values, under the influence of progressively more dechristianized environments they have little by little lost the faith, without ever having abandoned it in a conscious fashion. It is a kind of silent departure.

Others are at a distance simply because they were born into families and cultural contexts in which the sense of life, its criteria and the things that go with it are autonomous and totally unconnected with religious values.

Still others are far away because, lacking life's fundamental requirements through poverty and emargination, they are quite unaware of the existence of christian and religious values; or if they do know of them they do not see them as having any weight and significance for their own life experience, obsessed as they are by the need for daily survival.

65. To the category of those who are far away belong also those young people who simply exclude any religious reference from their lives. Faulty education may have led them to pass from an intense religious practice to its complete rejection.

The reasons for this vary considerably: sometimes it is through negative witness; or because the kind of religious approach was lacking in quality and gradual presentation, or was not assimilated at a personal level; or because religious observance has been replaced by adherence to ideas and political movements which do not recognize the humanizing effect of religious experience; or because in today's consumer society they have embarked on the acquiring of a condition of wellbeing, and faith has become for them something irrelevant and even an obstacle.

66. Finally there are young people who think they are far from God because they have given up religious practices and have abandoned ecclesial institutions and teaching, but not their ethical commitment. They offer a good basis for dialogue when they are sufficiently disposed for it.

67. Youth open to religious discussion

Then there are young people who are open to a certain participation. They feel a real need, even though only in a confused way, to find a meaning for their lives, and values to underlie their choices and actions.

They are youngsters with good desires who are sensitive to religious incentives, but they can quite easily get bogged down at a stage where they have "seen the light" and have bursts of emotional religious activity on coming into contact with exceptional persons or events; but they are not concerned about acquiring an organized knowledge of the christian mystery, nor of living coherently according to the Church's teaching.

But they are usually well disposed for discussion and the acquiring of deeper knowledge.

68. Young people who "practise" religion

Resembling the latter to some extent, though with different emphases, are youngsters who "practise religion" without motivation, those who regularly go

through the usual religious gestures, but without adverting to their quality or living their fullness. For them these are more a matter of social custom than a conscious expression of seeking God and the coming of his Kingdom. They have not given themselves on their own initiative to Christ and their fellow men, nor are they disposed to do so, usually because their religious option is far from mature.

The result is that in them the faith does not realize all its potentiality, christian life is not accepted in its prophetic aspects of an original adventure, and charity does not become self-donation, witness, ecclesial service, and social and political commitment.

69. Committed youngsters

"Committed youngsters" form the smallest group, but their presence is a real sign of hope. For them the faith is a gift; it is a discovery, a surprise, and always a joy. They continually reflect on the christian mystery; they strive always to be consistent, and the various forms of apostolic, social and political commitment and the various vocations, lived with generosity, give life to their deeply felt and openly manifested membership of the Church.

70. And among these youngsters there are some who have lived their lives in simple kindness and dedication to others, even to the point of attaining sanctity. They can be found in our own history: Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Ceferino Namuncurà, and others.

Don Bosco made of them outstanding leaders in the evangelization of other young people. Our documents speak of them as the real objective of our work of evangelization (cf. GC21 27-28).

They have been taken by God and placed at the service of their own companions and the community. Their existence is a clear manifestation of the powerful action of the Holy Spirit, and is a stimulus for the salesian communities themselves.

71. Contact with young people belonging to other christian denominations is no longer something exceptional for us at the present day. The Congregation now has places in geographical areas traditionally linked with other denominations, and more and more boys and young men of other religions frequent our works.

In recent times, through the influence of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and the ecumenical movement that has followed it, a new climate is apparent almost everywhere: a spirit of religious tolerance and the desire for unity characteristic of our present era.

These youngsters, by reason of their faith, live a life which as regards spiritual elements and moral demands has much in common with Catholicism. Many of them are open to dialogue on religious values and are willing to work with us for the Kingdom.

They come to us willingly, either from personal choice or because their families find the atmosphere in our establishments attractive, or for simple

reasons of convenience. Mutual esteem and respect for the religious option enable diffidence and differences to be overcome. We grow in our appreciation for each other and are solid in the realization of common projects.

This is not the case however with the fundamentalist sects found in various contexts.

72. Young people of other religions

Among the youth of other religions can be found examples of the characteristics already described for various groups, from those at a distance to those already committed. Many of them admire Jesus, but the majority do not embrace christianity.

There are many reasons for this: there is the fear that if they become christians they will have to abandon the culture and tradition of their own social group; there is a radical feeling that christianity is the depositary of a foreign faith imported from abroad; and in some countries the lack of religious freedom plays a part.

Of influence too is the fact that many christians are easygoing and do not provide credible witness, fighting among themselves while appealing to the same Christ.

All this weighs heavily upon and conditions the first movements towards the faith.

73. We may add too the interpretation given of the moral and religious crisis in traditionally christian countries as though this were the result of a colossal failure of christianity; young people from eastern parts have come to such countries in search of peace, harmony and enlightenment, and have found that christianity seemed to have little or nothing to offer beyond what could be found in their own religions.

Self-sufficiency, born of a partly true and partly debatable interpretation of these facts, presents a difficulty to dialogue and is an obstacle to the acceptance of the scandal of the Gospel with a humble heart.

74. But all things considered, these religions offer a good basis for comparison with christianity. It is a question of helping people to discover and increase their ability of opening themselves up to God and to the proposition of faith; of helping them to distinguish what is true and authentic from what is false and deceptive; of accompanying the young on their path to a meeting of communion with God, using the good elements that already exist in their faith and their desires.

4. THE MORE URGENT CHALLENGES

When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather for the sky is red.'
And in the morning, 'It will be stormy
today, for the sky is red and
threatening.' You know how to interpret
the appearance of the sky, but you
cannot interpret the signs of the times.
(Mt 16, 2-3)

75. After examining the contexts, the youth situation, and the concrete attitude of the young as regards the faith, the Salesian Congregation feels itself challenged to take a stand and commit itself. But in what direction?

In the process of its discernment, the GC23 has singled out certain hurdles which, in its opinion, pose a stronger and more direct challenge to the communities because of their gravity, urgency and extension. They are matters which on the one hand seem to be provocations to our mission of educators to the faith; and on the other appear as real opportunities rich in possibilities. They are new occasions that call for creativity and courage.

They express in a clear and detailed fashion the two ideas on which the faith is required to shed new light and significance: the individual and society; personal identity and the universal solidarity with all men.

Five such hurdles are indicated:

- the challenge of those "far away or outside";
- the challenge of "poverty";
- the challenge of the "irrelevance of the faith in life and culture";
- the challenge of "other religions";
- the challenge of "life".

76. Those far away or outside

The challenge of the young people who remain at a distance from the world of faith is the most universal fact emerging from the analyses that have been made. One meets it even in those who have passed through the first stages of christian initiation.

Many young people, with a freedom of choice before them, confine their lives within the framework of a secularist vision, which is most attractive to them but leads them to concentrate entirely on the present and lose all awareness of their destiny.

77. Young people far from the Church are numerous and present a big challenge to salesian communities, who are aware that the gap between them and the community is very often based on a difference of mentality and a lack of communication:

- How is the community to overcome the physical, psychological and cultural barriers and reach the world of the young from which we are separated?
- How can we make contact with those who are part of our environment but remain at a distance and have no interest in the faith?

The very manner of living and presenting the faith by the community receives a rude shock, and gives rise to the question:

- Does the community really live its faith as a dimension which gives savour and direction to life? If so, in what ways does the real value of this become apparent to today's young people and help them to follow the same path?

Poverty

The social condition of "poverty" is a challenge to every person of good will. The impossibility or great practical difficulty of self-realization as individuals, in the absence of the minimum requirements for adequate development, pose serious questions.

And they are questions which become still more distressing when one realizes that the impoverishment of many has a direct relationship with the enrichment of a few.

79. Those who, as disciples of Christ, see and understand these realities and ponder them in their heart, are called upon to show sympathy with those in such situations and be solid with them in their sufferings. The prophetic character of religious life calls us to be the embodiment of the Church which desires to abandon itself to the radicalism of the Beatitudes and bear witness to her. This gift of the Spirit makes us more sensitive to the challenge of poverty.

He who is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2,4) sends us to be the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves, to be poor with the poor, to take up their cause, to seek justice for those suffering from its lack, to collaborate in the transformation of a reality that is far from the Kingdom of God.

80. When we look at the social condition of poverty with the eyes of Don Bosco, and see how it destroys so many young people whose horizons do not extend beyond their immediate needs for survival or an ideal devoid of sense, we feel challenged to make our salesian presence among the poor more consistent and effective.

And we ask ourselves:

- How does the salesian community live the radical sense of the beatitude of poverty, and how does it bear witness to it? What sort of education and christian life do we present to youngsters who live in a world of poverty, injustice, distress and abandonment, so that it may be meaningful and liberating?

- Especially in those countries where the standard of life is high, how do we educate young people to become aware of the injustice created in the world of wellbeing?

81. One of the aspects of the challenge is that emarginated and impoverished youth, to the extent that they are open to the Gospel, themselves become our own evangelizers: "we recognize the gospel values they stand for", we are told by our Constitutions (C. 29).

82. Salesian communities are called to be a sign of hope for these young people. Once we decide to share with them our live as educators living by faith, we feel compelled to put an end to situations of lethargy and indifference.

Daily contact with these youngsters, enriched by signs of the presence of Christ, produces in the community new incentives for living the faith with greater truth; it helps towards the celebration of the Kingdom and salvation, a realistic search for new motives for conversion and solidarity, and to making the faith a saving reality in history.

83. Irrelevance of the faith

The "irrelevance of the faith in life and culture" has become an axiom of "modern" society, just as well proved and unquestionable as the idea that being religious is in opposition to the laws and movements which control men of today in the fields of economy, politics and the exercise of power.

In the welfare state, and reflexively in other contexts, religious values have been moved to the margin of the components of the new society and of the aspects considered essential for social life.

For the young, and especially for those living in this kind of atmosphere, questions about God are of no importance, and religious terminology (salvation, sin, faith, future life) has lost all its significance. There is no point therefore in talking about the relationship between faith and life, or faith and culture. Religious concepts can no longer be expressed in an intelligible way in the field of culture. This is a dramatic aspect of the otherwise lawful process of secularization.

84. And youngsters who are believers? They too tend to live their faith "in private", without linking it with the real life that rejects it. These situations of isolation, of restriction to private practice, of being extraneous, are met with more or less everywhere and especially in the mass media.

And very soon youngsters find themselves facing a choice between two alternatives:

- Should they enter the social scene and face adult life without following or being guided by religious criteria? Or should they stay faithful to their own ideals and horizons, those of faith, more especially in their private lives?

Salesians too have to ask themselves:

- How can the young be educated to build a new christian identity within the developmental processes of human values?

85. As a consequence of all this, the community itself runs the risk of being unable to make credible its own faith and to pass it on, unless it finds a suitable place, a sufficient length of time, and appropriate language for the education to the faith of those to whom it is sent.

The place cannot be other than its historical life setting: the new social reality. The period of time is that of the various stages or ages of life. The language - such as can communicate within the new culture.

The challenge is great, and even enormous. It is not a matter of meeting questions with abstract replies; the whole dynamism of life and civilization is involved, the sense of the various initiatives of daily existence and, at the same time, of the premises for any educational project deemed possible. In the last analysis it is a matter of being able to keep on hoping.

86. Contact with other religions

"Contact with other religions" is a challenge met with in the various contexts described, in different ways and with different characteristics which nevertheless have something in common. How can Jesus Christ be made present, he "who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his heart"? (RH 8).

After 2,000 years christianity is still seen, in these contexts, as a religion remote from or foreign to the prevailing cultural sensitivities, and at times is considered even dangerous by some religious groups of fundamentalist tendencies. A person who feels himself threatened becomes closed in on himself, and any attempt at mutual knowledge, collaboration or exchange of views becomes impossible.

The most effective responses to the challenge of contact with young people of other religions are sincere and practical dialogue, a deep and careful inculturation of the christian faith and a courageous evangelization of culture (cf. C 7), and the witness of a community enthusiastically committed in self-sacrificing service.

- How can the community bring about a sincere and open dialogue with these religions, emphasizing their positive values while recognizing their limitations? How can the salesian values of the preventive system, especially loving kindness, be lived as the first christian witness and the best way to present the Gospel? (cf. R 22).

87. Life

The challenges referred to up to this point are disturbing though they give rise to real opportunities. But there is one challenge that is a synthesis of all the others and permeates them all: the challenge of "life".

88. It is experienced by many young people in its most distressing manifestations: in the hunger of those seeking food; in the oppression of those wanting freedom; in solitude seeking fellowship; in profanation seeking dignity; in bewilderment looking for security; in absurdities wanting to find sense; in violence craving for peace.

There are other youngsters who are happy in their studies, in their family and friends, in their living standard and spare time, and they finish up by feeling no need for faith and an afterlife.

And finally there are those who want to live a full life. This is a desire which at the present day takes on particular characteristics: the search for a new quality of life which, once the primary needs have been met, provides a response to other more personal, relational and religious needs; sensitivity to the dignity of the human person and his rights; the search for new motives for living in today's world as real men.

These challenges find an echo in the entire existence of the salesian community; they impinge on every aspect of its identity and compel it to verify and evaluate what it is and what it does. Measuring itself against Jesus of Nazareth, it will have to verify that it is really at the service of life threatened and destroyed by so many forms of death. It will have to rethink its idea of "christian salvation", enlightened by art.31 of the Constitutions: "We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total wellbeing of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man".

SECOND PART

THE FAITH JOURNEY

1. THE COMMUNITY FACED WITH THE CHALLENGES

Two of them were going to a village...
Jesus himself drew near and went with
them... (Lk 24, 13.15)

89. The community is questioned

The community feels itself called upon to meet the challenges. It accepts the task with humility and pastoral fervour. It is convinced that the matter is not just one of simple youth problems but of the signs of the times, by means of which the Lord makes himself known and indicates what he wants.

The community responds by examining its own life, the perspectives and projects which have so far guided it in its pastoral commitment, and is convinced that it can meet the requirements of the young. In salesian tradition, in fact, a happy coincidence is evident between what young people are looking for, and what our apostolic consecration prompts us to give them.

90. rethinks the mission it has received

Underlying this hope there are certain firm beliefs. The youth mission, in which every confrere and community feel the joy of giving their service, allows us to keep up with the times. We are collaborating in God's work, and to this end he gives us his light and grace. Through what they ask of us the young prevent us from getting bogged down in the past; they educate us and prompt us to find new and courageous responses.

The dawn of a "new evangelization" (CL 34) is a call to us to take up the building of a more human society, and asks us above all to renew in fresh contexts our faith in the Good News brought to man by Jesus Christ, and even to make a qualitative leap in this regard.

91. and undertakes to provide a response

We are convinced that God is at work in history, that the Spirit of the risen Lord is present wherever good is being done and calls upon the community to confess Christ and reawaken its own faith.

We do not have precise replies of assured efficacy to all the challenges or to any of them in particular. They are not mere passing difficulties, but indications of a "change of epoch" that we must learn to assess in the light of faith.

92. drawing inspiration from Don Bosco's experience

We are brought to the same conviction by our spiritual experience as Don Bosco's followers.

The Spirit present in his heart attracted youngsters not just to his own person, but to God. Despite the complexity of situations and the precarious nature of his resources, he lived as one "seeing him who is invisible" (Heb 11,27; cf. C 21). With trust he sowed seeds of faith through kindly gestures, and formed others to do likewise.

This is the experience that we too at the present day want to pass on to youth: through this mysterious presence of the Spirit, life (even though it be lived in poverty) has within itself the force of redemption and the seed of happiness. This is the substance of what is meant by "educating to the faith".

And so we intend to allow ourselves to be converted by their provocations and help them to bank on the faith. We are confident that we can offer them a path that will lead them from a desire for life to life's fullness, i.e. to develop a style of existence which reproduces that of Jesus of Nazareth as it was relived by Don Bosco. This is the substance of "salesian youth spirituality".

93. following the example of the Lord

All this we do in imitation of the Lord and following the way of charity of the Good Shepherd (cf. C 11) on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24, 13-36). We repeat his attitude: we take the first step in approaching the young and joining them; we travel with them along the same road, listening to them and sharing their hopes and anxieties; we patiently explain to them the demanding message of the Gospel; and we stay with them, to repeat the gesture of breaking the bread and stirring up in them the ardour of faith that will transform them into credible witnesses and proclaimers of God's word.

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man (Lk 2,52)

MEETING GOD IN THE YOUNG

94. The work of God

For the salesian, educating youth to the faith means "work and prayer". He is aware that by committing himself to the salvation of the young he is experiencing something of the fatherhood of God (cf. C 12) "who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them" (C 20).

Don Bosco has taught us to recognize God's operative presence in our work of education, and to experience it as light and love.

95. recognized

We believe that God loves the young. This is the conviction which is at the origin of our vocation, and which motivates our life and all our pastoral activity.

We believe that Jesus wants to share "his life" with young people: they are the hope of a new future, and in their expectations they bear the seeds of the Kingdom.

We believe that the Spirit is present in them and that through them he wants to build a more authentic and human christian community. He is already at work in individuals and groups. He has given them a prophetic task to carry out in the world which is also the world of all of us.

We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.

In this way our work of education becomes the preeminent context in which to meet him.

96. in every youth situation

By virtue of this grace no youngster can be excluded from our hope and activity, especially if he be suffering the consequences of poverty, downfall or sin. We are also certain that in each young person God has placed the germ of his "new life".

This prompts us to make them aware of such a gift, and to take a lot of trouble with them so that they may develop this life in all its fullness. When our

efforts do not seem to achieve the desired result, we nevertheless continue to believe that the God of hope and salvation has foreseen our suffering.

THE DEPARTURE POINT

97. Go to the young

Our obligation to educate youth to the faith often comes up against an obstacle: many youngsters are not reached by either our message or our witness. Between ourselves and the majority of them there is a gap which is often physical but more especially psychological and cultural.

And so the first thing we have to do is remove this gap between us, approach them and get close to them. In this too Don Bosco is our teacher. "Being away from you, my dear sons," he wrote from Rome in 1884, "and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine" (MB 17, 107).

He went looking for youngsters: he walked the streets and squares; he went into backyards and workplaces. He met them one by one and invited them to come to his Oratory.

This love and the gestures that accompanied it were not only part of an educational method, but the original expression of his faith in God and his desire to proclaim Christ to the young.

98. Meet them where they are to be found

Going to meet the young where they are to be found, welcoming them into our environments with disinterested concern, attending to their requirements and aspirations, are for us fundamental steps that precede any other stage of education to the faith.

99. Building on the good they already have

The journey of education to the faith begins by giving due value to the patrimony every youngster has in himself, and which a true educator can bring to light with patient intelligence. He will make opportune use of reason and of his pastoral sensitivity to discover God's design, which is sometimes hidden but not completely obliterated from the youngster's heart. He will stake his ability for understanding and affection in an effort to "make himself loved".

A kind reception also gives rise to the development of reciprocal friendship, esteem and responsibility, which eventually makes the young person aware that he has a value and significance as an individual that surpasses his wildest dreams. And this draws forth his best energies.

100. In an educative environment

A welcoming reception has all the greater effect when the youngster is brought into contact not with an individual alone, but with a whole setting that is full of life and presents so many opportunities. The Oratory is the basic pattern and model for all our environments: "a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares pupils for life, and a playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves" (C 40).

The "oratorian" setting is not primarily a specific educational structure, but rather an atmosphere characteristic of all salesian work. Its principal elements are confidence and a family spirit, joy and festivity which accompany work and the doing of one's duty, the many free expressions of youthful leadership, and the friendly presence of educators able to make suggestions in line with the interests of the young and at the same time inculcate faith options and values.

Don Bosco refers nostalgically to this atmosphere in his letter of 1884 from Rome, when he asks for a return "to the days of affection and christian confidence" between boys and Salesians; "the days when hearts were open with simple candour; days of love and real joy..." (MB 17,114).

Don Bosco was wonderful at creating environments based on education and faith, in which his boys became missionaries among their peers.

For this reason he was always demanding about the educative quality of such surroundings, and he did not hesitate to make even severe decisions in regard to youngsters and collaborators who in any way openly rejected or compromised the educational atmosphere.

In this way, in the close relationship between personal contact with every youngster on the part of the educator and the rich encouragement provided by the surroundings, there have matured in salesian history exemplary experiences of youthful sanctity.

THE PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE

101. A significant contact or a cordial reception in such an atmosphere becomes the starting point for a journey "towards" faith or for further development "of" faith. This puts to the test the oratorian heart of the Salesian, his personal experience of faith in Jesus Christ and his educational ability.

102. A faith proposal within the educational process

The educational process, in which the objective is the development of the whole person, is the best setting for presenting the faith to the young. The direction taken at this stage is decisive for defining the characteristics and content of the journey to be made. It is a setting in which due importance is

given not only to "religious" events, but also to everything relating to the growth of the individual to maturity.

103. Youth and Christ

The journey must be planned keeping well in mind two points of reference: on the one hand, the difficulties and suffering the young must face in forming their personalities; and on the other the express reminder of Christ to build that personality according to the revelation manifested in Him. The life of the young is at one and the same time the obligatory point of departure for a journey of faith, a continual point of reference in its development, and the goal of the journey itself, once it has been transformed and set on the road to fullness in Jesus Christ.

The proclamation of Christ, continually renewed, is the basic aspect of the whole journey; it is not something extraneous to or merely bordering on the experience of youth. It becomes in it the way, the truth and the fullness of life.

We are dealing therefore with a true journey "towards" the faith and a precise journey "of" faith, which sets out from the recognition of the fact that Jesus Christ has been manifested as the true man, and only in him can man enter totally into life. The journey leads to the ensuring and consolidating of a definitive meeting with him, lived in the ecclesial community and an intense christian life.

104. An educational journey

It must always be kept in mind that we are dealing with an educational process, which takes the young people in the situation in which it finds them, and sets about supporting and guiding them in travelling to the fullness of humanity that may be possible for them.

It can take place therefore even in circumstances in which the explicit proclamation of Christ may be difficult or impracticable, or where the minimum conditions for it being heard have still to be created. In a precarious situation of this kind reference to the Gospel provides inspiration, indicating genuine human values, and bolstering the silent and far from easy witness of the educators.

105. which gives priority to the poorest and most lowly

As a result of all this, there are certain aspects which are central to the idea of the journey:

1. The journey must be adapted to the condition of those setting out on it: the salesian option of giving priority to the poor is a precondition for dialogue with all, including those who are less well informed about the christian "event".

Simple and easily understood language, a welcoming environment and a style of family relationships render the salvific mystery accessible, and make of it good news and an invitation for those who are at a distance. The option for the poor and lowly is something that determines not only the beginning of the journey but also every further stage until the conclusion is reached.

A person who has already travelled part of the journey cannot be expected to start again from the beginning, but he can always be invited to come back to the realities, to the simple and fundamental words and signs, so as to support by his witness those just starting.

106. which never finishes

2. The journey goes always ahead towards new goals. It can go as far as those degrees of self-donation and holiness which the Spirit is able to reveal to the young. The exemplary lives of Dominic Savio and Laura Vicuña provide a pattern for our own educative experiences and make us realize the extraordinary fruits the life of faith can produce in the young.

There will always be something lacking therefore in our educative and pastoral mission whenever we are able to find in our environments this gift placed there by God, or when we are unprepared to sustain a generous response.

107. is adapted to the pace of every youngster

3. As well as giving priority to the poorest, lowliest, and those farthest away, and having something to offer those who have already made considerable progress, the journey calls for a third sensitivity: to be aware that every youngster has his own rate of progress, which is not the same for everyone; the results at each stage are not the same for all either, and therefore the journey must be adapted to each individual. If the faith is a dialogue of love of God and with God; if it is a covenant with God made in the practical circumstances of daily life, there are no standard forms that are repeatable from one person to another. Constituted as we are by the Holy Spirit as friends of God and of the young, we commit ourselves to anticipate, foster and follow up their words and indications.

108. Even educational failures can form part of the experience of every journey. We do not consider these as accidental facts or dimensions extraneous to the educative process. They form an integral part of it and should be accepted with understanding. In some cases they are a consequence of the grave conditions in which some youngsters are obliged to live.

109. From all this it is clear that the journey must be thought of as something unique, because unique is the objective to which it is directed, unique too the indications linking it with the nature of faith, and some characteristics of the youth scene do not change.

But it is not difficult to understand that the journey must be progressively defined or divided into particular stages according to the capacities of the young travellers. These separate itineraries appear as more detailed specifications of

experiences, content and goals, according to the young people involved and their particular circumstances.

110. and which is realized in community

And there is another aspect that must not be overlooked: it is the "educative community", including both adults and young people. It is the subject which makes the journey "of" faith and "towards" faith. No distinctions can be made of the kind: the young are those to whom the plan is directed, while the adults are only those who authoritatively look after its technical details. This kind of outlook would put the whole scheme into the category of professional services, completely detached from life. St Paul reminds us how we were generated in the faith.

The journey is a single one, but it involves many people. Even though it may challenge each individual with regard to his or her specific responsibility before God, the project is sustained by all those who recognize in Christ the foundation and sense of life.

111. In the educative and pastoral community all the members, whether they are involved in tasks of education and human development, or more explicitly in what concerns matters of faith, are "educators of the young to the faith".

Their greatest joy is to pass on the unfathomable riches of Christ (cf. C 34). All resources and activities must converge in the service of the same individual, helping him to grow towards life and contact with the risen Lord.

DIMENSIONS OF THE JOURNEY

THE OVERALL OBJECTIVE

That you may believe that Jesus _____ is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20,31)

112. Mankind directed to Christ

We draw up our plan of any journey in keeping with the goal we want to reach. We have to be clear about the kind of person and believer we wish to develop, given the specific circumstances of life and society. We do this in the awareness that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is also at work, transforming the individual starting from the concept of a "new creation".

113. We are given guidance in this direction by our Constitutions: "We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total wellbeing of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man. Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form upright citizens and good christians" (C 31).

In this text of the Constitutions the first reference focuses on substantial configuration to Christ, Son and Brother, who gives his life for all and is restored to life by the Father. The second reference, on the other hand ("upright citizens and good christians"), is to the historical realization of this kind of christian, called to live in the Church and society at a specific time and place.

114. able to integrate faith and life

A different formula, one that is dense and expressive, is preferred in some contexts for saying all this: "integration of faith and life". This integration is the response to the dramatic and provocative challenge we have earlier pointed out: the irrelevance and separation of faith, life and culture manifested simultaneously at both social and personal levels.

The goal of the journey therefore, which is put before the young, is that of building their own personality with Christ as the point of reference as regards mentality and life. Such a reference, as it becomes more explicit and spontaneous, will help the youngster to see history through the eyes of Christ, to judge life as He judges it, to select and love as He does, to hope as He teaches us, to live in Him our communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Through the mysterious fruitfulness of this referral the individual is built into an existential unity: he accepts the responsibilities which are properly his and seeks out the ultimate meaning of his own life. Finding himself part of a people who are believers, he succeeds in living his faith freely and intensely, in proclaiming it and celebrating it with joy in daily life.

115. And so those human attitudes which lead him to be sincerely open to truth, to respect and love other people, to express his own freedom in self-donation and service, mature and become natural to him. The practice of faith, hope and charity become his normal style of life. Mentality, daily life, and presence in the community become the three fields where the authenticity of the "good christian" and "upright citizen" can be assessed.

The salesian phrase linking the two concepts emphasizes the communal social and political dimension of faith and charity, which leads to the assuming of specific responsibilities in the building of a renewed society.

THE DIMENSIONS

116. Four great aspects of christian maturing

The journey is intended to be a progressive growth towards this objective. We take up seriously therefore four important aspects of the christian maturing process which we shall call "dimensions".

We can indicate them schematically as follows:

- human growth towards a life to be lived as a "religious experience";
- a meeting with Jesus Christ, the perfect man, that will lead to the discovery in him of the sense of individual and social human existence: the "Saviour of mankind";
- progressive insertion in the community of believers, accepted as the "sign and instrument" of humanity's salvation;
- commitment and vocation in what concerns the transformation of the world.

Within each of these dimensions, we have to:

- cultivate some attitudes that can be frequently verified;
- single out some points, a knowledge of which is indispensable for an adequate understanding of christian life;
- choose experiences that can lead to such attitudes and knowledge.

117. which respond to the challenges

These four aspects correspond to the challenges posed to the faith of the young and to our mission as educators by the present cultural situation and youth scene. From them in fact emerge the question of life and the meaning of faith in the maturing of an individual's identity and in human history. There is a risk that faith may be considered irrelevant for either human existence or historical development.

The dimensions need to take up whatever is esteemed as being of true value and put into it the seed of faith as a final touch. At the same time they have to present the Kingdom as inserted in the heart of history (the great world history or the smaller personal history of each individual), and true believers as having been called by God's love to commit themselves in the leavening of human history.

And so faith is not something disjoined from or merely closely associated with what is human, historical, temporal or secular, but is rather a germinating force within all these; it gives them enlightenment and new meaning and also transcends them, broadening our horizons beyond the confines of history.

118. to be well understood as regards their significance

The various dimensions are not and must not be considered, either in the person or in educative activity, as separate sectors. They are all present together and continually interact.

It would not be right to consider them in the first place solely from the standpoint of human growth and then from that of faith. Faith must be recognized as injecting a particular energy into an individual's whole human

growth. Reference to Jesus Christ and the Church is something constant that affects every dimension, even though it may become explicit and concentrated only at particular moments. When the Word of God has filled the whole of life, human growth does not cease but rather continues and is manifested in different expressions.

We have to present the various contents in logical fashion, but that does not mean that we want them to be considered as succeeding one another in time.

119. But no progress at all is possible unless the plan be accepted by the subject. What we want to emphasize in each dimension are not "lessons" offered from outside, or material to be worked on. They are steps in maturity which take place in the individual in virtue of the options he has made. Hence great care is needed to make sure that each proposal becomes an internal personal conviction.

Education to the faith must be thought of, therefore, as including human formation, sense of life, choice of values, and ecclesial and social commitment.

Towards human maturity

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Phil 4,8)

120. Life and faith recall each other

Our first concern is for young people who are "poor". Their poverty may appear in many forms: poverty of living conditions, of sense, of perspective, of possibilities, of awareness, of resources. Their life itself is lacking in many of its main resources. No religious experience can emerge until life is discovered in its true sense. And on the other hand, every experience of true life sets off a religious reaction.

Taking as his starting point the wonderful harmony of nature and grace so strikingly manifested in the person of Don Bosco the educator, it is easy for the Salesian to understand that faith calls life to mind, and that when life is seen in its true light it feels in a certain sense the need of faith. Because of grace there is no break between creation and redemption but continuity.

121. The journey of faith begins with that "make yourself humble, steadfast and strong" (BM 1,95) under the motherly guidance of Mary and with the support of educators.

A first indication for sustaining the development of this element is careful attention given to the requirements of each stage of growth:

- the phase of infancy when the wonders of the surrounding world are first discovered;
- childhood, during which an openness develops to surrounding objects and positive relationships with other people;
- adolescence, with the desire to know and accept oneself, and to feel and explore one's own identity;
- the effort to find one's bearings in the world and reach a satisfactory synthesis, and the desire to share in the social life proper to the young and make contributions to it.

122. First steps towards the young

For this reason we cannot overlook but must consider the particular situation of need in which many young people are placed. The salesian practice aims at helping them to overcome the radical, economic and affective shortcomings which condition subsequent openness to values.

In this commitment faith is already proclaimed in witnessing to charity. At the same time the individual shakes off the heavy conditioning shackles and frees himself. This is the line followed by every initiative which proposes to offer to youth worthy living conditions and opportunities for recreation, or prepares them for entry to the world of work and acquire the necessary culture. In this way favourable conditions are created for young people to open up to a search for the truth and the taste for the genuine values which lead them to full human maturity and make them architects of their own lives (cf. C 32).

123. they look for wisdom and knowledge in the educator

For the better analysis of problems in this first dimension and for the preparation of appropriate responses, the educator to the faith makes use also of the educational sciences, using them with the discretion suggested by faith itself.

There is quite a complicated array of educative models available, and the educator to the faith will choose and organize his interventions with his eye on the person whose image he sees when he contemplates the mystery of God present in Jesus of Nazareth.

A person is mature when he attends carefully to the questions arising from his personal life and from the world; a person who is aware of the mystery surrounding him and tries to fathom its meaning through effort and reflection.

This is the model passed on to us by solid salesian tradition, when it makes religion a point of reference for education. It is well emphasized in "luvenum Patris" where we read: "The term 'religion' indicates that Don Bosco's pedagogy is essentially transcendent" (IP 11).

124. In this perspective we present some objectives to be attained, and some experiences to be suggested.

they lead to an acceptance of life

1. In the first place the young person must accept life. This means in the first place that he must accept himself. For some youngsters this is something that happens spontaneously. Finding themselves in a world of people who love them, who talk with them easily and work to build their future, be it great or small, is a great help to them.

But for others this is the first great hurdle. They think - and it causes them much interior suffering - that their life is not worth living. The lack of fundamental requirements makes them let things go and throw up the sponge. The educator of the faith must then stay at their side with intelligence and heart until they recognize the inestimable value of life.

In this way they come to see its double character as both gift and duty. This is an indispensable step if they are to become "subjects" of their own history, and responsible for their own growth. If they are offered positive experiences, if they are helped to discern the structural, cultural, personal and collective conditioning effects which have so far marked their lives, they come to see that change is possible, that there is a future, that it is worthwhile to go on hoping.

Once this first "closure" on life has been overcome, it is possible to draw out other difficulties, to prompt other attitudes, and to set in action other reserves of energy.

123. to an opening up to others

Positive ideas lead of themselves to a progressive opening of interpersonal relationships, and lead to the ability to communicate with others, recognizing their value, willingly accepting their diversity, and also their limitations. They also lead people to enter into a positive relationship with the environment, reality and the world in general.

Salesian pedagogy assigns the development of this dimension to the activities in which the young engage together in an atmosphere of joy and collaboration. In that context they meet adults capable of espousing the most noble causes and passing on their enthusiasm for them.

126. and to draw out deep aspirations

2. The welcome acceptance of life, its exploration, and the longing to savour it to the full, all reveal in an almost tangible manner the depth of human aspirations and their limitations. Here there is another step forward to be made and another set of experiences to suggest, in line with the meeting between life and faith. The adult is already able to express this idea for himself, while the adolescent and young person still live it in a confused fashion and with a certain amount of personal suffering.

The educator's task is to stay at their side and help them to be aware of what is happening as they live through enriching experiences, of a kind that enable them to realize ideals they have thought of intensely in their imagination, such as self-donation, leadership, putting service of those in great need before their own convenience, the contemplation of nature or truth.

Experiences too of extreme situations of distress are able to contribute to growth and internal maturity, e.g. the lack of personal satisfaction, awareness of one's own poverty, human situations of sorrow and tribulation.

But how can a young person understand this kind of thing? It can be done by listening to the interior voice within him, and learning to interpret the phenomena of human social life. Under the guidance of the educator he opens his mind to the ethical principles involved and matures in two directions: he accepts the incidence on his own life of his actions and attitudes, and he comes to understand his responsibility towards others with whom he shares the good things of life. The separation of these two aspects or the subordination of either of them to the other is to give rise to individualism and strengthen its roots.

127. to discover the sense of life

In this way the question about the sense of life and the seeking of its ultimate meaning, begin to take shape. This is not just an intellectual problem. Even though they may not be able to express the fact very clearly, many youngsters are looking for sense of this kind, especially when they are living through a period of deep (and sometimes radical) dissatisfaction and thinking about the future.

Their discontent may have various origins or reasons: frustration at their inability to reach a model of happiness they wanted, or the empty feeling that remained after seeing proposals that looked like solving their problems vanish into thin air.

In this maturing process the educators have an indispensable role to play. They have to help in the reflection that will make their own rich experience as adults accessible to the young.

There are some environments which, of their nature, prompt systematic reflection on human problems. Salesian practice is able to make available also less formal ways, such as the rapid (but not superficial) evaluation of events and situations, or spontaneous conversations during recreation or games, or suitably arranged personal discussions.

128. to yearn for what is transcendent

4. In the young the question and search for sense become an invocation, i.e. the desire for a response, for a perspective or outlook which will help to solve the question posed by life, about its beginning and end, about what the individual must do so that life may attain its fullness.

This should be the goal of every educational process. One goes through a mature human experience, which is also a "religious" experience, so that the individual may succeed in entering fully into God's plan.

129. Response to the challenges

This process tries to meet the challenges thrown up by the present culture. In opposition to the logic of self-sufficiency and secularism, it proposes in fact an alternative way of being a full human being.

In many contexts it is stated that the first step to be taken is that youth must recognize the emptiness of the idols that are a weight on their lives, and acknowledge that God manifests himself in creation and in the human person. Then will arise the desire to rebuild a personal identity, at a time when such a proposal seems often to be crushed or in crisis.

The salesian practice not only sustains ideally the fundamental value of the "religious experience" in the formation of personality, but gives priority in practice to certain ways for bringing it to maturity. They are: the giving of due value to youthful vitality and expressions; participation in activities in which one can experience one's own worth and the joy of sharing; involvement in situations of need; and times for reflection.

When the youngster has attained deeper levels and chosen faith as the key to the interpretation of his own existence, he is followed up and prompted to formulate an organic christian view of life and history.

Towards an authentic meeting with Jesus Christ

I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life
(Jn 8,12)

130. Fullness of life in Christ

Our service as educators to the faith certainly cannot stop at the level of human growth, even though it be inspired by christian principles.

Education to the faith requires us to go further towards the meeting and acceptance of a revealed event: human life attains its fullness only in Jesus Christ. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10,10): here is found the definitive response to the cry that goes up from existence in the form of "invocation".

131. The meeting with Him

But the encounter with Jesus is not just any kind of meeting. Education to the faith tries to prepare it, offer it, and deepen it so that it may be a personal meeting in faith.

Quite frequently, in fact, one comes across young people who are attracted to the person of Jesus. Many of his messages and images find their way into the mass media and many youngsters are still influenced by some religious experience from their childhood, all things which have an external and general effect on the life of the christian community. Contact with Christ is often just fleeting and superficial. On the other hand a systematic exposition of the faith would be for such youngsters no more than so much theory or the detailed ideology of a religious group; it would not be the "proclamation and promise" of salvation.

What kind of path is needed to get youth into deep contact with Christ? Which aspects of his mystery should be emphasized?

132. through witness

This dimension is strongly centred on the witness of christians. To instigate and sustain a faith-encounter with Jesus Christ there is need of the life lived by a believing community and its interpretation through the word of faith.

In the kind of structures in which we work we sometimes meet with failure because we tire ourselves out trying to put across formulas of faith in an impersonal way, while such formulas are quite unintelligible if disjoined from their efficacy for life.

Faith is desired and sought after when young people come in contact with a genuine evangelical experience.

133. Here then are some targets that must be progressively aimed at if the meeting with Jesus Christ is to be more than mere curiosity and be transformed into a faith encounter.

134. From signs

1. One target, that requires a corresponding nucleus of content and experiences, is the recognition of the signs of Christ the Saviour, his presence in the believing community and his effect on human history.

These signs can be found:

- in the persons who make up the community;
- in the attitudes produced in them by the memory of Christ;
- in their celebration of christian devotion.

This is a goal or target within the reach of all, even those who are less close to the christian event.

The signs can speak and transmit messages. Pedagogical skill is needed to choose, prepare and present them in such a way that they speak strongly to the sensitivity of youth.

But there are also signs and messages that are not directly intentional on our part. They stem from the educative and pastoral style of the institution, from the mutual relationships between people, from the good taste and religious sense evident in the signs of faith themselves: objects, places, gestures.

135. to witness

Recognition of the signs can be a predisposing factor for understanding the witness of Christ's disciples. The human and faith-revealing gestures of people close to the young constitute the first call to faith. It is not a question only of religious actions, but also of the willingness to talk with young people and the ability to get involved in the salvation of the poor.

This witness reveals to the young the universal value of faith, when they learn of eminent models of charity or commitment which excite their motivations and the strength of their love for Christ.

136. From witness to proclamation

The witness becomes explicit by the proclamation of Jesus, of the human and divine events of his life, and of his teachings. It is a proclamation which is a clear confession of faith on the part of the educators.

Circumstances will suggest the best way to go about this: personal conversation, catechesis, a relaxed inter-religious discussion. In any event the character of "good news" should be ensured. Jesus should be presented as the truth that enlightens the youngster's search; as the life that stimulates his energies for doing good; as the way leading to his own fulfilment.

In the same perspective the Word of God should be seen by each one as an opening to his own particular problems, a response to his questions, a widening of his values, and at the same time a satisfying of his own aspirations.

137. From the proclamation to the discovery of the Person of Christ

3. The proclamation leads to the discovery of the presence of Christ in his life as the key to happiness and good sense. Thus begins the process of conversion and leads to the expression in the adult state of the form of Christ impressed in us by Baptism.

The proclamation, together with this discovery, implies the adherence of the individual to Christ. From Christ who is proclaimed, the journey of faith leads to Christ who is loved, contemplated, and finally followed with the attitude of a disciple.

It is not a gradual process throughout. The Master may indicate new paths or shortcuts; he may ask for certain breaks, for the abandonment of certain goals or objectives and a relaunching in line with the strong demands of the Gospel.

This is the point in the journey where the first big dropout may occur among those who originally set out, not only because of the difficulties linked with faith,

but because of mistakes or inadvertence on the part of educators more concerned with extraneous things than with a fraternal accompaniment of the dialogue between the youngster and God.

138. The transformation of life

4. Perseverance in conversion and in following Christ leads as a consequence to a revisal of one's view of life, to live it in a new way, to break with alienating attachments to sin and to models of life that stem from it. It calls for a new understanding of reality and a sharing of the overwhelming preoccupation of Jesus for the Kingdom of God.

For those who continue the journey, catechesis must be followed by a confrontation of faith with the great cultural problems. These are felt intensely and are fundamental for a real maturing of a faith-mentality that demands consistency between thought and life. Overlook this aspect and you are on the road to the cleavage between faith and culture, between personal religious practice and the social ethic, that is so much deprecated. We are therefore obliged to accompany and help those who are seriously comparing their own lives with what faith demands.

139. A faith that is strong and dynamic

5. Practising the faith implies, finally, the laying down of roots in the matter of attitudes and behaviour, sustained by corresponding convictions. Education to the faith gives the believer the ability to give an account of his own hope (1 Pet 3,15).

The faith which recognizes the presence and love of the Father flourishes in a filial attitude towards him ("piety" in its literal sense). Prayer is the language given us by the Spirit to approach the Father, and must be developed in the various forms that christian tradition has unfolded.

In times past "piety" was expressed in forms pedagogically suited to the conditions of contemporary youth. Today there is an urgent need for a rethinking of the best times and forms of initiation to it, beginning from the family itself.

Towards an intensified membership of the Church

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2,42)

140. The meeting with Christ in the Church

The Church is the best environment for meeting Christ. Moved by the living witness of the christian community or of some believer, the young person matures through a full sharing in the "people of God".

Without the faith of the Church, our own faith and that of the young would be very poor. It would lack an indispensable point of reference for living as believers. If we do not take part in the Church's life, we are remaining at a distance from the place in which the gift of salvation is experienced in a special way.

The ultimate objective of this journey is to help the young to live the Church-experience, and so develop their sense of belonging to the christian community.

141. A membership that progressively matures

The membership of young people in the Church does not immediately attain its full maturity. If this is not well understood by educators and pastors and is not wisely developed, it will not get beyond the stage of a general interest, external adherence, combined with the autonomous maintaining of a certain distance.

Today's youngsters are involved in a real but limited membership of many groups and organizations. Adherence to the Church can mature as union of mind and heart only if the Church is perceived as communion with God and fellow men in faith and charity, as a sign and instrument of the Kingdom. Institutions, in fact, be they civil or religious, receive only a partial and external adherence. It is taken for granted that the individual surpasses them in value and destiny. Only if the Church is seen as centred on persons - the person of Jesus Christ, of the believers, and of those to be saved - rather than on organization and legislation, can it give rise to decisions of faith.

142. From this aspect too there are attitudes, content and experiences, which define the journey. We can formulate themes follows, starting once again from those who are poorest as regards faith.

143. The need for friendship and interpersonal relationships

1. The first point to note is the need experienced by youth for friendship and deep interpersonal relationships, for sharing and solidarity; it brings out their sense of festivity and their taste for being together.

The educators accept these values, deepen them, share them by taking part in youthful manifestations of them, and try to give them still greater depth.

In accordance with salesian tradition, all this already bears an ecclesial significance, if it is realized in a widely welcoming environment where one can meet believers, ecclesial signs and christian communities.

144. The group "craving"

2. Another batch of ecclesial attitudes and content develop expression in the youth group, where the youngster feels personally at home and worth something. He frequently experiences the joy of sharing, and becomes open to communication and responsibility in an atmosphere of mutual trust. In this way he also learns understanding and forgiveness.

145. The group as the place for discovering the Church

3. When these groups are inserted in broad educative or christian communities, involved in a common project, they already constitute a practical experience of Church, and a greater awareness develops. Eventually comes the discovery of the Church as a deeper communion and universal service.

But this happens only when in the community there are living signs of the ecclesial reality: the effort at communion by individuals, the complementary presence of different vocations, gospel assessments of events that take place, and the celebration of faith.

Useful too are meetings with other believers, contact with other groups and communities with whom experiences can be exchanged, and common projects for social and apostolic involvement can be shared.

It is also a help to have a sufficient knowledge of Church history which reveals the presence and action of Jesus who continually raises up in his Church new forces of renewal and holiness.

146. The act of faith in the Church

4. An important phase in the development of an ecclesial sense is reached when it becomes an act of faith in the Church.

We accompany individuals and groups towards this goal, helping them to put the Word of God at the centre of their own existence. In his light everything takes on a new aspect, and one learns to share it and celebrate it with other believers.

One takes part in the overall pastoral work of the local Church, and proper value is given to the teachings of the Pope and the Bishops, in recognition of their mission of guidance and the preservation of unity.

147. Experience of participation in the christian community

5. The positive experience of young people taking part in the life of the christian community increases the sense of belonging to the Church. When the christian communities welcome them and give value to their contribution of vitality, the young take on the responsibility which is theirs, assimilate the values

and requirements of the community, and are incited to creativity and commitment.

148. The celebration of salvation

6. A more intense sharing in the mystery of the Church is realized through prayer, listening to the Word, and the celebration of salvation. In faith one comes to understand that the Church plays the role of mediator in the meeting with God, and this mediation is lived with gratitude so as to conform to Christ in thought and life.

In accordance with the tradition that comes from Don Bosco, we give this meeting a setting especially, but not exclusively, in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. In these together with our young people we live a personal relationship with Christ who reconciles and pardons, who gives himself and creates communion, who calls and send us, prompting us to become architects of a new society.

The frequent use of these sacraments seems to have come to a standstill. The key to overcoming this is to educate to those attitudes which are at the foundation of christian celebration: silence, a listening attitude, praise and adoration; the formation of a symbolic language, based in practice on the fundamental symbols of the sacraments; offering gradual experiences of well prepared celebrations; the accompanying of everything with a progressive sacramental catechesis which reveals the relationship between the celebration and the life of the young enlightened by faith in Christ.

In all this due attention must be given to the deep nature of the mystery, and to youth sensitivity. Both education to celebration and education in celebration are in fact equally necessary.

The catechesis of Confirmation acquires an important function as a special means for stirring up in the child or young person the sense of the presence of the Spirit and the will to commit himself for the Kingdom.

The catechesis of Matrimony is a preparation for living the life of mature persons for a generous opening to life, and for an expression of Church in one's own family.

Towards a commitment for the Kingdom

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12,4.7)

149. Life as vocation

In the salesian pedagogy of faith the vocational option is the mature and indispensable result of all human and christian growth. "We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel" (C 37).

Faith cannot be reduced to mere intellectual assent. The believer confesses the truth by committing his own life to the cause of God, the Saviour of mankind.

The christian vocation can be understood only with reference to the Kingdom, which is at one and the same time God's gift and the result of man's endeavour. God is the protagonist. He wills the life and happiness of man and realizes his will in many different ways. Man is invited to accept this gift with total availability and to stake his own life for God's plan.

The christian therefore lives his vocation recognizing God's dominion and love, and committing his own powers in radical fashion. He acknowledges that everything is God's gift and that we are "only servants". But he also recognizes the need for hard daily effort to overcome the power of death and consolidate life. He is therefore a true disciple and friend of Christ, because available to do with him the Father's will in serving man, even to the extent of the cross.

The vocational commitment will become in everyone a family, professional, social and political responsibility. For some it will bloom into a consecration of special significance: the priestly ministry, religious life, or secular commitment.

150. To the discovery of one's own place in building the Kingdom

The objective of this dimension is to help young people to discover their own niche in the building of the Kingdom and to will it with joy and determination.

To reach this objective we may think of some steps as being so many stages of a journey.

151. Draw out whatever is positive in the youngster

1. "Every youngster has something good within him, and by working on it you can get great results" (Don Bosco). In the first place the positive element has to be drawn out, through a patient work of attention to himself, comparison with others, listening and reflection.

From this joyful discovery of his own resources, albeit with limitations and hurdles to be overcome, there arises the desire to bring to fruition the gifts he has received.

They are: in the first place life itself, the guiding principle of the entire journey of faith, which must be learned and managed; health; intelligence and feeling; the human and religious patrimony of the family; friendships; material goods; the difficulties that help in overcoming oneself, etc.

The youngster opens his eyes on himself and his surroundings, and discovers the bond of solidarity that links people with each other.

152. The joy of communicating one's own gifts

2. It is not enough to have gifts and possibilities. With these gifts one has to attain true happiness. And this is where the first different experiences of sharing come in.. The youngster trains himself to generosity and availability. These are two attitudes that give rise to joy: to gain life you have to give it.

At the same time the foundations are laid for a solid christian experience as described in the two earlier dimensions, founded on the meeting with Christ that can become a "call and invitation", and on the perception of the Church as a "mission" in the world, carried out through many ways and means.

For any consideration of vocation all this is indispensable.

153. The explicit vocational suggestion

3. And so we come to the point of a vocational suggestion. Through catechesis young people can be led through listening to the word and contact with models, to reflection on their own vocation. This enables them to see what is the common vocation of everyone and what different forms there are for serving the Kingdom.

To this panorama the youngster listens with attention and responds: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22,10). He wonders along what paths will be realized the call to offer his own life. And this starts up an internal dialogue in which each one must listen and respond.

154. Explicit suggestions by the one following the youngster will help him to see new possibilities for his own existence. The call comes in fact for some through the presence of models rich in evangelical sense and quality. But there are others who declare that they would never have interpreted the call had they not been given an explicit invitation to commit themselves to a certain kind of life as lay christians, religious or priests.

Sometimes the suggestion comes from a community which, while getting on with its involvement and witness, is able to provide animation and talk about its own history. The presentation of the Founder and an affectionate link with the origins are often determining factors in the making of decisions. So too is a knowledge of the actual commitments of the community, especially those that are more difficult and meaningful.

155. Vocational discernment

4. When vocational suggestions are listened to, they prompt a process of discernment. The young person assesses himself and the gifts he has received with relationship to the suggestions made to him and the services and ministries of which he has a basic knowledge. He does this not only through rational analysis. He lives the call with generosity as an invitation from the Lord,

and tries to say "yes" from the depths of his conscience. He knows that the vocation will involve his whole person: his preferences, relationships, energies and dynamism. It is a delicate process.

His whole personal universe is in upheaval and is reorganizing around an option. This does not depend only on natural interests and aptitudes, but on his willingness to recognize the presence of God in his life and of the freedom he has to accept the invitation of grace.

All the elements of the spiritual life concur in the discernment to produce a favourable result, but to some must be given greater weight:

- prayer and meditation which enables one to pass from a superficial view of life to something deeper within it: the individual comes to grips with himself and feels more easily the call God is addressing to him;
- personal guidance or spiritual direction which can suggest motivations, help the youngster to read the signs of his own life, provide light to see how the vocation fits into his life, help to verify his path for growth and to overcome his dependence on external stimuli and on the educator himself;
- the apostolic commitment which helps in the maturing of the love which becomes self-donation in the christian community and in society.

156. The vocational choice

5. The discernment leads to a first vocational option.

Many factors concur in making the decision: from spontaneous inclinations to the image the community offers as a place for commitment. But the determining point is that the youngster comes to see all this as a personal call, and is ready to reply with Mary: "Here I am, Lord!".

Rather than focusing on a work to be done, be it religious or profane, he concentrates on the singular sense to be given to his existence: to make of it an acknowledgement of the absolute greatness of God and a response to his love.

157. The presence of Mary on the journey

The motherly presence of Mary provides deep inspiration throughout the whole journey and in every phase of it. In the case of every young person we can repeat: "She has done everything".

Mary is the first among believers and the most perfect of Christ's disciples (cf. MC 35). The word of God became flesh and entered history in her soul and person before her womb. And so she is the living representative of the laborious but happy journey of every individual and of all humanity towards its fulfilment. In her the path of man meets that of God. She is therefore the key for interpretation, a model, a type and a journey.

Mary has been proclaimed "Blessed", a feeling she had already experienced within herself, happy in her poverty, happy because of God's gift, happy because of her ready availability.

Mary accompanied the Church in its infancy and today participates with all the riches of her motherly nature in the historical development of the christian community and its mission in the world.

3. SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

What you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me, do (Phil 4,9)

PRELIMINARY

158. A "salesian" spirituality

The journey of education reveals progressively to young people an original plan of christian life and helps them to understand its implications.

The youngster learns a new way of being a believer in the world, and arranges his life around certain perceptions of faith, choices of values and gospel attitudes: he lives a spirituality.

Research into "salesian youth spirituality", adapted to new times, reached historic depths in the SGC and GC21. The GC23 is now relaunching it in our communities and among youth. Research still goes on, but the reality has been there for a very long time.

It finds a first formulation in the dream at the age of nine years. "Make yourself humble, steadfast and strong". In this way the young John Bosco received in Mary a mother and teacher who was to be at his side in his mission to the young.

Later in the Valdocco environment under Don Bosco's inspiration there flourished various expressions of holiness and life in the Spirit. The biographies of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone describe the youthful sanctity of the first Oratory; it has been officially recognized by the Church and is offered to all young people through the canonization of Dominic Savio and the beatification of Laura Vicuña. On the other hand, our tradition has always spoken of the Preventive System as a spirituality project. In the concept of "reason, religion and loving kindness", fused by the "grace of unity" into a single experience, are to be found the content and method of spiritual proximity and encouragement.

The "Companion of Youth" and the various "Regulations" written for pupils in salesian houses, carry in the simple context of daily life what is called for by salesian spirituality.

"Salesian" does not imply here the distinctive mark of a certain group; it indicates, rather, the charismatic source linked with the spiritual current of the

humanism of St Francis de Sales, reinterpreted by Don Bosco in the experience of the Oratory.

159. is a "youth" spirituality

At Valdocco there was ample opportunity for the young to exercise leadership among their companions in every sector of life, even to the extent that the youngsters were called by Don Bosco to be with him "founders" of a new Congregation.

On their side they helped him to begin, in the context of everyday experience, a new style of holiness tailored to the typical requirements of a boy's development. In this way they were to some extent both disciples and teachers at the same time.

In all salesian communities today, as happened yesterday in Don Bosco's Oratory, spiritual commitment is born of a meeting that breeds friendship. This leads on to a continuous point of reference and group situation in which the implications of the baptismal vocation can be more deeply understood and the journey begun to maturity of faith.

"I want to stay with Don Bosco" expresses the choice of a particular way of growing in the life of the Spirit: experience of christian life precedes systematic reflection on it.

160. and therefore an "educative" spirituality

Putting the youngster, with all his lively energy, at the centre of the educator's attention as a practical criterion for the choice of a process to be pursued, manifests the fundamental characteristic of youth spirituality: it is an educative spirituality. It is addressed to all young people without distinction, and gives preference to the poorest of them.

Taking up the challenge of those who remain outside or at a distance and of those for whom faith is irrelevant to life, requires the educators to stay alongside the young and share their experiences. "Love what the youngsters love," Don Bosco repeats to the Salesians in the present-day situation, "so that they will come to love what you love."

To promote the growth of the young to the fullness of life after the measure of Christ the perfect man, is the goal of salesian work.

A SYNTHETIC PRESENTATION

161. The basic points

To help communities get a rapid grasp of the proposals and encourage them to examine them more deeply, we provide the following description of the main nuclei of salesian youth spirituality.

1. SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY DAILY LIFE.

Daily life inspired by Jesus of Nazareth (cf. C 12) is the setting in which the youngster recognizes the presence of God who is at work, and lives out his personal realization of the fact.

2. SPIRITUALITY OF JOY AND OPTIMISM.

Daily life is lived in joy and optimism, without prejudice to commitment and responsibility (cf. C 17.18).

3. SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS.

Daily life is recreated by the Risen Christ (cf. C 34) who gives reasons for hope and leads to a life that finds its fullest sense in Him.

4. SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH.

Daily life is experienced in the Church (cf. C 13.35), as the natural setting for growth in faith through the sacraments.

In the Church we find Mary (cf. C 20.34) who goes in front, accompanies and inspires.

5. SPIRITUALITY OF RESPONSIBLE SERVICE.

Daily life is presented to the young as a setting for service (cf. C 32), both ordinary and extraordinary.

1. SPIRITUALITY OF DAILY LIFE

162. It is a synthesis of faith and life

The fundamental challenge for a believer and a community is to transform experience of life into gospel experience, by force of faith.

It is easy to declare oneself a christian in a general way. It is much more difficult to live as a christian, overcoming the problems that make life difficult and opening up to the practical requirements of the beatitudes. Internal harmony in a youngster and the joy of life need the "grace of unity".

In salesian experience this is an intuition which is both joyful and fundamental: there is no need to detach oneself from normal life in order to seek the Lord.

The first pages of the "Companion of Youth" proclaim this requirement of youth: "I want you to be happy". When the Salesians, prolonging in the world the

presence of the Don Bosco of Valdocco, live pastoral charity and produce a family setting in which "the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced" (C 16), they facilitate the production of this harmony and raise up in young people the desire for happiness.

163. a rediscovery of the Incarnation

At the foundation of the positive evaluation of daily life lies the continual rediscovery of the event of the Incarnation. The human condition of Jesus reveals the fact that God is present in life, and that God affirms life's transcendence. Jesus as Man is the sacrament of the Father, the great and definitive mediation that makes God present and close to us.

He teaches us that the place to meet God is in human reality: our own and that of others, daily and throughout history. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25,40). It is human life that inserts us in the event of the Incarnation.

Life therefore is primarily a gift offered to all - a mysterious gift because of the expectations to which it gives rise. It is like a jewel-case containing unforeseen meanings and horizons.

164. love for life

To take up in consistent fashion the ordinary aspect of existence; to accept the challenges, questions and tensions of growth; to try to gather its fragments into the unity realized by the Spirit in Baptism; to work to overcome the ambiguities present in daily experience; to leaven every option with love: all this is part of the process necessary for discovering and loving daily life as a new reality in which God works as a father.

In the loving kindness of the Salesian who, with "kindness, respect and patience" (C 15), follows the building of their personality; in the unconditional welcome of the community which expresses its predilection for them (cf. C 14), the young discover a sign of God who loves them and anticipates them. Notwithstanding the negative experiences of fatherliness or family relationships through which they may have lived, the new heart they are building helps them to look at the world in a different way.

This approach will make it clear that at the origin of our life, however it may now be with its thrusts and aspirations, there is a call of God.

"To love life, not as something fragmented but planned as a vocation, means accepting the appeal to become involved in the building of humanity, of justice and peace [...]; to love it in a far-reaching way, open to culture and ideals, to sharing and solidarity, able to dream courageously as Don Bosco did of new worlds and new men" (Fr Egidio Viganò, Appraisal DB'88).

2. SPIRITUALITY OF JOY AND OPTIMISM

165. The joy of kindness

Clearly evident at Valdocco were joy, optimism and hope.

Don Bosco is the saint of the joy of living. His boys learned the lesson so well from him that they could say, in typically 'oratorian' language, that "holiness consists in being very happy".

To the emarginated youngsters of his time, Don Bosco put the possibility of living life as a feast, and faith as happiness. Music, the theatre, outings, sport, the joyful daily rough and tumble of a playground, have always been valued in salesian pedagogy as educative elements of primary importance. They give rise to a lot of energy for doing good, which will be challenged in due course into a commitment of service and charity.

A salesian feast is never the manifestation of an internal emptiness seeking relief; nor is it an occasion for getting away from what are frequently hard realities. It is rather a means for building friendship, for developing whatever is positive in young people.

This style of holiness could prove surprising to some experts in spirituality and pedagogy, concerned that it could lead to a playing down of gospel demands and educational obligations. But for Don Bosco the source of joy is the life of grace which obliges the youngster to undertake a difficult apprenticeship in asceticism and kindness.

166. and commitment to growth

All his life Don Bosco set young people on the road to a simple, serene and happy form of holiness, bringing together in a single vital experience the playground, serious study, and a constant sense of duty.

He offers today, as a faithful response to the gratuitous love of God, an invaluable rereading of the Gospel in the spirit of the beatitudes. They manifest in the first place whom God is for us, and what must be our commitment as believers for the construction of the Kingdom. Then, by inciting us to live in the unity of joy and duty, they teach us to take up the cross and follow Christ as the paschal dimension of the evangelical option, and so of the development of humanity according to the stature of Christ who died and rose again.

Outside a seriously undertaken journey of faith, growth becomes ever more difficult. The Salesian will frequently remind young people of this when they may get the idea that rebuilding their own lives in the light of the Gospel requires detachment from good things they cannot give up. Freedom, justice, solidarity, materiality, often bring a believing youngster to a crossroads: either to stay with the Lord Jesus and accept the hardships associated with faith, or to choose to live his life outside Christ's influence. This is a crucial moment; a difficult but necessary decision has to be made in order to reach the integration in which one experiences the good fortune of living with the Lord of life and history.

John Paul II, with happy intuition, has labelled the place of Don Bosco's childhood and adolescence the HILL OF THE YOUTHFUL BEATITUDES: because

from there goes forth a message of joy and responsibility for all young people who look to Don Bosco as a father and teacher.

3. SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS

167. Meeting with the Risen Christ

To live the spirit of the Beatitudes in the Valdocco style is to form bonds of close friendship between Jesus and the young person. The latter is no longer satisfied with a first encounter and an attraction to the Lord. He wants to deepen his adherence to his Person and his cause. He tries to make a concrete response to his love, with commitment and generosity. When the young reach this degree of relationship with Christ the Lord, they open up to the radicalism of the Gospel.

The experience of the Oratory with the personal stories of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone in its history, tells us that all youngsters can follow the way of this friendship with Christ.

Friend, Teacher and Saviour are the terms that describe the centrality of the person of Jesus in the spiritual experience of the young people who live the salesian style of life. The personal dimension of the relationship - "Jesus is my friend and companion" said Francis Besucco - is a spur to a knowledge of the totality of the mystery of Christ, who died and rose again.

168. for a new heart

Don Bosco's constant concern was to educate to the faith, walking "side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord", so that they might grow "into new men" (cf. C 34).

Don Bosco liked to repeat that "education is a matter of the heart". Also the journey of spirituality requires a new heart. Unless you reach this central point of human life, you will never bring about any deep and enduring conversion.

In contact with the Risen Lord youngsters acquire a more intense love for life. In friendship with him they develop an 'oratorian' heart that beats with the restless sensitivity of the young and the silent but efficacious force of the Holy Spirit.

4. SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

169. The desire to be together

Sustained by a spirituality born of the relationship between persons who find in Christ a common friend, the young people in salesian environments feel a great need to be together. As friends they share and celebrate the joy of living, so as to help each other. In this way they feel themselves to be the leaven in the midst of other children and young people.

As is natural also, they organize and to some extent institutionalize their friendship by creating groups linked to the most varied interests of their lives: from games to culture to religious commitment. Since the groups often share the same ideals and values, a linkage often develops among them, and in this way they tend to become a youth movement drawing its inspiration from the spiritual characteristics of Don Bosco.

170. for a communion in responsibility

The personal relationship with the risen Christ and the group experience lead automatically to a filial relationship with the Church. Don Bosco was a man of communion. He taught the youngsters to live the mystery of the Church which enshrines, despite its human weakness, the invisible grace of the presence of God. His personal daily witness and the family environment he created at the Oratory, produced in the youngsters the sense of collaboration and shared responsibility.

Today too, the diversity of interests, gifts and values lived together in the educative community, testify to the presence of the Lord who unites all in one heart and one soul. This family spirit is an efficacious sign of the Church which all want to build together for a fraternal service to those in greater need.

171. towards the particular Church

The history of the young people at the Oratory, during Don Bosco's lifetime, abounds in concrete expressions of love for the Church. In fact communion is something that seeks continually to associate itself with all the forces working for salvation and the building of the Kingdom of God.

This communion is expressed in esteem for the Pastors, and in practical cooperation with them and with all who work for the common good, and for the young in particular. It seeks for understanding and dialogue with those responsible for pastoral work in the vicinity, following a mature vision of faith, and capable of understanding and accepting the human aspects of the Church, with its limitations and shortcomings. It is open finally to the problems of men and of youth which arise in the various contexts.

Spirituality grows and can be measured by reference to the history of the individuals concerned.

172. towards the universal Church

To feel the great interests of the universal Church as one's own, intervening in a manner proportionate to one's ability, is a constant commitment in salesian history. The savour of a "great religious adventure" attaches to the preparation of the Congregation's first missionary expedition. The entire Oratory became involved, in fact, and everyone felt he was playing an active part. It was an experience that developed among the youngsters a lively sensitivity towards the worldwide aspect of the apostolic commitment.

The components of a salesian youth spirituality include an explicit love of the Pope and a convinced adherence to his teaching. The person of the Supreme Pontiff is a visible sign of unity for the whole Church. He is a providential presence through the service he provides in the name of Christ the Lord for the benefit of all humanity.

173. Christ met in the sacraments

The meeting and relationship with the risen Christ are lived in a special way in the celebration of the sacraments. Salesian tradition recognizes and asserts their importance in the christian growth of young people. Today also, in line with the conciliar renewal, the communities are giving new value to the sacraments of initiation.

Baptism, for instance, the beginning of the journey of education to the faith, involves the youngsters in a renewed catechesis and a life witness consistent with configuration to Christ the Lord. Confirmation too, the sacrament that leads to the realization of maturity of faith through the gifts of the Spirit, takes on particular importance for youth.

But in Don Bosco's pedagogy of holiness emphasis is placed primarily on the educative influence of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

174. in the sacrament of forgiveness

The sacrament of Reconciliation, which celebrates the love of God which is greater than sin, was presented to the young by Don Bosco as one of the fundamental columns of the educative edifice. And so at Valdocco it was frequently celebrated and given particular attention.

In the first place particular care was given to its preparation by means of a welcoming environment rich in friendship and fellowship; this helped the youngsters to overcome a natural reluctance to make known the secrets of their heart.

And then it was directed to life: i.e. it should improve interpersonal relationships; create conditions for a more manifest commitment to the fulfilment of one's duties; sustain conversion and renewal of heart, so that the youngster could "give himself to God" with a more efficacious intention. And finally it was prolonged in spiritual direction, to strengthen adherence to the Lord, and in a fraternal meeting with the educator through a joyful sharing of life.

The educational results of the sacrament of Reconciliation are many. When youngsters are sustained by a love which is understanding and forgiving, they find the strength to recognize their own sinfulness and weakness, and the need they have for support and guidance. They learn to resist the temptation to self-sufficiency, and offer pardon in exchange for the reconciliation they have received. They become educated to a respect for other persons, and form a right and consistent conscience.

Regular recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation makes efficacious the process of conversion and renewal.

175. in the sacrament of the Eucharist

The celebration of the Eucharist, prepared in an atmosphere of solidarity and friendship, is lived as a festive encounter, full of youth symbolism and expressions. It is a joyful celebration of life, and thus becomes for the young a significant moment of spiritual growth.

It is called the second column of the educational edifice of the salesian system. From the Eucharist, in fact, the youngster learns to reorganize his life in the light of Christ who gives himself through love. In the first place he learns to submit his life to the requirements of communion, overcoming selfishness and introversion.

He is then led to aim at the generous donation of himself, opening himself to the needs of his companions and committing himself in apostolic activities, suited to his age and christian maturity. In this way the Eucharist becomes for him the source of new energy for growth in grace. "Education to true love passes necessarily through the Eucharist" (Rector Major, AGC 327, p.14).

Salesian tradition recalls another typical expression of the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus: the visit and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Don Bosco frequently referred to the visit as a means of thanking God for the gift of one's own existence.

176. in prayer

Prayer made in a salesian fashion has some particular characteristics. It is the prayer of the good christian, of a simple and popular kind: it has its roots in life. It likes the festive atmosphere of contact with the young, but can also find time for personal dialogue with the Lord. It is expressed in brief and spontaneous expressions drawn from the Word of God and the liturgy.

Every generation has to find its own style of prayer in fidelity to tradition and a courageous relationship with culture and related problems. For this reason, salesian prayer is able to accept new styles which help youngsters to meet the Lord in daily life, i.e. it is flexible and creative, and attentive to the Church's guidelines for renewal.

Don Bosco used to speak more frequently of "piety" (devotion) than of "prayer". "Piety" expresses the awareness of being immersed in the "fatherhood

of God" and is less concerned with words than with the loving gestures of one who wants to please the Lord in everything.

177. Mary, Mother and Helper of the Church

Salesian youth spirituality reserves a special place for the person of Mary. From the beginning of his vocation in his dream at the age of nine, Don Bosco received her as his guide and support (cf. C 8). With her motherly help he carried out God's design for his life. At the end of his labours he could declare with truth: "Mary has done everything".

In contact with the salesian community young people learn to look to Mary as the one who "infuses hope" (C 34), and suggests to them some typically gospel attitudes: listening, fidelity, purity, self-donation, service.

All youngsters live through certain difficult periods of transformation, but also periods of enthusiasm for the new elements that lie ahead of them and which they are very keen to attain. Mary, invoked and honoured under the title of "Helper" is for them a "sign of certain hope and comfort" (LG 68). Once they have acquired a well motivated Marian devotion, the young who live in salesian settings discover the horizons that Mary Help of Christians opens before them: a burning apostolic zeal in the struggle against sin and against a view of the world and mankind opposed to the Beatitudes and the "new commandment".

5. SPIRITUALITY OF RESPONSIBLE SERVICE

178. Becoming upright citizens and good christians

The young believer, prompted by the Spirit, is at the service of mankind, like the Church - an expert in humanity. Service is a yardstick for the journey of spirituality.

Don Bosco, the father and teacher of youth, called on his boys to become "upright citizens and good christians". The synthesis of the two elements is the mature fruit of youth spirituality. The simplicity of the formula conceals a difficult task to accomplish, and a commitment never fully realized.

To be an upright citizen implies at the present day for a young person the promotion of personal dignity and the rights that go with it, in every context; living generously in the family and preparing himself to form it on the basis of reciprocal donation; fostering solidarity, especially among the poor; development of one's own work with honesty and professional competence; promoting justice, peace and the common good in the political arena; respecting creation; fostering culture (cf. CL 37.44).

179. with the creativity of love

The history of youth at the Oratory during Don Bosco's own lifetime is rich in this apprenticeship to the christian life: to be always of service to others, and this even in an extraordinary manner at times.

At the present day new fields of service are becoming open to youth. There is the educational and cultural animation of the locality, to overcome emargination and spread a culture of sharing; there is also civil and missionary volunteer work, for collaborating with other organisms for human advancement and evangelization.

Love for life, in the sign of the Spirit and Don Bosco's style, can find adequate ways for employing the best energies of the world of youth.

180. to the extent of committing the whole of life with Don Bosco in the way he committed his own

Many youngsters are rich in spiritual resources; they show signs of an apostolic vocation and manage to develop their first contact and liking for Don Bosco into a desire to continue his mission. A knowledge of the daily problems lived by their companions provokes in many young people a first response of an educative kind.

Many vocations are born in fact from a happy experience of service in some field: in a poor area, in catechesis in an oratory, in visiting the sick, in voluntary work or educational initiatives. The young people ask themselves: "What social or ecclesial field shall I enter, so as to express my love for life and the Lord of life?"

For many of them the call is undoubtedly to a profession and the raising of a family, lived as a responsible service to the Church and mankind. For others a still more evident choice is for the priesthood or religious life. In any case all of them, under the guidance of the Spirit and animated by the values of salesian spirituality, welcome and live out their own existence as a vocation.

4. SOME KEY ISSUES IN EDUCATION TO THE FAITH

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another
(Gal 5,13)

181. The journey of faith and salesian youth spirituality take up seriously the difficult task of the young who try to build an identity by bringing together the

urgings of their internal energies, the numerous and varied messages that come from the local context, and the horizons which they see emerging at the present day. Faith in Christ finds a central place in this task as the source of understanding, the hope of future life, God's gift, and the transforming energy of history.

The incidence of faith on life, or its practical irrelevance, is clear today in some aspects of the existence of individuals or of culture, which therefore become its acid test. It is not a matter of particular points, but rather of areas where the significance, strength and contrasts of faith can be found.

We shall concentrate our attention on three of them.

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

182. A lively sense of freedom

A glance at the modern world at once reveals some criteria of behaviour, which are for us an occasion or a difficulty for committing ourselves to the education of youth to the faith.

In the first place there is an acute sense of individual freedom. In the political as well as the religious field, everyone's freedom is considered inviolable as regards both mentality and style of life. They are ready to give up many things, but not their autonomy in making choices.

Any norm which is not interiorly accepted not only loses all meaning within the framework of personal values, but will be formally ignored. And it is possible to reach such standards of relativism that objective moral truth ceases to have any meaning.

183. Repercussions on youth

The young feel the effects of this general situation, while being already under the influence of other characteristic elements of their age which render more difficult their efforts to form their conscience. The strong emotive drive, linked with personal development and frailty of will, places them in a state of weakness in the face of norms of conscience: they are aware of its promptings but only feebly; they catch a glimpse of the line they should take, but never with the necessary clarity.

They frequently run the risk of adopting ambiguous attitudes, under the influence of the cajolery of the mass-media and the effect of what is commonly called "modern style". The possibilities of access and choice, offered them from all sides, are excessive and an obstacle to the selection of a coherent and harmonized set of values. These are in fact more like a piling one on top of the other of criteria and references from a variety of forces than the elaboration of a coherent code of life.

184. But over and above these limitations the youth conscience spontaneously accepts the "new humanism" (GS 55) and its values: the sense of freedom, the absolute dignity of the individual, the sense of one's personal life-plan, the need for authenticity and autonomy. These are elements which open on to the Gospel.

185. Is it possible in a situation like this to form a moral conscience?

The educator must be aware that the journey of education to the faith finds in the formation of conscience an obligatory stage that must be reached. He knows that conscience is the place of personal encounter between man and God. It is God's sanctuary, where man feels in his inviolable interior the word and call of God, and responds to them.

A distorted conscience is at the same time the cause and effect of a falsified vision of God, his Word and his Salvation. Hence it rules out any faith project based on God as Father, on Christ as Saviour, on the building of his Kingdom, on spirituality.

186. Educative intervention

From an overall standpoint one must educate to a faith mentality which is not afraid of confronting values but directs them into contexts regulated by human laws and by the Gospel. For success in this task certain indications must be kept in mind.

The first is that the young person must be helped to acquire a sufficient capacity of judgement and ethical discernment. He must be able to discern good from bad, sin and its structures, the action of God in his person and in history. Concentrating on discernment of this kind as the focal point of the formation of conscience means also making clear the purpose of all moral formation: to become able to exercise one's own autonomy and responsibility in the field of morals.

But it should be remembered that a christian conscience is formed only when the youngster is helped to measure his own life against the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In the educational process, openness to objective truth is a precondition for acceptance of the Word of God. This is a challenge which commits the educator to be faithful in the integral presentation of moral principles, while understanding the practical situation of the young.

187. Necessary too is a serious critical formation concerning cultural models and certain norms of social life that are in contrast with fundamental values. In this regard one must be able to take a stand, based on one's own conscience inspired by Christ and his Gospel. This is a defence against ambiguities arising from false

rationalizations, current ideologies, or superficial judgements of events whose deeper nature remains hidden.

Many abandonments of religious commitment are caused by faith not being inserted in culture, or by a progress in technology not adequately accompanied by cultural growth in the religious field.

188. An evangelical reading of reality

On the other hand, to be able to express judgements on current cultural movements and on the values continually emerging in history, it is indispensable to be able to read them from a gospel standpoint. The Word of the Lord contains within itself indispensable criteria for the expression of a judgement on human actions.

The Gospel, with its proclamation of the Good News, must enter the life of the individual and provide him with a vision of the reality which places at the centre the relationship with God the Father and his Son the Saviour. And so for an educative intervention it is not sufficient to express a swift condemnation on anything that is new or does not correspond to previous practice.

In the matter of education to or of the faith it is indispensable to place oneself positively in the significant areas of modern daily life, and face them with competence.

189. Specific catechesis

It is not always an easy matter, especially for young people, to pass from gospel principles to the concrete circumstances of daily life. A particular catechesis is needed to evaluate the morality of gestures and behaviour, to motivate the conscience, which is the ultimate personal criterion for action, and to grasp the relationship between faith and norms, faith and culture. The environment and witness are its determining elements.

190. Sense of mystery, of sin, of limitation

There is finally a further important aspect that must be recalled; the sense of mystery which surround the life of every human being. Alongside the luminous mystery which binds us to the Lord and is realized in the Incarnation of the Son of God and the gift of the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, there is also another mystery that we all feel at work in us - the mystery of sin and iniquity. No victory can conceal from us the weakness we carry within us from our earliest years, and which through gestures, words, intentions, and hardness of heart we find always rooted within us; it makes us blind to good, and renders our steps hesitant on the road to holiness.

We are creatures, and so we are finite and limited. This is the basis on which our personal identity and moral nature is built. We are sinners, and

therefore in need of light and strength. To educate to the mystery of man is to educate to a sense of a judgement of his own worth and of his real possibilities.

191. The need for comparison with a norm

From this situation arises the need to compare ourselves with a norm, whose function it is to enlighten and sustain the development of experience.

There is first of all a human norm to be kept in mind in personal guidelines and options.

There is also the experience of the Church which gathers the fundamental guidelines for a christian existence from the lives of believers enlightened by God's word, from intelligent attention to the signs of the times, and from the history of hidden and manifest holiness.

The journey is not an easy one. It requires daily contact with the life of the young, wide availability to meet them in dialogue and spiritual direction, and a great esteem for the sacrament of Reconciliation and living experience in its use.

EDUCATION TO LOVE

192. The situation

Today's social and cultural context stimulates and facilitates communication and affective exchanges.

Young people, not lacking in enterprise and challenging cultural prejudice and censure, stimulated by their age and wanting to overcome affective shortcomings in the family, are sensitive to the values of meeting and exchange as an expression of self-donation and fidelity, and gamble on love.

They want to "live" this gift but very often, through a process of internal and external conditioning, they manage to make of it only a "throw-away" element.

Love is certainly a fundamental dimension of the person. It is the spring that sets off life. It gives sense to existence, opening it to understanding and oblation.

It is lived by the young with exclusiveness and totality, to such a point that they give it precedence over every other value and commitment. But their radical donation does not correspond to the duration of their offering. They live it as a fleeting experience. And even if an encounter tends to take on a desire for authenticity, the force of sentiment is frequently overwhelmed by the sexual drive.

Finally, the seeking of a person to love leads necessarily to isolation from others and from the group, which one soon leaves.

193. Repercussions on the journey of faith

All this has repercussions on the plan for the building of personality and on the more specific plan for maturing in christian life.

When love is lived in a context of conflict, and the sexual content occupies the main part, it puts a brake on overall growth. Realized selfishly the gesture of love is not open to the future, because it concentrates only on present feelings and tends to prescind from the evolution of persons.

Similar effects are produced in some contexts by the situation of many young people who put the blame on the absence of a father figure, or the lack of parents. They have no experience of a balanced relationship with parents and siblings. They have gaps in their make-up which are not easy to fill and are defenceless before the provocations of society. In their process of development they substitute tastes for values because they confuse happiness with pleasure. They have no plan for defining the sense of their own personal realization.

The environment too created by people who live experiences of this kind creates a kind of generalized culture which, far from correcting such tendencies, sanctions and strengthens them

194. In situations like this, a christian cannot acquire an authentic understanding of love except against the background of God. God it is who has willed the reciprocal relationship between men and women, calling them to a deep communion able to signify the very reality of God himself.

195. Educative action

The Salesian who is diligent about his educational activity in fostering the maturing process of young people, feels today a special commitment to educating them to love. He is convinced that the mystery of Christ and the events of his life provide the full and normative revelation of true love.

The typical experience of Don Bosco and the educative and spiritual content of the preventive system guide him towards some simple but efficacious methods.

196. In the first place it is fundamental to create around the youngsters in every environment an educative atmosphere rich in opportunities for communicational and affective exchanges. To feel that one is accepted, recognized, esteemed and loved is the best lesson on love itself. When such signs and gestures are lacking in the family, the youngsters easily leave it, not only materially but also and mores especially affectively.

197. Integral education of the person and the sustaining power of grace bring boys and girls to appreciate the authentic values of purity (respect for themselves and others, the dignity of the individual, transparency in relationships, etc.) as a

proclamation of the Kingdom and the denunciation of every form of exploitation and slavery.

198. Encounters between boys and girls, when lived as moments of mutual enrichment, are an opening to dialogue and attention to each other. They lead to the discovery of the richness of the reciprocal relationship which exists at levels of feeling and intelligence, thought and action. In this way each comes to discover the other, accepted as what they are and respected in their dignity as persons.

199. An adequate education, therefore, leads to the acceptance of sexuality as a value which matures the person and as a gift to be exchanged in a specific, exclusive and total relationship, open to responsible procreation.

200. Comparison with persons who live this kind of love has the force of witness. Certain attachments linked with gratuitous self-donation become strongly and intuitively understood and assimilated. The joy of a vocation lived with conviction reverberates strongly in young people, and facilitates in them the opening to a serious and serene love able to accept the demands that go with it.

201. The witness of the Salesian who lives in a clear and happy manner the donation of himself in chastity leads the young to see the possibility of living a similar experience of love. The youngster living at his side will begin to wonder about the Lord of life, who can fill the heart of a creature so completely.

He will become aware that love becomes in its own right a plan of life which can be expressed in a thousand and one different forms. Fraternal service too to the poor and the "little ones", and guided and gradual contact with situations of suffering, will lead to gratuitous love.

202. Careful catechesis will lead young people to understand the reality and dimensions of this love; it will lead them to the acceptance of the plan of God, who is Love and the source of all love; and it will prepare them for its realization in christian marriage.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CHARITY

203. The situation

The General Chapter has "lived" the world sense of the salesian vocation. And what strikes the mind and heart most strongly is the living daily story of thousands of Salesians who are disturbed each day by the tragedy of the poor; they compare themselves with them and give their very lives for them. The challenge is a continuous one, both because material poverty seems to be increasing without limit in many countries, and because within the context of economic wellbeing are hatched and explode new and tragic forms of poverty: delinquency, emargination, exploitation of persons, and drugs.

204. An essential component of the Christian ethic

But poverty is only an indication of a social imbalance at a moment of global transformation. Other motives for concern loom menacingly on the horizon, even though they be accompanied by evident signs of hope. New problems are emerging which require the active participation of individuals: peace, the environment and the use of goods, the moral question in every single country, international relationships, the rights of the defenceless.

The challenge therefore extends far beyond poverty. It is a question of preparing a generation capable of building a more human social order for everyone. The social dimension of charity appears therefore as the "manifestation of a credible faith" (John Paul II). It is in fact a "constituent dimension" (Synod 1971, "De iustitia in mundo") of the preaching of the Gospel. In other words, it is a fundamental aspect of the activity of the Church "for the redemption of the human race and liberation from any form or oppression" (cf. EN 29-37). It follows that the social dimension of charity is an essential component of the christian ethic.

205. The need to form a mentality

It is a matter therefore of demolishing a kind of widespread indifference, of swimming against the stream, of educating to the value of solidarity against the practice of aggravated competition and individual profit.

There is a strong temptation for young people to take refuge in a private view of life based on consumerism. Generally they seem to have no confidence that any valid and enduring improvement can be brought about. And to this must be added the diffidence that stems from the grave cleavage between ethics and politics, which recurrently becomes manifest in news of corruption, punctually recounted and magnified by the means of social communication as only the mass media can do.

206. The challenge touches all educators of youth, and especially of those who live in situations of poverty and underdevelopment. Here hope is further thwarted every day by the awareness of the existence of perverse mechanisms of exploitation. Corruption at all levels is generating new and tragic situations of poverty. Some young people would like change and transformation, but the

typical impatience of youth and the impossibility of trying out changes lead them to attitudes of violence and permanently frustrated states of mind.

And yet many of these same young people feel a sense of responsibility for the future of their country. How can they be helped to transform into practical projects their noble sentiments, without falling a prey to temptations to violence, utopianism, and religious intimism which the sects offer in abundance at bargain prices? How especially can it be ensured that they themselves do not give way to temptations to consumerism and the exploitation of their fellows?

207. The historical response of Don Bosco

To respond to this challenge we have the example and experience of Don Bosco.

Although social and political situations have changed since his time, the reality that struck the young Don Bosco in his first contact with the Turin of immigration and the era of youth exploitation, was from certain aspects similar to that of today. To meet it he chose the way of integral education to meet the needs of the youngsters of the day. His school of holiness became a plan of life immersed in concrete commitments: a spirituality that was not something private but involved in activity.

208. The salesian community is aware therefore that the struggle against poverty, injustice and underdevelopment, forms part of its mission (cf. C 33). And so it feels itself deeply involved in it, in line with Don Bosco's style and its own charisma: with intelligence and realism, and always with charity (cf. SGC 72).

In the conviction then that an efficacious education to the social dimension of charity constitutes a verification of its ability to communicate the faith, the salesian community tries in the first place to bear witness to justice and peace before the youngsters and to promote them everywhere. And so it lives in deep harmony with the world's great problems and is attentive to the sufferings of those in the setting in which it is placed.

In contexts of economic wellbeing it will be able to steer youngsters into taking up critical positions with regard to society, and help them especially to discover the hidden but no less tragic world of the new poverty and its structural causes.

But the challenge applies with particular intensity to those communities that work in contexts of poverty. Here it is up to the Salesians to motivate the young and the ordinary people through education to become leaders in the process of their own liberation.

209. Educate to the value of the person

At this point it becomes urgent to single out attitudes and plan initiatives which will help today's youth to express in their lives the true social dimension of charity. The more general indication is to work in the journey of faith to

emphasize the absolute value of the individual and his inviolability; he stands above material goods and any organization. This is the critical key for the evaluation of ethically abnormal situations (corruption, privilege, irresponsibility, exploitation, deception), and for making personal options in the face of complicated manipulation mechanisms.

When this "personalization" is mature, it will be possible to pledge one's life in the social field. This must be fostered by giving proper value to the originality of the young person and his interpersonal dimension. He must understand in practical terms that his destiny in life will be fulfilled in association with other people and in his ability to give himself to them. When this perspective is absorbed interiorly with deep christian motivations, it becomes a criterion of relationships with others and a source of tenacious historical commitment.

210. Introduce to a knowledge of the complexity of the social and political reality

1. Attention must be given first of all to helping young people to acquire an adequate knowledge of the complex social and political reality. We speak of serious, systematic and documented study, and this at two levels. The first is the level of one's own locality, town and country: the situations of need, the institutions, the manner of handling political and economic power, and cultural models that influence the common good.

At the same time eyes must be turned to the world, its problems and dramas, and the perverse mechanisms that in so many countries make worse the situations of suffering and injustice. The serious nature of this approach should help young people to make a critical and unbiased evaluation of the various systems and multiple facets of the social and political field.

Information alone is obviously insufficient. All partial pieces of knowledge must be united in a practical synthesis, in a deeply felt faith that animates efficacious activity, in truth and peace, for the building of a "civilization of love". The social teaching of the Church therefore appears as the key to understanding reality, and as an indication of the ideal objectives to be sought.

211. Introduce young people to situations that call for solidarity

2. One can and should go further than this. To stop at an analysis of the reality is not of any great help. Communities operating in contexts of poverty and distress will work to lead youth and people in general to become responsible for their own development; they must overcome their resignation with a lively awareness of their own dignity, and must take on the responsibility not only for their own problems, but also for those of their neighbours.

For communities working in contexts of economic wellbeing on the other hand, it will be a matter of physically introducing young people into the world of those men and women who are asking for solidarity and help. This is a moment of greater delicacy. Contact with this world must be purified from false curiosity and emotion. It is not just a question of gaining experience of a particular context, or situation, or a part of the world with particular problems. The objective is to meet

persons, to share their human drama. This will lead to the overcoming of a certain mentality disposed to serve the poor but not to share their life.

The spiritual attitude is defined therefore by the esteem and search for values that are present in everyone, even those in situations of personal decay. This is the phase of listening, of conversion and sharing.

212. Respond with practical solidarity projects

3. The personal impact of world problems and appeals requires that from the time of youth one learns to devise precise and practical solidarity projects, and to develop forms of social intervention. There is no place for ingenuity in social and political intervention; attention is needed to some fundamental points:

- the overcoming in the young of superficial attitudes, that lack the social conscience on which the teaching of the Church insists so much;
- a proper relationship between "works of charity" and "obligations of justice" (AA 8);
- patient analysis for transforming existing structures which continue to weigh heavily on certain situations;
- the making of plans drawn up not only for the poor, but with them, so that by following them they will be able to manage their own lives.

Always and everywhere, following the example of Don Bosco who strongly defended the social significance of his work, it is necessary to educate young people to get their leaders involved at social, political and religious levels. Only in this way can the projects serve as examples, and eventually be imitated and multiplied.

213. A solidarity founded on the Gospel and on faith

Each of the above-mentioned phases requires that we help the young to strengthen their motivations of faith. Education to solidarity means making it understood that charity must be an expression of one's own encounter with Christ. Hence the importance of listening and adhering deeply to God's Word and of prayer, through which the young learn first to build themselves before improving others, and avoid the danger of activism and excessive concern about efficiency. The deeply rooted social teaching of the Church will enlighten them so that they can direct their activity towards objectives and models inspired by christian love.

214. even in the requirements of taking part in public life

The initiatives fostering these sensitivities and formation of the young may refer to different sectors: to the locality where they live, to developing countries where they may be able to spend time and energy, or to the animation of youth environments.

But there is one aspect from which we Salesians are called to work with particular conviction: that of setting young people on the road to commitment and participation in public life, or in other words "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good" (CL 42). This is a sector we have somewhat overlooked or disowned. Perhaps we have been afraid of getting involved in forms of collateralism or of falling into the complicated machinery of electoral campaigns, or of being unfaithful to the manner which is properly ours for taking part in the Church's commitment to justice and peace (cf. C 33). But this is a challenge we have to accept, and a risk we have to take.

The more active youth communities will be able to ask this kind of service from their better members, in the name of the social dimension of charity. At the beginning it will be a limited commitment, restricted to their own locality and town. But other roads will open in due course, and this objective will serve also to foster in young people a positive attitude towards the political reality, and open them to the trust that at this level too can change things and situations.

In this way evangelical charity, once it has become expressed in a concrete project, will continue to trace out in history the new path of justice.

THIRD PART

PRACTICAL COMMITMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY

You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5,13-14.16)

215. The community

The task of educating the young to the faith in the context of the new evangelization leads the community to rethink and renew itself in the light of the Gospel and of our Rule of life.

The preceding General Chapter had already suggested some stimulating reflections on the salesian community, evangelized and evangelizing. Now, rather than repeat a doctrinal synthesis, it is opportune to deal with some themes which are closely linked with the task of education to the faith.

216. a sign of faith

The community is conscious of being constituted by vocation as a "sign of faith". It rejoices at the fact and is grateful for it to the Lord, while recognizing its own weakness. It endeavours to give transparent and evangelical authenticity to its life, in the conviction that you cannot communicate the faith unless you live it as the great resource of your existence.

It reminds itself that "for the necessary discernment and renewal historians are not sufficient, nor theologians, nor politicians, nor organizers; we need spiritual men, men of faith, sensitive to the things of God and ready to work with courageous obedience as our Founder did" (SGC 18).

In this way it finds again the practical way to strengthen its witness in prayer, with which it daily "deepens its awareness of its intimate and living relationship with God, and of its saving mission" (C 85), and in fraternal communion, by which "the confreres lead a life of self-giving and sharing by welcoming others and offering them hospitality" (C 56).

It becomes an efficacious sign when it welcomes and values the generosity and dynamism of young confreres, the original contribution of the various charisms, the suffering of confreres who are sick, and the calm and fatherly presence of the elderly.

It gives transparency to the following of Christ, convinced that "in a world tempted by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possessions and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists and that his love can fill a life completely" (C 62).

217. a school of faith

But the community, precisely because it is a "sign" and salesian as well, is called to be a "school" of faith for the young. Above all it is "missionary", i.e. its mission is the reason for its existence and work. This calls for its attention and discernment so as to confront the faith with the surrounding reality. The continual evolution of the world and society involves youth, and is in consequence a challenge to educators.

Spiritual and pastoral renewal are two aspects which mutually compenetrates and are interdependent. This calls for attitudes of confidence, encounter, understanding and dialogue with the world; a pastoral creativity through which challenges are met with an 'oratorian criterion'; discernment and fidelity in salesian pedagogical style which becomes a concrete educational plan, thought out and realized in shared responsibility.

218. a centre of communion

The community is not only a sign and school of faith but, by virtue of its consecrated life, it becomes a "centre of communion and participation", capable of gathering together and stimulating those whom the Spirit calls to work with youth. "It works in communion with the particular Church" (C 57), from which it receives

guidance and support and to which it makes its own charismatic contribution (cf. C 48).

From this vision of the community as a sign, school, and centre of communion and participation, and from a consideration of the challenges, the journey of faith and salesian youth spirituality, some deliberations considered as the most urgent take their rise, together with some practical guidelines, for the education of the young to the faith.

1. CHAPTER DELIBERATIONS

1.1 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THE WITNESS OF A COMMUNITY IN CONTINUAL RENEWAL.

219. Witness

Witness is the only language able to convince young people that "God exists and his love can fill a life completely" (C 62). It is indispensable therefore that the community live and make transparently evident its faith in Jesus Christ, to whom it wants to lead the young.

For us Salesians, called by the Lord to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2) we must concentrate our attention and enthusiasm on three great aspects that give strength to our witness.

The first is the unity of the community, which is the evangelical sign that Jesus asks of his disciples sent by him into the world to proclaim the Good News. The second is the proclamation of the message which, at the beginning, may be only the gift of a welcome or a manifestation of trust, as happened in the case of Bartholomew Garelli. The third is the commitment of service to the world, and in particular to the young, especially the poorest of them.

220. Ongoing formation

These three aspects require a deepening of our religious life and an updating of our expertise. If the novelty of Christ is to be inserted into history, then culture (which is in constant evolution) must be continually renewed. One cannot speak therefore of education to the faith without involving the life of the salesian, who is by profession "sent to the young" and is by profession an educator.

He must give the best of his time and resources to God and young people. Religious and professional formation, though differing from one another, are

brought together in the grace of unity. Ongoing formation therefore, which qualifies the Salesian for his mission as educator and pastor, must become an unalterable constant in his life. And the setting in which it takes place is the local and provincial community.

THEREFORE:

221. In the next six years the Congregation will have as its primary obligation the continuing formation and qualification of the confreres. It will give particular attention to the internal apostolic conviction which is both pastoral charity and pedagogical ability.

Because of this:

222. Every local community, animated by its Rector, will have an annual programme of ongoing formation, preferably on a weekly ("community day") or fortnightly basis. The confreres should take part in the community meetings, which are "opportunities for renewing the religious and pastoral meaning of his life, and of learning to carry out his work with greater competence" (C 119).

223. Every province will draw up an organic plan for the ongoing formation of the confreres with a view to their spiritual renewal, their pastoral qualification, and their educational and professional ability.

It will prepare confreres especially for the work of education to the faith, the animation of pastoral communities, and the formation of lay people.

It will make provision for special initiatives for the formation of Rectors in the field of both personal and community spiritual direction.

224. The Rector Major with his Council will foster and follow up the provincial plans with opportune indications. They will verify them on the occasion of the "Team visits" that take place during the six years.

1.2 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY BE INSERTED IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT AND YOUTH SCENE WITH A NEW PASTORAL QUALITY

225. A more active insertion in the youth scene

The distance of young people from the faith, and frequently also their distance from us, calls on us to have the courage to insert ourselves more actively in their world and in the social context in which they live. Every single Salesian therefore is called upon to accompany the young on their journey.

This implies a direct experience of their world, listening to their questions and aspirations, acquiring their culture and language, and willingness to share experiences and projects worked out not only for them, but also and more especially with them.

A truly qualitative leap is needed, a return amongst youth with renewed pastoral sensitivity and a more marked educational ability.

226. Significance in the locality and in the Church

This is an enterprise that concerns not only the individual Salesian. It involves the community and, in a quite specific way, also its educative and pastoral plan. It must acquire the habit of continually revising and replanning the youth significance of its work, and its ability to dialogue with the local reality, with social and educational institutions of the neighbourhood and town; the ability to express its educational ardour with plans that meet the expectations of the young, and to interact continuously with the surrounding reality in which it is vitally inserted.

In so far as it is a living experience of Church, the salesian community must be clearly inserted in the plans and projects of the local Church for pastoral work in the youth sector. It must learn to receive incentives from it, but also to communicate experiences and suggest plans for the education of all young people to the faith, and especially those who are poor or farthest away.

227. Responsibility of the Province

But the need to create a living relationship between salesian work, the locality and the Church is not the responsibility of the local community alone. It belongs to the provincial community to continually revise and replan the individual works of the province in line with their ecclesial and social significance. Such continued reflection will also imply the obligation of making some difficult but important decisions. Sometimes courage may be needed to relocate a work in social and ecclesial contexts that better correspond to the salesian mission, and to start up new works to meet new and urgent requirements and new fronts of salesian commitment.

In making decisions of this kind the Provincial with his council will find guidance and support in the General Council.

THEREFORE:

228. The Congregation commits itself in the next six years, to better characterize its works from the point of view of education to the faith and, if necessary, to

relocate them to ensure a greater contact with the young, and especially the poorest among them.

Because of this:

229. The local community will look for practical ways to revitalize its own presence among youth, and will exploit every form of communication and solidarity with its own district, through collaboration and linkage with institutions that foster the education and culture of the people.

Once a year by means of a "scrutinium" for the purpose, it will verify the effect of its evangelizing action; as a result of this it will reshape its activities and reformulate the duties and commitments of the individual confreres so as to concentrate resources on the objectives of education to the faith.

230. Not later than the next Provincial Chapter, every Province will revise its Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan ("PEPS", in Italian). In it:

- it will pay particular attention to the active insertion of the individual works in the local Church and district;
- it will review the educative quality of the same works and their significance from the youth point of view, starting up (if necessary) an investigation into their possible relocation;
- it will single out new and urgent frontiers for our commitment, principally among youngsters in greater difficulty, and starting up for them some work which will be a "sign" of our intention to go after those youngsters we have not yet reached;
- it will translate the journey of faith proposed by the GC23 into a practical process suited to those we are working for and the contexts in which we operate.

231. The Rector Major with his Council will study the particular situation of each province; they will offer guidance for its reflections and for making the decisions needed to adapt its pastoral commitments to the new circumstances.

1.3 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY BECOME THE ANIMATOR OF THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY AND OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY.

232. The educative community

Wherever we work, we set up the educative and pastoral community. "It involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C 47). Though this is certainly an arrangement that will improve

educational organization and make better use of the various abilities of the laity, it is above all else an experience of communion and shared responsibility.

The setting up of the educative and pastoral community means that all the members are directly involved and are made to share responsibility for the educational experience and christian formation.

It is not an easy thing to do. A change of mentality is needed in all its components, and in the first place in the Salesians themselves.

233. Shared responsibility of the laity

A change of this sort is concerned especially with giving the laity their proper value. Numerically they form the major part of the educative and pastoral community. Mature relationships of shared responsibility must be established with them. There is need especially of a process of formation. Experiences realized so far guarantee satisfactory results, even with some difficulties. On the other hand we are spurred relentlessly on in this direction by the guidelines of the Church, recently expressed in "Christifideles laici".

234. The Salesian Family

We have particular duties of animation in respect of the Salesian Family. They live the same spirituality that we do and take part in the same mission to the young; they collaborate and share responsibility in our own work, or working in Don Bosco's style in widely different fields of activity. Their presence in the locality is a far from indifferent factor in the education of the young. It is our intention therefore to extend and strengthen it. We feel the responsibility for their spiritual, educational and pastoral formation, and we support them in their initiatives in favour of youth or the environment.

THEREFORE:

235. The Congregation commits itself in the next six years to the setting up of the educative and pastoral community wherever we work. In it will be fostered in particular the qualification of lay people (and especially members of the Salesian Family) from a christian, pedagogical and salesian standpoint.

Because of this:

236. Not later than the next Provincial Chapter each local community will set up the educative and pastoral community in its work, and get it functioning as well as possible. It will translate into practical local initiatives the provincial plan for the formation of the laity referred to in the following paragraph, giving particular care to the formation of the members of the Salesian Family, who should always be involved and committed in programmes for education to the faith.

At the time of the provincial visitation, the Provincial will verify what has been done by the community in this field.

237. The province will draw up a programme of formation for the lay people; this programme will foster their professional approach, educational ability, and witness as regards education to the faith. It will offer initiatives for liaison, lay down criteria for the sharing of responsibility and participation in all the works, and try out particular forms of management of the work with the collaboration of the laity.

238. The Rector Major, through the Departments concerned, will offer elements and lines of thought for a "lay project" in the Congregation.

1.4 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE COMMUNITY DEVELOP AN ORGANIC PASTORAL PROGRAMME.

239. Communion in action

Ecclesial communion has its source in the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in faith, hope and charity, and manifested in an eminent manner by communion in activity. The Church, as it develops varied activities through its members, tends towards a single objective, the salvation of mankind in Christ. The different services and ministries serve this unity and in this way contribute to the development and qualification of pastoral activity.

240. In the Congregation too there are services and structures of pastoral animation. The SGC asked for structures of unity and guidance, rather than division and mere organization of initiatives in the sector. The structures must foster the integration of faith in life; they must lead to a better understanding and expression of the complementary nature of all values in Christ (cf. SGC 712).

To overcome the scattered nature of many pastoral initiatives unconnected with each other, and to create a practical communion about the great objectives and in our own style of doing things, interventions and persons must be made to converge on certain specific targets.

241. This convergence is required by the subject of education, the young person, to whom are directed the various proposals, which must be harmonized with each other and adapted to all their other requirements.

This convergence is required also by the active subject, i.e. the educative and pastoral community. If in fact the members did not agree about the goal to be achieved and the way to reach it, the journey of faith of the young would be seriously compromised.

A further need is to make possible the circulation of experiences and pastoral models at regional, continental and world level, following the present usage of the Church.

THEREFORE:

242. In harmony with the pastoral activity of the Church and the sensitivity of the GC23, the Salesian Congregation, through its organisms of animation at world, provincial and local levels, will foster communication and liaison, and will coordinate practical steps and interventions of different kinds.

Because of this:

243. In every local community and in other forms of salesian presence, roles will be established so that education to the faith becomes a shared commitment for which all the confreres are responsible, while particular tasks of animation (catechesis, liturgy, spiritual direction, apostolic obligations) will be entrusted to each one in accordance with the norms of the provincial directory.

244. The Provincial with his council is responsible for the pastoral work of the province. He will appoint a delegate for the youth pastoral sector, who will coordinate the work of a team which will ensure the convergence of all activities on the objective of education to the faith, and render possible practical communication between the provinces.

245. National or regional pastoral centres will be followed up by the provincials responsible, and will be reorganized in line with the central position of education to the faith; they will be staffed by personnel who are well prepared and sufficient in number, and supplied with adequate means and equipment.

246. Services, activities, initiatives and works which are concerned with the education of youth to the faith, will find their unifying point of reference in the Department for Youth Pastoral Work.

1.5 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS THAT THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY GIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THEIR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE.

247. Qualifying dimension

Vocational guidance constitutes the vertex and "crown of all our educational and pastoral activity" (C 37). But this is not the terminus of the faith-journey; it is an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention.

248. For us who are Salesians this is truer still, because the care of apostolic vocations is a characteristic of our mission, and is indeed one of the purposes of our Congregation (cf. C 6).

Don Bosco's example is enlightening in this field too. At a period of great social transformation and grave crisis for the Church, he was able to trace out new paths in developing vocations for the Church and for his recently born Congregation (cf. BM 5, chap.33).

249. New experiences

In recent years our Congregation has carried out a long reflection, so as to face the new situation characterized on the one hand by the prolonging of the age of youth, with the consequent delay in making decisions, and on the other by the phenomenon of secularization, which has so invaded educative institutions and the family in particular.

The falling off in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life has been a further stimulus to the Congregation to review the quality of its own religious life and the vivacity of its educative project.

As well as renewing the traditional forms of vocational guidance and follow-up, it has been able to launch new and varied experiences, such as vocational reference groups, communities for encouraging those who are already aspirants to some extent, houses for prayer and retreats, school camps and vocational weeks. Above all it has found group experience to be a promising setting for vocational guidance. Finally, new missionary enthusiasm has opened up new vocational horizons to many young people.

250. The Congregation's reflection has been concentrated especially on the local community as the definitive setting for any serious plan of pastoral work for vocations.

It is in a salesian house, in fact, that the young come in contact with the salesian vocation. It is the local community that can identify the signs of a call, provide serious guidance, eventually perhaps make an explicit vocational

proposal, and follow up the young person through a process of the discernment of God's will towards a decision.

THEREFORE:

251. Vocational guidance, proposal and follow-up will become a characteristic part of journeys of faith at all their stages.

For this reason:

252. Every local community will express in its own educative and pastoral plan the manner in which it will provide guidance for all youngsters in discovering their vocation in the Church, and accompany those who show signs of a vocation to a special consecration.

It will offer concrete experiences of commitment and gratuitous service among the very poor as volunteers. It will create group experiences with a clear vocational purpose.

The Rector will take up again his role as guide of the youngsters through individual and group contact with them; he will invite those who seem more disposed, to share the more significant moments of our life, and involve them in our apostolic activity.

Every community will make known and loved the history and life of the Congregation.

253. The Provincial will verify that the vocational dimension is given the importance that is its due in the plan of every salesian work and every youth group; he will foster the preparation of the confreres as regards both vocational guidance and spiritual direction.

To the provincial team for youth pastoral work he will appoint an animator, who will coordinate the vocational dimension and maintain the necessary liaison with the pastoral work of the local Church.

1.6 THE JOURNEY OF FAITH OF THE YOUNG DEMANDS FROM THE COMMUNITY A NEW FORM OF COMMUNICATION.

254. The importance of communication

The ability to communicate and enter into accord with persons and events characterizes the development of the human person, and especially the growth of

the young. Communication, in fact, often becomes a determining factor for survival and development. It touches on every area of social life and every dimension of the life of the individual.

It not only passes on information, but communicates ideas, creates easy agreements and puts forward models of life and behaviour.

255. for the young person

The young live in today's society of communication and relationships. They are open to receive every message and form of communication, and are themselves capable of producing and passing on new messages.

They learn to keep themselves informed, and feel the need to be able to control, select and evaluate the messages they receive. They are not satisfied with verbal and cultural information: they want also the kind that is symbolical or passed on through 'body-language'. In the face of the bombardment of the mass-media they find themselves committed to resist the media's power for standardizing and making everything fit into a pattern.

256. A challenge to educators

All this is a challenge to educators: on one side, in their ability to speak in a world that habitually uses so many kinds of language; and on the other, because the use of the means of social communication has become a sine qua non even for the proclamation of the Word of salvation.

The Congregation feels itself involved in this dimension, and this all the more because one of its purposes is to be "educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication" (C 6).

Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of its importance and accepted the challenge. For this reason "he initiated apostolic undertakings to defend and sustain the faith of the people" (C 43).

THEREFORE:

257. In the next six years the Congregation commits itself to an adequate use of social communication for transmitting the christian message and educating youth to the faith.

For this reason:

258. The local community will foster its own capacity for communication:
- by helping each Salesian to be a good communicator, able to use a kind of language adapted to the young and to people in general, especially in the liturgy and catechesis

- by exploiting all the means (relationships, aspect of the house, theatre, video, music, meeting rooms, etc.) through which messages can be given to predispose people to the faith and spread the message of salvation;
- and in particular by seeing that young people are educated to the different forms of communication, and a critical reading of the messages they convey.

259. The Provincial will appoint someone to be responsible for social communication in the province. This person will:

- assist the individual communities in promoting various communicational realities;
- offer his services to the various sectors of activity and will maintain relations with local ecclesiastical and civil organizations.

In everything concerning the education of the young, he will work with the team for youth pastoral work.

260. The Councillor General for social communication:

- encourages the formation of the Salesian as a communicator;
- assists the community in the use of the various means of communication;
- guides (especially in the emerging societies) the launching of practical projects responding to the needs of various countries in the field of social communication (publishing houses, centres for the production of videos and audiovisuals for education to the faith, radio transmissions for the people, etc.).

2. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR PARTICULAR SITUATIONS

261. The journey "towards the faith" and "of faith", translated into adequate stages, will be taken into consideration by communities and individual Salesians who work in particular situations and guide specific youth experiences.

Referring back ideally to the GC21 and other documents of the Congregation, the GC23 limits itself to some fundamental indications, closely linked with the proposal expressed in this document. We are aware that this proposal must be inserted in a wider educative project, but our concern at the moment, in the various initiatives, is to highlight the particular kind of relationship to be established with young people and the possibilities offered by this same relationship for education to the faith.

2.1 ENVIRONMENTS PROVIDING A WIDE WELCOME

262. Environments offering a wide welcome - oratories, youth centres and other kinds too - carry out a progressive action of education and growth in the faith. They serve either a large area or the territory of a parish. They have the aspect of a frontier work between the civil and religious sectors, or between the secular and ecclesial domains: in this situation lies their originality and also their risk.

That they may lose their educative and pastoral quality is a danger that is not just imaginary. The welcome extended to everyone, the diversity of young people who find their way in, the atmosphere of freedom that surrounds the activities, and the scarcity of personnel, can compromise the programme of education to the faith, which of necessity must take on many different forms.

Consequently, in the next six years a particular effort is called for:

263. - To make the environment suitable. Welcoming everyone means that these settings must be characterized by gospel principles and methods, manifested in general objectives, organization, personal relationships, personal behaviour, and a family atmosphere;

264. - In emphasizing that the soul of the oratory or youth centre is evangelization. Hence attention must be given to the catechesis and religious formation of the youngsters, avoiding every form of improvisation. The desire for liveliness and company will be fostered by encounters with all the young people together, as well as in groups and in personal contacts;

265. - In assigning time and resources for putting the above indications into practice. Over and above its educative and pastoral aspect, every single oratory or youth centre must prepare initiatives (with precise details as regards times and personnel):

- for meeting the young people,
- for proclaiming the faith,
- for catechesis,
- for the formation of those disposed to undertake a mature journey of faith, and seek out their own particular vocation;

266. - In fostering in a quite special way the pedagogical, cultural and religious formation of the animators. These are the most successful expression of oratory work, and one of its aims most carefully pursued.

2.2 ENVIRONMENT OF SYSTEMATIC EDUCATION

267. Meeting young people in settings predisposed for a systematic programme of education (schools, training centres for trades, boarding establishments, hostels for students and workers, and the like) can provide the possibility for systematic education to the faith. This becomes inserted in fact in a vision of life and the world that the youngster builds up through learning the various matters associated with the planning of his own future.

268. In settings of this kind the demands of cultural programmes are greater. The time young people stay with us for recreational, formative and cultural activities has been markedly diminished. One notices also a kind of break between the institution and life. The teaching does not reach the youngster's vital problems. There is also a form of detachment between the institution and education, and another between education and education to the faith.

At the root of this there lies not only the cultural programme with little time available for contacts, but also an idea that supports the separation of the two aspects, if not indeed their total equalization.

269. There are confreres and lay collaborators who work and expend a great deal of energy in these structures for the educational and cultural growth of the young. They must direct their interventions in a more organic manner along the following lines:

270. - Rethink, in view of education to the faith, both the overall sense of culture and work, and the teaching of the individual disciplines, in which they should point out the religious dimension as a deep aspect of reality.

271. - Consider the teaching of religion as an important part of cultural formation and of proclaiming the faith. To this end there must be guaranteed the proper arrangement of the content, the necessary space in the time-table, the updating of the teachers, and all the elements useful for the successful carrying out of such teaching.

In the whole process of formation to the faith, there must be kept in mind the diversity of young people in their approach to the faith itself.

It will be the duty of provincial organisms to promote initiatives for qualifying Salesians and lay collaborators for this task. The same organisms must also verify the programmes and their quality.

272. - See that the time-table provides for faith celebrations for the entire scholastic community and/or particular groups. In this way concrete experiences will be offered of what has been communicated by word.

273. - Follow up personally or in groups all the youngsters, but more especially those who give evidence of greater sensitivity to cultural proposals and those of faith. The Salesians must dedicate themselves directly to these youngsters, sharing with the lay collaborators organizational and administrative aspects.

2.3 THE YOUTH GROUP

274. Group experience is a fundamental element in salesian pedagogical tradition.

The youth group is a part of wider organizations (associations, educational settings, parishes); it is the subject of particular apostolic initiatives (volunteer work, expressive activities, tourism, sport, etc.). In these various aspects we have in mind not their particular organization nor their immediate objectives, but their ultimate purpose of the formation to the faith of the young people taking part in them.

The group is the setting where educative and religious proposals become personalized; it is the place for expression and responsibility; it is the place for interpersonal communication and the planning of initiatives. Frequently it is the only structural element that offers the young the occasion for access to human values and education to the faith.

Our own environments give life and welcome to a great variety of groups, so as to provide an adequate response to every interest of youth.

275. Youth groups and associations which, while maintaining their organizational autonomy, share the same salesian spirituality and pedagogical principles, form explicitly or implicitly the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM).

This is an original gift of the Spirit to the community of believers, and one of the riches of the Church and youth. In the Don Bosco centenary year it showed itself to be full of life and growing in self-awareness.

276. In the SYM all the groups live the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) at different levels.

The SYM is an open reality, in the form of concentric circles, which unites many young people: from those farthest away, for whom the spirituality is something only dimly perceived through an environment in which they feel welcome, to those who consciously and explicitly make their own the salesian ethic. These latter constitute the animating nucleus of the whole movement, which is therefore an original educative movement.

277. The circulation of messages and values in the SYM has no need of a rigid and centralized organization. It is based on free communication between the groups, and needs only a minimum structure for the coordination of common initiatives. On this basis those meetings are preferred which become meaningful occasions for dialogue, comparison, christian formation, and youthful expression.

The groups work and are linked with each other in the local educative community, in which they interact for their mutual enrichment and to create a cultural climate which is lively and committed in a christian manner.

This first locale will have a wider setting at provincial or interprovincial level, for the purpose of exchange of views and communication between groups for a verification of their incidence in the area concerned and their insertion and contribution in the local Church.

278. With regard to education to the faith, the groups are not always successful in the efficacious promoting of the christian principles present in their plans. Prevalent attention to the immediate interests of the youngsters; animators who frequently have little motivation as regards the faith proposal; greater concern about organization than formation; all these are factors that can cause a falling off of the commitment to education to the faith.

Hence, animators of individual groups, those responsible for associations, Rectors and local councils, Provincials and provincial delegates, are asked:

279. - to promote group activities in our works, not least as one of the best means of reaching those at a distance and fostering the process of an authentic education to the faith;

280. - to make explicit, for every group or collection of groups, the plan for a journey "to the faith" or "of faith", inspired by the fundamental elements of the SYS, starting from the immediate interests of the young people;

281. - to draw up an annual programme for a process of pedagogical and salesian formation for the group animators, and to provide for its verification;

282. - to foster communication between groups, by creating points of reference and coordination in respect of their organizational autonomy;

283. - to make a continually deeper study of the SYS, making the most also of the places associated with salesian origins.

2.4 PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE YOUNG PERSON

284. Education to the faith finds a particularly efficacious setting in personal dialogue, of which Don Bosco was a master without parallel. Its principal expressions concern the individual in his own environment, the educational conversation, spiritual direction, and the sacramental encounter.

In recent times its necessity has been felt more keenly because of the complexity of the problems young people now face, and the personal attention they require. But the new demands have not always found Salesians ready to meet them. And on the other hand, those who have taken up this task are wondering how to carry it out in a salesian manner and with the greatest profit.

Starting from the undeniable validity of personal dialogue, we want to encourage the confreres to make themselves available for it, by offering some indications:

285. - A deeper study must be made in the provinces of the typically salesian style of personal follow-up: a group of converging elements that sustain the christian maturing process, such as atmosphere, encouraging company, shared activities, the personal word, brief exhortations to groups, and celebrations.

286. - The confreres must be encouraged and prepare themselves to offer to young people in personal dialogue the testimony of their own faith and the guidance of which the youngsters stand in need.

287. - The Rector must take to heart the personal encounter with the young people, and especially with those who are approaching a point of decisive importance in their lives.

288. - In retreat houses for the young, and at times of particular importance, (e.g. the spiritual exercises), the young people must know that this form of guidance is available for them in complete freedom.

289. - A special moment of personal contact with the youngster is lived in the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Provincial will foster the preparation of confreres for this ministry, which is so important in salesian pedagogy.

2.5 COMMUNITIES FOR YOUNGSTERS IN DIFFICULTIES

290. In recent years reception communities for boys and young persons in difficulties have come into being and taken root. They bear witness to the courage that is never extinguished in the Congregation, and to the value of the preventive system. They are points of reference and of promotion of solidarity: they meet with general approval, succeed in obtaining collaboration of many kinds, create a mentality of solidarity among the people, and win the support of society.

Education to the faith in these communities has its own typical and particular aspects. We indicate some practical guidelines

291. Fundamental is the sign of being close to these youngsters and to their world.

In this way the Salesian relives in Don Bosco's style the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli. The latter, driven out by society, found in Don Bosco a heart that welcomed him, a face that smiled on him, a hand that helped him - a person able to share his sorrows and hopes, to sustain his will to begin, or begin again. Before such a reception the barriers of diffidence begin to crumble, and maybe also those of hostility and prejudice that have kept these youngsters away from the Church and from God. This is the first step.

292. For boys like this daily contact with "new" people, able to stir up wonderment and reawaken in them the good that lies there dormant and their intensely human resources which coincide with gospel values, becomes a truly original experience.

Attentive friendship, a family atmosphere, simplicity and kindness, and the fostering of personal dignity, all provide a form of witness that makes the youngster wonder: "Who are you? Why do you act like this?"

The response, given in many ways and at different times, according to the needs of each individual, becomes an announcement of Christ as his companion on his journey through life, and of the love of the Father, of his plan for salvation and happiness; it is an offering of liberation from slavery and of fullness of life.

293. The journey of education to the faith thus begun is a delicate and difficult process, often meeting with failure. This is where our faith in education becomes manifest, our conviction of the power of prayer, of grace, and of Christ's patience. We remember with admiration how Don Bosco dealt with Michael Magone.

294. The educator concentrates enthusiastically on the positive qualities present in the youngster. The latter is encouraged by the whole community; they are ready to understand him, forgive him, pick him up again after a fall, begin again and try once more with him, so that his hopes may never be extinguished

Sustained and supported in this way, the youngster opens up not only to a more mature appreciation of the system, but also to a deep revision of his own life, to a self-examination which in the sacrament of Reconciliation will become the grace of forgiveness and the strength to begin again.

The sense of joy and solidarity in the community, the desire to overcome one's own self-centredness and give oneself to one's fellow men will grow to the point of becoming an experience of eucharistic communion.

In this way we shall educate by evangelizing and evangelize by educating.

2.6 LARGE SCALE GATHERINGS OF YOUTH

295. At the present time, big youth gatherings are on the increase. They respond to the need felt by the young to express themselves collectively on a human and religious level. The idea often begins from a committed group, but goes on to involve other groups who may be interested and willing to take part. The "Youth Day" instituted by John Paul II is a response to this felt need, and has had repercussions even in the most restricted environments. In the space of a year, many provinces live days which intensify the dialogue between all the youthful component groups.

The pilgrimage too is a cultural form found among many peoples, a sign of the pilgrim Church. It unites the people in sentiment, gesture and memory, at places significant for their popular religious appeal or because of the memory of saints connected with such places. The young live such an experience with the desire to grow, and sometimes as a faith-offering in the sacrifice of a long journey. They look for settings for reflection and people who welcome them.

296. As far as maturing in faith is concerned, however, the result cannot be taken for granted. The festive atmosphere, with its undeniable values, is the immediate significance perceived by all. The educator of the faith must help by not putting too much emphasis on this atmosphere to the detriment of the content.

The gathering must have the overall effect of a true proclamation.

THEREFORE:

297. - The realization, in its various moments and expressions, must provide for a careful convergence of the contents on what concerns the faith, and for communication of good quality: prayer and celebration, music, entertainment,

games, experience of living together, scenic activities, meeting with witnesses, discussions, etc.

298. - A suitable period of preparation is necessary; and afterwards a follow-up assessment should be arranged. Both of these require the participation of a proportionate number of animators, especially young people.

299. The verification must consider two items which define the sense of the gathering: the young people who begin as casual participants and decide to begin a journey of faith; and those who develop social or apostolic commitments of a concrete nature in their own environment.

CONCLUSION

300. In our thoughts we have accompanied our young people in a journey towards the faith.
We have done so in the light of the Holy Spirit who has helped us to listen to and understand his voice in the young.
The toil of the journey has been compensated by the joy of discovery.

If after reading these pages,
anyone should say that, by and large,
they contain nothing new,
from certain points of view he would be correct.

They tell, in fact, of our mission as Salesians,
committed in the education of youth to the faith:
of our mission, therefore, of yesterday,
of today and always,
as long as there will be children and young people.
They are the essential points
that have to be continually rethought,
kept in the heart
and, above all, put into practice.

And if on reading these pages
anyone should feel himself a "man of little faith",
frightened by the task asked of him,
let him know that we too
have felt ourselves to be men of faith

small as a grain of sand.
It is the mustard seed
entrusted to the earth by God
so that it may grow.
It is a seed
that the strain of days of work cannot consume,
nor the wind blow away,
because charity can never fail
as long as the Triune God is love.

We entrust ourselves, therefore, to the pastoral charity,
gift and strength of the Father's love,
shown us by Christ
and poured out in us by the Holy Spirit.
The love and sole strength that nothing can resist.
To encourage us, Don Bosco says:
"If we cannot manage the whole alphabet,
but can get as far as ABCD,
why should we neglect this little with the excuse
that we cannot go as far as Z?" (BM 12, 151)

Finally,
if on reading these pages
some of us should have heard again Don Bosco's voice,
and felt joy and relish
at this vitality of the Holy Spirit
which, through the intervention of Mary Help of Christians,
is spreading in the Church;
and if, after some experience of fatigue,
they take up again the mission journey,
then let us all rejoice
that the Lord has made himself present among us:
"Did not our hearts burn within us
while he talked to us on the road?" (Lk 24,32)

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE FAITH: A TASK AND CHALLENGE FOR TODAY'S SALESIAN COMMUNITY

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