

THE SALESIAN BROTHER

**History, Identity
Vocational Apostolate
and Formation**

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and Formation**

Rome 1989

Translator's note

Although the term "Salesiano Coadiutore" ("Salesian Coadjutor") remains in use in Italian, the term now commonly used in English is "Salesian Brother". In the first part of this translation the term "Coadjutor" has been retained where it seemed necessary for the understanding of the steps in the historical development of the concept. Otherwise the term "Brother" is used, as in the title of the book itself.

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PRESENTATION

Dear Confreres,

I present to you this booklet: "THE SALESIAN BROTHER",¹ which has been compiled to meet the directive of the GC22, which called for a deeper study of the "vocational identity of the lay salesian, and its essential significance for the life and mission of the Congregation in the light of present-day thinking in the Church". (GC22, 9).

It does this, as was requested, by considering the various dimensions of this identity: the historical, theological and spiritual dimension; and the pastoral, vocational and formative dimension; these are distinct from one another, but united in the individual experience of the Salesian and of the Congregation.

It is done as an act of obedience to the will of the capitular assembly, reflecting the esteem and high value shown by the Chapter for this form of vocation and for the Salesians who have been called to live it.

To the wealth of reflections you will find in the book itself, I would like to add some thoughts of my own. They will help you, I think, to better understand the nature and purpose of this text, and the serious practical commitments to which it gives rise.

1. *A deeper analysis*, in an up-to-date manner, of the identity and consequent practical obligations in the field of vocational pastoral work and of formation, implies:

- *taking stock*, in the first place, of the present situation in a matter which has already been dealt with at length in the Congregation, especially in recent times;
- *recalling once again the relevance* of the matter for the vital future scope not of a particular category of Salesians but of *the whole Congregation*. The book is not one "on" the Salesian Brother, nor is it intended for the Brothers alone.

The vocation of the lay Salesian is something that goes to the root of the life and mission of our Society in its essential significance.

2. This naturally implies a knowledge of what the Congregation and the Church have pondered, discussed and decided in the course of their various authoritative experiences and communications. Not unnaturally the text, as regards content and language, has had to conform to well established criteria. They have been culled from an analysis of the expressions with which the GC22, in entrusting the work to the Formation Department, has indicated the objectives to be pursued.

3. The main purpose is that of providing an up-to-date frame of reference for an *authentic* and at the same time *open understanding of the identity* of the Salesian Brother, considered in himself and in his relationship to others. It would appear that the objective aimed at by the GC22 is not that of dealing with the theme of the Salesian Brother for the purpose of providing edifying material suitable for spiritual animation. This aspect is not left aside, but what the GC22 wanted primarily was a deeper analysis of the identity of the lay Salesian, in the light of present-day thought in the Church.

The plan it asks the reader to follow combines historical and theological aspects with those which are pastoral and formative. This has implied a significant selection of content and problems, of instruments and methods, not always easily made but which it is necessary to study. Significant too is the choice of those to whom the book is addressed. They are primarily those who have specific tasks and responsibilities in pastoral vocation work and in formation: provincials, provincial councillors, members of provincial commissions, rectors, formation personnel and workers in the pastoral field. All of these will be able to use the book as an aid and bring a knowledge of its contents, means and methods to the various communities so as to render their salesian awareness more enlightened and convinced, and increase their sense of responsibility so as to prompt them to practical and concrete initiatives in pastoral vocational work and formation.

4. It may seem that here and there objectives are suggested

that are *too lofty and demanding*, or that may appear to some extent to have little direct reference to the *real conditions* of the problem.

I would say that there is a modicum of truth in both of these. What I mean is that *ideals* should not be considered so much as a judgement on a present situation as an invitation to direct our lives to what they should become. And so the desired ideal is rather an expression of the richness of the vocation, the sense of a special gift which God offers us and is ready to make real and gradually develop with our cooperation; it is not a yardstick for the measurement of a life, our life, which we see as so limited and far from the perfection of the ideal. And so let us not be discouraged!

Dear confreres, I wanted to put forward these considerations to help you to understand this text, which completes the series of others already published that deal with figures and roles that are important for the service of the salesian life and mission. We can look back with satisfaction on the considerable progress the Congregation has made as regards awareness and communication, and we resolve to make the practical results no less efficacious.

Finally I must thank those who have contributed to the composition and production of this final text* and express to you the same desire and wish that Don Bosco expressed to the 22 Brother novices in the programme he gave them at San Benigno: "You will grow in number; but more especially you must grow in kindness and energy".

Let us get down to work with salesian flair and enthusiasm!

Cordial greetings in the Lord.

Rome, 24 May 1989

Fr Egidio Viganò

* Fr Barroero, Fr Midali, Fr Natali, Fr Semeraro, Fr Vecchi, coordinated by the Formation Department.

INTRODUCTION

The GC22 dedicated one of its few practical directives to the Salesian Brothers. It was prompted to do so by a common concern and a certain embarrassment that emerges when a keenly felt problem exists and must be solved, though it is not easy to do so. 2

It was the Chapter's wish:

- that "the richness of the vocational identity of the lay Salesian should be studied more deeply at different levels, and its essential significance for the life and mission of the Congregation be recognized in the light of present-day thinking in the Church";
- that the provinces in their pastoral work for vocations and in the work of formation be aware of the urgency of stepping up initiatives in this field;
- that a greater insertion of lay Salesians into structures of community animation and responsibility be promoted.¹

The Rector Major, in August 1980, had already prompted a reflection on this "vital theme" by his letter: "**The lay element in the salesian community**", in which he declared that this was a matter of concern not to the Brother alone but to each and every member; it affected the community and its unique salesian characteristic; it was an essential dimension of the Congregation.²

Since then there have been various meetings at provincial, interprovincial and regional levels, at which the problem was seriously considered, even before the mid-term Provincial Chapters. There was a desire to complete the period of research and clarification so as to launch efforts at practical application. And a lot of good work was done, especially as regards pastoral

¹ Cf. GC22, 9

² Cf. ASC 298, p.3ff

vocational work and formation. A verification was made and the results were published.³

The Chapters had given great importance to the matter but had indicated rather what they intended to do in the future, rather than what had already been done and was already the practice. And they emphasized some common lines of formation.

There was need of:

- a spiritual formation, which would lead the confrere to be a “man of God” and educator of the faith among the young and people in general, in ways complementary to those of the salesian priest;
- an apostolic formation, particularly sensitive to the world of work and attentive to the missionary dimension;
- an intellectual formation, which with a common basis would correspond to the specific slant of this characteristic vocational expression.

Insistence on different aspects was determined by the local needs of the salesian life and mission, and by the number, aptitudes and availability of the subjects.

While these efforts are taking place, the aim of the present publication: “THE SALESIAN BROTHER”, called for by the GC22, is to meet the need for a follow-up to those efforts and give them added motivation.

The moment seems ripe for its publication. Reflection on the experience of the Church and the Congregation, updated by the very latest documents, by the information provided by the Acts of the various meetings and encounters on the Salesian Brother as regards the organization and progress of pastoral and formative experiences that have been set on foot, and by direct discussions on the theme during the Team Visits of the Superiors, has led to the conclusion that the material now available was sufficient to enable the present volume to be compiled and published.

The text is made up of four chapters.

The first is historical in nature: “THE SALESIAN BROTHER.

³ Cf. The formation of the salesian brother; a growing awareness and commitment; AGC 323, p.28ff

A LOOK AT HIS HISTORY". After a brief reference to the beginnings and historical development of the different kinds of lay religious in the various Orders and Congregations, consideration is given at greater length to the origins of the Salesian Brother and his development in the course of history and tradition.

His identity, as it has come to be defined more precisely with the passage of time, is then considered more deeply from a theological and spiritual standpoint, in the light obviously of all the research carried out at the level of the Congregation and the Church. This forms the second chapter: "THE VOCATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER".

This study and its results lead to a greater understanding of the values of this form of vocation and relate them to the field of pastoral work, so that in the latter they may find their proper place in the work of proposal and follow-up. This is dealt with in the third chapter: "THE VOCATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER IN SALESIAN PASTORAL WORK FOR VOCATIONS".

Finally, in the fourth chapter, the same values are further considered from the standpoint of the formation process. Motivations are given and the more suitable ways are suggested for their personal assimilation: "OUTLINES FOR A FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER".

We know very well that far more valuable than the pages of a book like this are the "models" of lay Salesians who work with holiness, joy and enthusiasm in the simplicity of their daily work. Reading these pages may be of use to them in motivating and nourishing their spiritual life and the appeal it has for the young. And of still greater use will it be to those confreres to whom obedience has given the task of working in the vocational and formative fields.

1. THE SALESIAN BROTHER. A LOOK AT HIS HISTORY

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTE.

- 3 The story of religious life is rich and complex. It can be studied from many different points of view, from the charismatic to the institutional and generational.

The succession therefore of the various forms of 'lay' religious life must be placed within this multiple evolution, otherwise it cannot be understood objectively and a distorted idea will result.

We therefore insert as a premise to the real theme of this chapter a few main ideas, and refer the reader who requires further information to the small number of specialized works on the subject, with the bibliographies they include. ¹

11.1 In the monastic life.

- 4 The origins of monasticism, especially in the East, constitute an extremely complex phenomenon, but it can be said in general that the first monks were simply 'lay' and the priesthood among them was exceptional. ²

In the first centuries of the Middle Ages, monasticism developed in the West, and the evolution of christian society contributed to the drawing of the monks towards the clerical state, while previously they had had a greater affinity with the laity. (...)

¹ The material in this historical note is taken for the most part from the article of M.SAUVAGE *Fratello* in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* (Pellicia-Rocca) Vol.4, Rome 1977, col.762-794. Cf. also Acts of various meetings on the figure of the lay religious held by various religious Institutes or in different geographical or linguistic areas, which have also looked back over past centuries, e.g. T.TURRISI: *La figura storica-giuridica del religioso fratello dalle origini al Vaticano II*, in *Il Fratello religioso nella comunità ecclesiale oggi* Rome 1983, p.25-49.

² Cf. G.M.COLOMBAS, *El monacato primitivo I*, Madrid 1974, p.64-68.

The number of priest-monks in the communities increased, but it is difficult to find precise statistics. At the end of the eighth century priests and deacons seem to have been about 20%, in the ninth century about 60%, and in the tenth 75%".³

In the twelfth century, especially among the Carthusians and Cistercians, the "lay brothers" take on their characteristic physiognomy and develop on a large scale. "Experts differ about the motives for the institution of the lay brothers. (...) The first canon concerning them comes from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Lateran (1139), where they are listed among those who cannot contract a valid marriage. (...) The Church therefore acknowledged for the lay brothers a religious state like that of the monk".⁴

11.2 Among the Mendicant Orders.

The Dominicans and Franciscans had at their beginnings different configurations of life and mission, and there was a corresponding difference between the figure of the lay religious in each case.

The Order of "Friar Preachers" (Dominicans) was clerical from its very beginnings, but St Dominic added "lay brothers" to it and entrusted them with the material responsibility for his convents. "In origin they are the companions of the priest members, and the differences between the two are to be found at the level of the kind of work they do and not at that of religious state".⁵

The majority of St Francis' first companions on the other hand were laymen, and the Franciscan legislative texts do not speak of "fratres conversi" - the Dominican term for their lay-brothers - but of "fratres laici", i.e. literally "lay" brothers. Nevertheless, among the Friars Minor too there soon developed a rapid process of clericalization. An analogous phenomenon took place also in the Carmelite Order.

³ M.SAUVAGE, o.c. col.766.

⁴ Ibid. col.766.

⁵ Ibid. col.768.

"With the Council of Trent (sess. XXII, De reformatione, c.4) all the offices of Superior in religious clerical families became reserved to priests; the Franciscan families protested against this decision, but subsequently were obliged to conform to it".⁶

11.3 In the modern religious Orders and Congregations.

6 In the 16th century new Orders began to arise: the Theatines, the Barnabites, the Clerks Regular of Somascha, the Jesuits, and others too, made up mainly of 'clerics'. All of them however had lay-religious attached to them who worked alongside the priest-religious, but with different tasks to perform.

"In the majority of the clerical Congregations founded in the 18th and 19th centuries lay brothers are found alongside the priests, with names that varied (coadjutors, cooperators, auxiliaries, etc.) In general these religious took care of material concerns; in some Orders, especially missionary ones, they were sometimes involved in lay apostolic work (as catechists in particular), but very often this kind of work remained no more than a desire because of various difficulties that arose".⁷

We may conclude with this remark: "The question of lay members of religious congregations has not been the object of much historical research. If a certain amount of attention was given to it by the orders of ancient foundation, it has been accorded little in general by congregations that began in the 19th century...".⁸

* * *

7 A brief summary in this way of a long and complex process is bound to leave a disproportion between the various periods

⁶ Ibid. col.769.

⁷ Ibid. col.770.

⁸ P.STELLA, *Cattolicesimo in Italia e laicato nelle Congregazioni religiose. Il caso dei coadiutori salesiani (1854-1974)* in *Salesianum* XXXVII (1975), 411.

and the forms assumed by religious life. They have been only hinted at, and in places may have given rise to partly false ideas. The reality of the lay religious can be better understood if inserted into its proper context in one of the "histories of religious life" now available in various languages, e.g. L. HOLTZ (1986) in German, A. LOPEZ AMAT (1987) and J. ALVAREZ GOMEZ (1989) in Spanish, J. LOZANO (1988) in English, AUGE-SASTRE-BORRIELLO (1988) in Italian. To these we refer the reader. The brief historical note given above is meant among other things to encourage him to read one or other of them.

1.2 THE LAY RELIGIOUS IN THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

12.1 The origins. The time of Don Bosco.

The early days of the Salesian Society were lived in Turin, the political centre of the well known suppressive measures enacted against Orders and Congregations after 1848, and the economic vertex of the first pre-industrial transformation of Italy. The ecclesial environment had already been showing for some time clear signs of a Catholicism in crisis and in search of a new identity. In particular, in the setting of the traditional religious corporations, the grave erosion caused by the Enlightenment was aggravated by more than a few attempts at renewal and reform which never got off the ground at all or remained a dead letter.⁹

8

⁹ The last attempt, after those of Pius VII immediately after his return to Rome from exile, and of Leo XII, limited to Orders and Congregations in the Pontifical States, was that of Pius IX who in 1847 set up a *Congregation for the state of Regulars*, and sent on 7 August of that year to all the Bishops of the various states of Italy a circular letter asking them to send in opportune information concerning Regulars, specifying the causes of any abuses introduced into these religious Congregations and indicating the best and most efficacious means for removing them". The whole documentation, preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives, bears witness to the widespread malaise and need for a concrete re-thinking of religious structures in the light of the new requirements of the times.

Already in the early part of the 19th century, after the napoleonic suppression and when the Orders and Congregations were making a laborious revival, sensible and attentive persons were not lacking who called for a decisive shift towards a more balanced composition and structure. In this way they could have been truly "useful to God and to society".

The very many Congregations that came into existence in this period did not ignore the new demands of the times and, although with many differences between them, fluctuated between the "revived traditional model" and the "new model", i.e. the traditional private lay Catholic association, where the 'laity' were called to carry out a role quite different from the traditional figure of the 'oblate' or 'lay-brother'. The new model in fact was of a person who testified to a fundamental gospel reality: the possibility of holiness open to everyone without distinction of category and with equal rights. The moral theology of the period, stimulated as it also was by the not always sound and disinterested principles asserted by the French Revolution, was driven to rediscover the nuclei of ancient truths and bring them up to date. The writings and historical experience of St Francis de Sales constituted for ecclesiastics with the care of souls an effective point of reference for a well founded belief in the "holiness of the laity", and for talking about it.

Don Bosco's human and religious formation, sustained by natural virtues and aptitudes, was marked by considerations of this kind which found a full place in his embryonic idea of a Congregation open (one might say 'naturally' open) to both priests and lay people, united in a common desire for perfection and christian charity.

"Hence the rise of the figure of the 'coadjutor' cannot be sufficiently explained by historical reasons or contingent opportunism, nor by acquiescence to tradition or organizational interests and reasons. The main motive was a highly supernatural one: the desire to extend as far as possible an experience of high and noble christian perfection to the greatest possible number of souls of every category".¹⁰

¹⁰ P.BRAIDO, *Religiosi nuovi per il mondo del lavoro*, Rome 1961, pp.16-17.

A. *How the necessity arose: the birth and need for workshops and of schools of arts and trades in the Oratory.*

A common need, but one which was enough to prompt intelligent and courageous men to set on foot some quite extraordinary enterprises, gave Don Bosco the idea for founding his workshops for artisans. 9

He was not the first in this field. In the wake of the Restoration one can find schools of arts and trades founded by authentic pioneers. Young John Bosco was hardly six years old when the enterprising Canon *Lodovico Pavoni* of Brescia opened the Institute of St Barnabas for poor youngsters, with an initial series of workshops which in the space of ten years included printing and copper-plate engraving, binding and the production of exercise-books, carpentry, the crafts of blacksmith and silversmith, and shoemaking.¹¹ From among the boys formed in these workshops Canon Pavoni found his best collaborators, who later became priests or "coadjutor" brothers and went on teaching in the same workshops. Pavoni died in 1849 and at the present state of the researches there is nothing to suggest that he had any direct influence on the future organization of the workshops at Valdocco.¹²

a. *The birth of the workshops.*

It was in 1853 in a little place in Valdocco that Don Bosco 10 began the realization of his workshops initiative.

Concerned as he was about the material, intellectual and moral needs of a sizable number of boys and young workers, he had

¹¹ Cf. Acts of the Congress: *Ludovico Pavoni e il suo tempo, 1784-1849*, Brescia, 30 March 1985.

¹² Two indications can be found in a letter of Rosmini to Don Bosco of 1853, and in a reference to a "missione bresciana" of his friend Don P. Ponte, then director of the San Luigi Oratory at Porta Nuova, at the end of 1849. It is probable however that Don Bosco had direct links at least with the book-publishing section of the printing establishment of the Institute of St Barnabas, which produced among other things the *Opera omnia* of St Francis de Sales.

already taken steps to find them employment in various workshops of Turin, often arranging special apprenticeship contracts for them. In the Salesian Central Archives there are copies of the agreements made in favour of the youths Giuseppe Bordone (1851), Giuseppe Odasso (1852) and Felice Paoletti (1855).

But the practice of sending his boys every day to workshop and foundries turned out to be inconvenient and full of risks. "Very soon", writes the historian Danilo Veneruso, "John Bosco became aware that an arrangement of this kind in no way met the needs of youth psychology for the purpose of christian education, nor did it even meet the productive requirements of contemporary society. As far as the youth circumstances were concerned, a short-term or even medium-term intervention of this kind might meet an immediate and urgent need, but it did nothing to solve the problem of the boy's future. Successive experiences led him to the conclusion that if anything was to be done for the boys, what was needed was a synthesis between an educational programme with a clear awareness of the objectives to be achieved on the one hand, and on the other an active and conscious response from the subject to be educated; a complex training period would enable the latter, as a free and capable individual, to attain the ability to run his own life and contribute to his personal growth and that of society".¹³

Don Bosco himself explained more than once what led him to flank his Sunday and evening schools, begun in 1845, and the "Society of mutual help", founded in 1850, with workshops on the premises: "As we did not as yet have workshops within the Institute, our pupils went to work and to school in Turin with grave danger to their morality, for the simple reason that the companions they met, the kind of talk they heard and the things they saw rendered useless what was said and done at the Oratory".¹⁴

¹³ Cf. D.VENEROSO, *Dai laboratori agli istituti professionali* in P.BRAIDO *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanit. Studi e testimonianze*, LAS Rome 1988, p.133.

¹⁴ MO 205; cf. also *Invito ad una lotteria d'oggetti in Torino a favore degli Oratori*, January 1862.

A start was made with shoemaking and tailoring. Don Bosco hastened to write some appropriate "Regulations for the workshops" for those teaching trades. ¹⁵ they were to "instruct the apprentices and see to it that they did not lack work". In the following year a book-binding workshop was added and twelve months later had already developed to a state which enabled it to take in work from outside. ¹⁶ At the end of 1856 the carpentry workshop was inaugurated. Those for metalwork and printing had to wait until the '60s because, although they figured in Don Bosco's plans and desires from the beginning, the cost and complexity of the machinery and equipment were too great and they needed space which was not then available. ¹⁷ Don Lemoyne also mentions places given over to dyers and hat-makers. ¹⁸ 11

A complete picture of the workshops existing at the Oratory can be deduced from a "Brief Report on the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales" of 23 February 1874, drawn up for the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in view of the approval of the Constitutions. It states: "The artisans in various workshops of the establishment practise the trades of shoemaker, tailor, blacksmith, carpenter, cabinet-maker, baker, book-seller, binder, compositor, printer, hatter, musician, designer, type-founder, stereotyper, lithographer and copperplate engraver. ¹⁹

b. The work experience of John Bosco.

The aptitude and feeling for so vast a list of trades were certainly not improvised. Don Bosco's personal experience in the days of his youth played an important part in their development. 12

¹⁵ Cf. BM 4,460. On the motives and manner of setting up the internal workshops at Valdocco v. also P.STELLA *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, Rome 1980, pp. 243-249, 383=386.

¹⁶ Requests in this sense can be found in some issues of the local newspaper *L'Armonia* of that year; cf. MB 5.540.

¹⁷ The printing press began on 31 December 1861 and the metal workshop when work on the Sanctuary of MHC started in 1862.

¹⁸ BM 7,72

¹⁹ MB 10,946

Of a peasant origin and mentality, he had been able to integrate the knowledge that came naturally to him from the agricultural sphere with the trades experience which he acquired through necessity in the various situations in which he found himself. When he was 15 and frequenting the public school at Castelnuovo he was able to do an apprenticeship in music and sewing with a good man, Roberto Giovanni, who had him as a boarder. "I gave myself wholeheartedly to the the art of music", he wrote later in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. ... "And in no time at all I was able to sew on buttons, make and turn hems, and do simple and double stitching. I learned also to cut out underpants, vests, waistcoats and trousers; and I seemed to have become a budding master-tailor".²⁰

At Chieri, in the years 1833-34, to earn the money to pay for his studies he worked as a waiter in a coffee-bar, and in a short time had picked up all the skills of the proprietor: "After six months I already knew how to prepare coffee and cocoa; and I knew the rules and proportions for making all sorts of concoctions, liqueurs, ice-creams and refreshments."²¹

His scholastic commitments meant that light work of a domestic kind was most suitable, but as soon as the holidays came round, notwithstanding his cassock as a seminarian. he used to engage in heavier and more demanding work: "I made shafts and small items on a lathe; I sewed clothes; I cut out shoes and stitched them together; I worked with iron and with wood. For my house at Murialdo I made a writing desk and a dining table with chairs which remain the masterpieces of my holidays at that time. I used also to cut the grass in the meadows, reap the wheat in the fields, thin out and prune the vines, harvest the grapes, make and tap the wine, and so on".²²

- 13 Rightly would his third successor, Fr Philip Rinaldi, write: "Providence arranged that Don Bosco should practise every trade to some extent: he had been a farmer, tailor, cobbler, blacksmith, carpenter and printer, so that his coadjutor sons would later be

²⁰ MO 45

²¹ MO 62f

²² MO 95f

able to say with a holy pride: Don Bosco once worked at this trade of mine! And so our venerable Founder has become the perfect model of our priests, and also of our Brothers too".²³

Don Bosco's experience of manual work enabled him to understand its value for the purpose of a sound and complete human formation. Despite his seminary studies, he never undervalued secular activities, though he kept an eye on them so as not to compromise ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.²⁴

Although Don Bosco never lost sight of this point (in fact he would often repeat to the Salesian Brothers: You will be able to do things that priests cannot do), he had a high regard for work because of its educational and social value. Among the boys work developed the sense of solidarity with companions, especially at times of moral danger and material need, and trained them to face problems and accept responsibility.

c. Workshops and collaborators

With the setting up of workshops on the premises, the most delicate and urgent problem to be faced was that of the instructors and educators. It was solved "through arduous experiences. Don Bosco summed them up in 1885. He took the opportunity to do so in a discussion in the Superior Chapter (14 December 1885); he recalled the history of the artisans at the Oratory, (...) and listed the various experiments that had been tried before a satisfactory arrangement was reached. (...) Since it was impossible to do without teachers from outside, Don Bosco took care to see that they had no disciplinary or financial duties, entrusting these tasks to Salesian Brothers, the first of whom were Giuseppe Rossi, Giuseppe Buzzetti, and to Federico Oreglia who was a Knight of St Stephen. But how was he to procure trade-masters of his own? 14

²³ 24 July 1927

²⁴ Synodal directives and ecclesiastical literature of the 19th century dealing with formation continually emphasize the unsuitability of a priest undertaking "servile or profane" works; cf. A.GAMBASIN, *Gerarchia e laicato in Italia nel secondo Ottocento*, Antenore Ed., Padua 1969, 330 p.

(Among the artisans at the Oratory) there were always some who felt a greater attraction to him, and to whom he devoted special care in the hope that they would become his own. These found no difficulty in deciding to stay forever with Don Bosco, an expression that we know had a particular significance at the Oratory. (...) They returned as teachers to the workshops where they had once been pupils.”²⁵

And so in the early days it was Don Bosco himself who was the first “assistant” and first “teacher” of arts and trades. Then realistically he had recourse to experts, and brought to the Oratory qualified teachers to whom he paid a salary. In choosing these he soon showed himself very demanding and selective: “If they are going to teach pupils successfully they must be well above average in morality, capability and knowledge, and in consequence must be well paid”.²⁶

It was not easy to find combined in the same person the professional skill and moral and educational aptitudes he wanted. Don Bosco began to see that the solution lay in the use of lay collaborators, preferably resident permanently at the Oratory, who had also been pupils there.

B. *Coadjutor: from lay collaborator to lay religious*

- 15 With the kind of outlook that created no barriers of any kind in the field of christian perfection and the apostolate, Don Bosco enjoyed in fact from the very beginnings of his work the practical and effective collaboration of lay people. This enabled him to learn at first hand their value and the educative importance of their presence among the boys.

It is true that from the testimony and documentation we have available it is not possible to say with certainty whether the Salesian Brother, as we know him today, is a product of the experience and geniality of Don Bosco at the very beginnings of the

²⁵ E.CERIA, *Annali della Societ Salesiana*, Vol.I, Turin 1941, p.651f.

²⁶ From a memorandum of Don Bosco to the President of the Turin Printers' Association in 1872; cf. *Collected Letters II*, p.233-4 (date incomplete).

Congregation. It seems more likely that there was a normal and progressive maturing of this form of vocation, developed by Don Bosco from models existing at the time in his own environment, and subsequently modified and coordinated by him to meet institutional needs.

The term *coadjutor* is found for the first time in the register of the names of the pupils of Valdocco in December 1854, where it appears next to the name of the 30-year-old Alessio Peano, but apparently implies nothing of a religious nature.²⁷ It was a delicate touch on the part of Don Bosco in respect of those whom others used to call simply "servants". It showed rather the nature of the presence of such lay people among the youngsters: they were not simply employees but, to some extent at least, collaborators.

Although, therefore, the name does not express the substance of what we now mean by the word, it is an indication of a development that was taking place.

Fr Joseph Vespignani, in a still unpublished work "the history of the salesian coadjutor", based on a diary of 1930 preserved in the Central Salesian Archives, says explicitly that "the name of 'coadjutor' was what Don Bosco first gave to all his companions and friends who understood the importance of the work of the Oratories, i.e. the teaching, assistance and guidance of poor and abandoned youth in the duties of the christian life".

For many years the name "coadjutor" remained a general term used for the collaborators who lived at Valdocco, whether they were professed in the Society of St Francis de Sales or not. Until the '80s the situation was what P.Stella calls "the non-uniform early conditions, when there were coadjutors with and without vows".²⁸ "The lack of mention of them in the constitutions themselves of 1888 may have reflected a tendency to leave the situation deliberately fluid, because for the purposes of daily life there was no distinction between diocesan clerics and those of Don Bosco, and between coadjutors with vows and coadjutors

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²⁷ A.Peano entered the Oratory in Dec.1854; he stayed three months and left on 23 Feb.1855. Cf. P.STELLA, *Cattolicesimo...*, o.c. p.413.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

who were simply guests or paid workers".²⁹ It was only in 1883 that the GC3 reserved³⁰ the term officially for lay Salesians.

In the first twenty years of the life of the Oratory there were about twenty persons who were called "coadjutors", ranging in age from 14 to 69 years, with an average of over 34. Several of them, although paying a very small amount for their board and lodging, earned a regular payment as servants or as workers in Don Bosco's workshops of arts and trades. Their stay at Valdocco lasted usually for only a short period and was not continuous. They very likely formed part of that well known group of youngsters from the rural areas who came to the capital city of the region, attracted by the newly opened factories which were beginning to take on workers. With Don Bosco they found a provisional place to stay until they got a job; they had no religious bonds or obligations beyond those of a good christian.

17 In the framework of the various groups and categories then existing (priests, salesian clerics, seminarians, students and artisans), the "coadjutors" were inserted in a familiar and vaguely defined way into the Valdocco scene, dominated as it was by the presence of Don Bosco as confessor and spiritual father, and permeated by his own characteristic temperament and ideals. The atmosphere was a family one in which everyone played his part, despite their differences in status.

In the artisans' sector the number and quality of the lay collaborators became ever more significant and necessary. From this group, by now indispensable and well grounded in the style and substance of the model desired by Don Bosco, the reality of the "Salesian Brother" began to take shape. The change, though substantial, was an internal one and implied no change in dress or occupation. The lay workers in fact who preferred to stay with

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ In the minutes of the morning session of the 6th, written by Don G.Marenco, there occurs the following remark: The question was raised as to whether the name of 'coadjutor' should be kept for the secular members or be changed to 'confrere'. Don Bosco, and many others with him, thought there should be no change, but that it would be better not to give the name of 'coadjutor' to the resident paid workers". Rome, Central Salesian Archives, *Minutes of the 3rd General Chapter held at the College of Valsalice in September 1883*; cf. also MB 16, 411ff.

Don Bosco and remain permanently at Valdocco were almost all from the country areas or the heavily populated parts of the towns, areas noted for their "attachment to religion", in which the sense of Providence was very much alive; religious observance, full respect for the clergy, a great devotion to Mary and regular frequenting of the sacraments were very much the order of the day.

The new and noteworthy element that in that time of social instability constituted a wonderful assurance for his first collaborators, was the certainty of being able to remain with Don Bosco, who guaranteed them "work, bread and heaven".

Fr Vespignani confirms this in the unpublished work already referred to: "In general the coadjutor of Don Bosco, on becoming a Salesian, never gave a thought to the acceptance of a rule and the making of vows: he just wanted to stay with Don Bosco and help him to do whatever he had in mind to do; in that he found his happiness. All the rest, like the rule, religious perfection, the profession of vows, would come later, in line with Don Bosco's indications".

C. *The first "Salesian Coadjutors" ("Salesian Brothers")*

The characteristic figure of the "Salesian Coadjutor" was thus becoming slowly defined during the first twenty years of the life of the Society of St Francis de Sales. In this process "it is not easy to determine whether the motives were all present together in Don Bosco's mind from the outset, or whether they came to him gradually later as his work progressively developed. (...) Don Bosco's particular temperament, the manner and caution with which he presented the new Congregation to the young candidates and likely members, to the public and to the civil authorities, the characteristically progressive method he adopted for setting his enterprises on foot, his preponderance for moving from facts to theory and not vice-versa and as a result the paucity of relevant documents in the early years, all render difficult the making of a response".³¹

³¹ P.BRAIDO, *Religiosi nuovi...*, o.c. p.20-21.

19 a. *Some facts*, and with them some leading figures of the first period, can serve to give us a general idea of how, beginning from 1860, the "Salesian coadjutors" properly so called came to be distinguished from the other so-called lay "coadjutors".

In the assembly of 18 December 1859, which formally brought the Society of St Francis de Sales to birth, there were no salesian coadjutors present.³² But soon afterwards on 2 February 1860 there came the acceptance of the first lay member. The minutes of the Chapter of the Society attest that on that date "the youth Joseph Rossi, son of Matthew Rossi of Mezzanabigli (...) was admitted to the practice of the rules of the Society",³³ a phrase which, as used by Don Bosco, meant admission to the test of the novitiate. Joseph Rossi was aged 24; four years later, on 19 September 1864, he made his triennial vows; these were followed in 1868 by perpetual vows, and he died as a Salesian on 29 October 1908. In the Valdocco register his trade is given as "provveditore", which in the context might be best translated as "Prefect's assistant".

20 With young Joseph Rossi the term "coadjutor", already in use as we have seen in the Valdocco registers, came to take on the current terminology of the salesian vocabulary. In fact, hardly three months later, in a letter of 11 June 1860, addressed to Monsignor Frasoni, the exiled Archbishop of Turin, in which the request was made for the approval of the attached draft of the Rule, the title of "coadjutor"³⁴ appears beside the names of Joseph Rossi and Joseph Gaia, while the other signatures are followed by "priest" or "cleric".

To these first two members others were soon added. Their names and tasks are by themselves sufficient to indicate Don Bosco's intention and the significance of his infant institute: Federico Oreglia, Knight of St Stephen, "general administrator" and Gaia, a cook, made their first vows on 4 May 1862, the date of the first official vows of the Salesian Society. The above-mentioned Rossi, in charge of the linen room, head of a workshop

³² Cf. BM 6,181

³³ BM 6,274

³⁴ E.CERIA, *Annali*, o.c., I, 36

and assistant to the Prefect, made his profession two years later; Andrew Pelazza, admitted in 1863 and then for nearly forty years the legendary head of the salesian printing and paper department, died as a Salesian on 23 September 1905. Then there was Peter Enria, also professed in 1878, who had been with Don Bosco from his boyhood and was later his irreplaceable infirmarian; Joseph Buzzetti, professed in 1877, the trusted right-hand man in all the first growth enterprises; Marcellus Rossi, Joseph Dogliani and Dominic Palestrino, linked personally with the three key duties at Valdocco: the doorkeeper, the music, and the sacristy of the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. There were Gioia, Scavini, Belmonte and Molinari, who went with the first missionary expedition to Argentina. By that time there was no work or task of any importance in the growing and developing Congregation where a lay Salesian was not working alongside the Salesian priest or cleric.

“Between 1860 and 1870 the salesian coadjutors seemed to be almost concealed or disguised among the artisans, as heads of arts and trades and junior officers in the Oratory family, just as the salesian priests and clerics led the same kind of life as the diocesan clerics who lived as guests at Valdocco.

From certain points of view this situation reflected the caution and discretion which characterized many of Don Bosco’s undertakings at the time. After the first missionary expeditions he was to tell the Salesians how he had previously been reluctant to use the term “Salesians” on a wide scale. If on the one hand he feared that it might not go down well with his collaborators, as was in fact the case with John Cagliero when he was first invited during the year 1854-55 to become a member of the salesian congregation, on the other hand Don Bosco was afraid that it would lead to the imposition of taxes. Only after 1871, when the security laws had been passed and there was a climate of separation and respect, did Don Bosco push ahead to get the salesian congregation publicly inserted into Italian society and that of the world”.³⁵

21

³⁵ P.STELLA, *Cattolicesimo...*, o.c. p.414f.

Furthermore he waited for the first missionary expedition of 1875 before making a notable change. In presenting his Pious Society to the world at that moment he put aside all circumspection and reserve and replaced them by propaganda and information on a wide scale.³⁶ The letters which came back from Argentina in the first months of 1876 produced a climate of great enthusiasm, and confirmed Don Bosco in his opinion that the formula of "priests, clerics and coadjutors" working together without grades or distinctions in the common identity of "Salesians", was the best arrangement. The Vicar General of Buenos Aires well expressed his judgement of the situation, a new one in the history of religious Orders, referring to the first group of Salesians who had taken up work at S. Nicolas: "Fagnano is tireless, Tomatis fearless, Cassinis constant, Allevena strong, Molinari indefatigable, Gioia invincible, Scavini immovable in scientific, manual and religious work... The college is running perfectly. The Salesian Fathers behave wonderfully and are highly esteemed in the town; they are already known throughout South America".³⁷

The realities of the life lived at Valdocco in the period 1858-1888, the pressures arising from economic and social circumstances (think for instance of the influx of boys from rural and depressed areas as the industrial transformation got under way), and the growing awareness and solidity of the salesian project in the world, gradually shaped the more significant traits of the physiognomy of the salesian coadjutor and his place in the Congregation, and this is reflected in the statistics: in 1870 the coadjutors numbered 23 between professed and novices; the priests were 26.

³⁶ This probably explains why in the more reserved documents the use of the term 'coadjutor' as a lay member of the Congregation is very clear (cf. e.g. the first draft of the Constitutions, which certainly dates from before 1863). Only later towards the '70s in documents available to all (e.g. the *Regulations for the boys and superiors* and also the *Confidential recommendations to Rectors* and similar documents) is the term used without too much distinction from the category of paid workers.

³⁷ In *Annali I*, o.c., p.258. Cf. also the other letters reaching Turin after the first missionary expedition of 1875 reached its destination: the custom is immediately evident of combining the different categories of priests, clerics and coadjutors into the one single reality of "sons of Don Bosco".

b. Place of origin and occupations

It would seem appropriate too to say something of the environments from which the lay Salesians came and the variety of tasks entrusted to them. 22

The earliest coadjutor vocations came from outside. The case of Federico Oreglia, Knight of St Stephen, is a case in point. But the natural breeding ground for such vocations remained Valdocco, with its varied world of workshops for artisans and its other services. A systematic examination of the personal data of the first generation of salesian coadjutors confirms this statement, and with one or two exceptions there was a common process of development: a chance meeting with Don Bosco or information about him heard outside Valdocco, transfer to Turin without any intention of remaining there, first and increasing tasks in many different sectors according to need and the ability displayed, life in community with the intention of staying, request for membership, and religious profession.

One can note a gradual process, marked by clear educational and religious signs, which transformed these fortuitous collaborators, friends or admirers of Don Bosco (never call them subordinates!) into full-time sharers of responsibility in various sectors, both logistic and administrative.

Early in 1870, in fact we already find the names of Joseph Rossi and Andrew Pelazza as legal representatives before the State for various properties; Joseph Rossi was called to the GC4 as a consultant for the salesian coadjutors and in charge of the schools of arts and trades; the head tailor, Peter Cenci who, because of his publication "Principles of cutting", had the titles of "professor" and "knight of the Crown", was often the legal representative of the tailoring section in various exhibitions and state contests; Joseph Gambino. after a long and brilliant period as manager of the "Catholic Readings", "Italian Youth Library", and the "Salesian Bulletin", became in 1891 general manager of all salesian publications.

Naturally not everyone was a specialist. Some were factotums, 23 like Peter Enria or Peter Nasi. They moved without any difficulty

from music classes to the theatre, the kitchen, the barber's shop, the seeking of work for the workshops, and to the task of infirmarian, so that they became (as Don Bosco liked to tell them) "not only useful but necessary". Others managed to combine two jobs, doorkeeper and cook, both of them important because, as it used to be said, with the rector they guaranteed the "successful running of a salesian house". Marcellus Rossi, for example, was doorkeeper for 48 years, while Joseph Falco, Francis Mascheroni and Joseph Ruffatto were famous for their dedication as cooks.

But such great ability and dedication to work would not have been sufficient of itself to make these men what they were, basically similar in their frugality and strength of purpose to a whole series of contemporary Piedmontese figures who were pioneers of projects which in due course grew to large scale enterprises. The key to the understanding of the tasks, whether humble or highly professional, carried out by the salesian coadjutors lay in the sharing of apostolic and educational responsibility, in the direct or indirect help given to the priest for the salvation of souls. If this perspective were not permanently kept in mind, there would be a risk of emptying the work of all soul and purpose, and of rendering completely false the idea of Don Bosco who saw in the coadjutor an apostle and educator, indeed "a true worker for the Gospel": as he explained in 1883 when speaking about the future of the Congregation: "This is the idea of the salesian coadjutor; and I have a tremendous need for a large number of them who will help me in this way".³⁸

D. *The thought of Don Bosco in the last ten years of his life: a source and term of comparison.*

- 24 As has been said already, in the first years of the Congregation's life there already existed the reality of the vitally inserted salesian coadjutor, with tasks and attributes still not well defined but certainly far different from the parallel figure of the traditional

³⁸ MB 16,313

“lay-brother” in the older Orders. But we have few formal texts available in this connection, and those we have are not explicit. We have already mentioned some of the factors that led to this reserve on the part of Don Bosco. And we must also bear in mind the still “intuitive” character of the figure of the salesian coadjutor as a seed containing in itself in embryo subsequent developments, and the natural concern for priestly vocations.³⁹ Don Bosco’s undeniable prudence too ⁴⁰ led him to wait for a time so as to be sure he was doing the right thing in recruiting young artisans, i.e. elements differing in so many ways from the students to whom vocational invitations were traditionally addressed, though not exclusively so.

On the other hand a typical trait in our Father’s character was that *circumspection* expressed, for example, in his reaction after reading the letter from the Rector of the Montpellier Seminary who asked him what was the secret of his pastoral work: “I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and the circumstances seemed to require”.⁴¹ Certainly in all this Don Bosco never acted in haste. For a long time, deliberately or not, he said nothing in public to the pupils of the Oratory on the matter. At the most, in line with his usual strategy, he would ask some youngster if he would like to help him, and on getting a positive reply would lead him gradually to the practice of trusting collaboration which would lead eventually to full dedication in religious profession.

³⁹ Our analysis agrees with that of Fr Braido, which opened the way to reflection on the available documentation on the figure of the salesian coadjutor; he refers explicitly to the factors which would explain “Don Bosco’s reluctance to be more explicit in the matter”; cf. P.BRAIDO, o.c. *Religiosi nuovi*, p.23.

⁴⁰ In a conference he gave at Valdocco on 30 Oct.1876 to 228 professed members, novices and aspirants, Don Bosco himself said: “I can assure you in the Lord’s name that all those who made their profession are undoubtedly called, because *before accepting them I made it a point to know them thoroughly* (emphasis ours), and by admitting them I proved beyond doubt that I was convinced of their worthiness for this great calling. Moreover the superior is obliged under penalty of grievous sin to reject any applicant whom he considers unfit” (BM 12,410).

⁴¹ MB 18,126f

a. *Don Bosco's thought.*

25 Only in 1876, for reasons already stated, did a period begin marked by innovations in the way the vocation of the salesian coadjutor was presented and motivated.

"When on 31 March 1876 Don Bosco spoke directly for the first time to the young artisans of Valdocco about the vocation of the salesian coadjutor, they had already been prepared for its understanding by two eloquent facts: 1) the practical reality: 'despite the long reserve Don Bosco had shown in speaking about the Coadjutors, the Catalogue for that year (1876) showed that they already included 28 perpetually professed, and 22 in triennial vows, with 28 novices and 25 aspirants' (E.CERIA, Annali I, 707); 2) the departure of Salesians for South America, which stirred up great enthusiasm in the Oratory, not least because of the lay collaborators of the priests in the work of evangelization and the spreading of the values of civilization"⁴².

The preparation of the first expedition to Argentina and the departure itself provided an excellent opportunity for Don Bosco's change of practice, and were a good example of those 'circumstances' he had referred to in his reaction to the letter from Montpellier. In fact the news coming back from the missionaries after reaching their destination, and from those who saw the work they were doing there, removed every difficulty and provided an unequalled opportunity for getting the boys to understand just who those 'coadjutors' were who had left several months earlier for Argentina, and why they too were 'salesian missionaries', like the others who had left Valdocco for those far distant lands dressed in cassocks.

26 In the evening of 19 March 1876, in a talk at which the older artisans were present in the course of the festivities in honour of St Joseph which they celebrated with great enthusiasm, Don Bosco said: "Notice that when our Lord spoke of workers in the harvest he did not mean just priests, preachers and confessors as you

⁴² P.BRAIDO, o.c. *Religiosi nuovi*, pp.24-25

might perhaps think. All those who work for the salvation of souls are called apostolic labourers, just as all who help in harvesting are themselves harvesters. See how many kinds of labourers we need to work a field... The Church too needs all kinds of labourers, and I mean all kinds... What a blessing it would be to have enough priests for every city, town, village and hamlet - enough to convert the whole world. Since this is impossible, others must lend a hand. Besides, how are priests to give themselves full time to their ministry if they do not have people to bake their bread and cook their food? Suppose they had to make their own shoes and clothing? A priest must have help, and I believe I am not wrong in saying that all of you here present - priests, students, artisans and coadjutors can become true evangelical labourers in the Lord's vineyard. (...) Now you may be saying to yourselves: 'What are you driving at, Don Bosco? What are you trying to tell us, and why?' My dear sons, that cry 'The labourers are few' did not resound only in past eras; it is more imperative than ever in our present day and age. The harvest allotted to our Congregation grows daily at such a pace that I may well say that we do not know where to begin or how to go about our task... Heart-rending news comes to us from Fr Cagliari in the Argentine Republic... Yes, really, I would hope to see you all eager to work like so many apostles. That is the goal of all my thoughts, cares and efforts".⁴³

What Don Bosco said, though falling in minds already predisposed to understand this kind of language, his nuances and even the things he did not say, provide the immediate preparation for what we might call the first public manifestation of what had already been lived and tried out for a long time in the intimacy of the religious nucleus of the Oratory.

A short time afterwards, and in fact on the 31st of the same month, Don Bosco took up the same line of thought again, as though to emphasize its chief points. Fr Ceria, reporting the fact,

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⁴³ BM 12,459f; this was a conference given in the church of St Francis de Sales to the Salesians of Valdocco; present also were the novices, aspirants and interested artisan students of the higher classes - 205 persons were present in all.

does not conceal his surprise: "Never before", he wrote, "had our Founder spoken publicly and so plainly on this subject. The conference he gave on the feast of St Joseph may have been meant to prepare the way, and in any case the impression it made did create a most favourable impression".⁴⁴ Within the typical context of a "good night" addressed particularly to the young artisans of Valdocco, Don Bosco spoke explicitly of the vocation of the lay religious and of the need for this to increase in the Congregation. "I think that nearly all of you know what the Congregation of St Francis de Sales is. It is not just for priests or aspirants to the priesthood; it is also for artisans. It is a Society of priests, clerics and laymen - artisans especially - who wish to work together, trying to help one another and others spiritually. So keep in mind that not only those who want to be priests can be members of it, but a sizable part is made up of people who remain in the lay state."⁴⁵ "Anyone", added Don Bosco, emphasizing at once its ultimate purpose, "who wants to save his soul is welcome".⁴⁶

The choice of this kind of life was based on two specific and determining characteristics of salesian work: the apostolate, and especially among youth, as readily appears from the entire context, and absolute equality in the brotherly atmosphere of a common life. In this regard Don Bosco's words were deliberately clear and precise: "Note also that our Congregation makes no distinction among members; all are treated equally, be they craftsmen, clerics or priests: we regard one another as brothers; meals are the same for all. What is served to Don Bosco, Fr Lazzero or Fr Chiala, your director, is also served to the rest of the members".⁴⁷

28 Naturally there could not fail to be a reference to the particular circumstances we have already referred to. "Another thing, on joining our Congregation anyone wishing to go to South America would have the chance to do so... You know that some companions of yours who were here last year are now working there as

⁴⁴ BM 12,120

⁴⁵ BM 12,121

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ BM 12,121f

missionaries and are doing much good. While they were here they rated the same as everyone else, they were like you; now they are there and living an extraordinarily happy life. You remember Gioia. Here he was a cobbler; now I hear he has become a famous jack-of-all-trades - he cooks, cobbles and catechizes. You know Scavini who was an apprentice carpenter; well, he heads a cabinet-making shop where he trains some twenty boys and in the short time he has been there he has done wonders. And Belmonte - remember him? We thought he had no special talents when he was here, but now we hear great things about him: he is sacristan, musician, catechist, and even housekeeper of our residence in Buenos Aires. I could also mention Molinari, who is now studying music. Last year they were all simple artisans. Now they are respected and honoured men in Argentina".⁴⁸

Apart from his final references to individuals involved in the recent "American" experiences, it can be seen that Don Bosco added nothing new or different from what salesian novices, and especially the coadjutors, had been learning for years to feel and live. In fact according to notes made by Fr Caesar Chiala, who summarized a talk given by the Saint to coadjutor novices four years earlier in 1872, the ideas he expressed then were substantially the same as those we have just reported. "The purpose of our Society is to save our own souls and the souls of others, especially of youngsters... Nowhere does the communion of saints appear so true as in a religious congregation, where anything one religious does benefits the others. Those who preach and hear confessions must eat. How would they manage without a cook? And teachers need clothes and footwear; how would they get along without tailors and shoemakers? The same is true of our bodies. The head is more important than the leg, the eye more than the foot, but the body needs both. If a thorn pierces the foot, the head, eyes and hand are immediately mobilized to pull it out. Here too the example of a watch-factory is much to the point: when all the components are precision-made, they mesh perfectly, and the result is a perfect precision watch".⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ BM 10,476f

29 Identity therefore as regards the essential points, but there is also a gradual adaptation to current events and the needs of the time, even though explicit reference to the educational and apostolic dimension is not always emphasized, as appears from the "Circular for the seeking of coadjutor vocations",⁵⁰ which Don Bosco compiled and sent to parish priests in January 1880. By this time it was possible to speak freely and publicly, even outside the Oratory, of the "Pious Salesian Society founded by Fr John Bosco", but it was evidently the Saint's desire to make known on a wider scale not only the existence of the lay component of the new Congregation, but more especially the need for it. As Fr Ceria says in presenting the circular: "The expansion of Don Bosco's undertakings made it indeed necessary to recruit an adequate number of coadjutors".⁵¹ What appears as abbreviated, on the other hand, is the role allotted to these members as simply material collaborators in the running of the institutes without any reference to possible involvement of an apostolic or educational nature. Youths were sought who were "willing to engage in any kind of work, in farming or in the kitchen, bakery or dining-room; to do housework or secretarial tasks if qualified, or to continue to ply their trade in the workshops if they were craft-masters. They should be between 20 and about 35 years of age".

30 The circular, despite what Ceria says,⁵² would be open to a reductive interpretation, were it not correctly located in a certain context and understood in accordance with Don Bosco's mind. In his opinion the salesian coadjutor could and must be, as we have already seen, an "evangelical worker", and his presence and service among the young therefore could not be limited purely and simply to administrative functions. The apostolic and educational dimension was in fact so implicit that not even the authoritative "Deliberations of the Third and Fourth General Chapters of the

⁵⁰ MB 14,783f

⁵¹ BM 14,302

⁵² Ibid. According to Ceria the letter was intended to make known the "character" of the coadjutors as distinct from the traditional figure of the "fratres conversi", while the content appears in fact to do the very opposite.

Pious Salesian Society, held at Valsalice in September 1883-86",⁵³ dedicate more than a minimum of space to the point. There is a reference in the *IV deliberation on the "Regulations for Festive Oratories"*,⁵⁴ in the course of the GC3 of 1883: "All Salesians, both ecclesiastic and lay, should consider themselves fortunate to be able to work in the Oratories and be persuaded that this is an apostolate of the greatest importance". This might be considered to carry no great weight unless one examined the documentation of the entire Chapter, which dedicates two of its "Themes" to the salesian coadjutor: the IVth (Culture of the coadjutor confreres) and the Vth (The line of approach to be taken with the sector of material work in Salesian Houses and means for developing vocations in young artisans), discussed in the sittings of 6 September of which we have a summary of the minutes which it will be useful to record.

"6 September - morning. At 9.15 Don Rua opened the sitting with the customary prayer. D.Belmonte read a report on the studies that had been done on theme IV, concerning the culture of the coadjutor confreres. Don Bosco joined the assembly and theme V was read, on the line to be taken with regard to the workmen in Salesian Houses etc. and its relationship with the culture (of the coadjutor confreres) etc. The question was raised as to whether or not the name of 'coadjutor' should be preserved for the secular members or changed to 'confrere'. Don Bosco and many others were of the opinion that there should be no change, but that the name of 'coadjutor' should not be given to resident workmen. In this connection it was pointed out by the confrere Barale that there was a certain coolness between the older ones and those arrived more recently. Don Bosco read the words of Ch.2, art.1: "All the members shall regard each other as brothers, etc.". Thereupon D.Bonetti suggested a deliberation in the following terms: All the members, both priests and laymen, shall treat each other etc. Don Bosco said that it was desirable to preserve the words that were used by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars 'Fratres Coadiutores'.

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⁵³ Published by the Salesian Press, S.Benigno Canavese, 1887.

⁵⁴ Quoted in MB 18,702-704.

"6 September - evening. ... The question was raised as to whether a separate novitiate was necessary for the artisan novices. Don Bosco thought it better that their position be improved by separating them from the other artisans. Nearly everyone was for the founding of a separate novitiate. The question was left undecided and an effort would be made to decide something at San Benigno".⁵⁵

It seems clear that the chapter assembly was concerned not so much about the apostolic activity of the salesian coadjutor but rather about a clearer understanding of his identity and place within the Congregation. This can be deduced from the question of the name, the need for a clear distinction from resident workmen, and the desirability of a novitiate "separate from the other artisans". Strangely enough a separation did come about, but it was from the 'clerics'!⁵⁶

32 Problems of this kind would have been inconceivable before 1874. Their sense and weight arose from the events and changes that accompanied the settling down period of the Congregation after the long process for the definitive approval of the Constitutions by the Holy See. The following is a summary of the more outstanding facts.

Already in 1875, with the departure of the missionaries for Argentina, the first expansion took place beyond Europe, with notable reverberations both outside the Congregation and within its original framework. The first beginnings of the Salesian Family were beginning to develop life and strength through the female branch of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the lay branch, the association of the Cooperators. Every three years from 1877 the whole of salesian life was examined and checked by the guidelines and directives of the General Chapters, presided over by Don Bosco himself only until 1886.

In the meantime the solid growth of the Congregations and the unexpected canonical enclosure for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians meant that there had to be an increase of paid

⁵⁵ Transcription of Fr G.Marenco, Secretary of the GC3, preserved in the Salesian Central Archives; cf. also MB 16,411f.

⁵⁶ Cf. o.c. *Annali* I, 470, and MB 16,413ff.

male employees or of salesian coadjutors. These were called upon to undertake domestic duties and offices that formerly had not existed, or had been taken care of by women volunteers, following the example of Mamma Margaret and Don Rua's mother who were followed by other mothers who lived at Valdocco until 1872.

Following the controversy with Archbishop Gastaldi another problem was added to the several already existing, that of the formation of candidates for the priesthood. This led to a change in the original physiognomy of the Oratory. Life had to be structured in such a way as to meet the demands of canonical visitations concerned about the ecclesiastical spirit of the young levites. It was also necessary to establish a novitiate exclusively for them and entrust it to Don Giulio Barberis as the master.

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This series of facts: growth of the Congregation, increase in the number of resident workers, the pointed separation in the novitiate from the ecclesiastical branch, could not fail to have an adverse effect on the figure and prestige of the salesian coadjutor. The process of distinction from the clerics and priests and the more marked use of such personnel in services reserved formerly to resident employees (who had previously been normally called 'coadjutors') could easily deteriorate into a way of thinking which seemed to down-grade the identity of the lay confrere.

Occasionally and in some communities, these elements of distinction and embarrassment became more marked than usual and were reflected in complaints of those who, although they were Salesians on a par with others, felt that they were treated as 'workers', if not indeed as 'servants'. This was an underlying and enduring complaint which, despite the passing of the years and the greater awareness it brought, was to reappear more than once in salesian documents.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Don Rua's circular of 1 Nov.1906 to Provincials and Rectors on this point is well known: "A further word about our coadjutor confreres... I would like all of you to show them true brotherly affection, and that you show this by treating them with all kindness, listening to them when they speak of their difficulties, showing concern for their health and providing for their needs. We must show by deeds and not just by words that we consider them our true brothers. It pierces me to the heart when I sometimes hear them complain that they are considered not as brothers but servants. Avoid anything that could possibly give them such an impression".

34 Evidence of a feeling of uneasiness on a certain scale is found in the words of several coadjutors who had been formed directly by living contact with Don Bosco, and who had tasted the "honey" (as A. Pelazza puts it), i.e. the Saint's delicate, affectionate and understanding treatment. Many reactions too are more easily understandable when one remembers the vastly differing types there were among the lay Salesians: they varied from those who were semi-illiterate, though endowed with good common sense, to others with a certain professional training. Specific training was almost non-existent, and the result was that if charity grew thin problems arose. As well as this the priest had been considered for centuries as a kind of super-christian and an authority unchallengeable by good christians. This culture - which in fact was in rapid decline towards the end of the century for reasons known to all - made the more distasteful the attitude of certain salesian priests who treated the coadjutors as mere servants. One has only to read some of the proposals put forward in the GC3 (1883) to realize that 'clericalism' was a fact. This is what gave rise to Don Bosco's poignant words in support of the coadjutors. On the other hand the problem was basically one of individuals. Where there was (and is) a deeply lived charity, the communities lived in peace and harmony (and do so still).

35 The documents preserved in the archives, though sober and concise in what they say, seem nevertheless to take on strength and colour when they report the prompt and unequivocal reaction of Don Bosco. Whenever he sensed there was any risk in the offing he promptly opposed any alteration and any possible demeaning of the identity of the salesian coadjutor in his Congregation.

His stand was clear from his ever more decisive and lucid interventions during and after the GC3 in the last five years of his life, and especially on the occasion of his first visit to the newly-opened novitiate for coadjutors and of the last General Chapter before his death.

36 An event of historic importance was the institution of the novitiate for coadjutor novices at S. Benigno Canavese in the autumn of 1883, which fostered the process of distinction of the

salesian coadjutor. The talk Don Bosco gave to the 22 coadjutor novices at S. Benigno on 19 October 1883 can be rightly called, because of its contest and content, a milestone in the process of the clarification of the ideal figure of the salesian coadjutor, an idea which Don Bosco himself said he "had never had the time earlier to explain well".⁵⁸ More than one scholar has rightly seen in this short and familiar talk at S. Benigno the "definitive thought",⁵⁹ the "true concept of the salesian coadjutor",⁶⁰ "perhaps the most important words" ever addressed by Don Bosco to the lay Salesians.⁶¹

It will therefore be useful and opportune to reproduce here the entire transcription of the address passed on to us by Fr Giulio Barberis, before picking out the more significant points. "This morning's Gospel", said Don Bosco, "told us: do not be afraid, little flock. You are indeed a 'pusillus grex', but you must not fear, 'nolite timere', that you will not grow. I am very glad that a regular year of testing has begun for the artisans. This is the first time I have come to S. Benigno since you have been here, and although I have come for the clothing ceremony of the clerics and can only spend a day here, I did not want to leave without saying something to you in particular. I will put two thoughts to you. The first is to let you know what is my idea of the salesian coadjutor. I have never had the time and opportunity to explain it well. You are gathered here to learn the art and practice of religion and piety. Why? Because I need helpers. There are things that priests and clerics cannot do, and you will do them. I need to be able to take one or other of you and put him in a printing establishment, and say to him: 'You look after things and see that all goes well'. To send another to a particular house and say: 'Take care of that workshop or those workers, and see that everything is in order and nothing wanting; make sure that the

⁵⁸ MB 16,312

⁵⁹ M. WIRTH, referring to Don Bosco's intervention at the GC of 1886 and this address of 19 Oct. 1883, says in so many words; "There, it seems, must be sought the definitive thought of Don Bosco", *Don Bosco e i Salesiani*, LDC ed., Turin 1969, p.111.

⁶⁰ This is the title given by Braido to the text of San Benigno, included as an appendix in the "Documents" section of his study *Religiosi nuovi*, o.c. p.62.

⁶¹ This is what P.STELLA asserts, o.c. *Cattolicesimo...*, p.422.

work is done as it should be'. I need to have someone in the house to whom I can confide tasks of greater trust, like the management of money, or dealing with legal cases and representing the house before outsiders. I need people on whom I can rely for the smooth running of the kitchen and for the task of doorkeeper; those who will see to the provision of whatever is necessary and that nothing is wasted, that no one leaves without authority etc. I need people to whom I can entrust tasks like these, and you must be such people. In a word you must not just be people who work or labour, but people who direct matters. You must be masters and supervisors of the other workers, not just servants. All this of course according to a rule and within the necessary limits; but all of you must play your part in the directing process, as though you yourselves were responsible for the workshops. This is the idea of the salesian coadjutor. And I have a tremendous need for many who will come and help me in this way! And so I am happy that you have suitable and neat clothing, that you have proper beds and cells, because you must be masters and not servants, not subjects but superiors. And now I put to you the second thought. Because you will have to help me in this way in large enterprises which may also be delicate ones, you must acquire many virtues, and because you will have to oversee others you must first of all give good example. The presence of one of you must be an automatic guarantee of order and morality, and that good is being done. Because 'if salt loses its savour...'. And so let us conclude as we began: *Nolite timere, pusillus grex*. Do not be afraid; you will grow in number, but more especially you must grow in goodness and strength. Then you will become like unconquerable lions and will be able to do a great deal of good. And then, '*complacuit vobis dare regnum*'. A kingdom and not slavery, but especially you will have the eternal Kingdom".⁶²

37 These words from the mouth of Don Bosco and in the context of the world about him cause no astonishment nor do they indicate any great innovations. We have drawn attention to them because

⁶² MB 16,312f

of the insistence and emphasis on some fundamental ideas, and first among them that the coadjutor brings an adequate response to typically 'non-sacred' needs, and especially to those which a certain theology of the priesthood prevalent at the time did not look kindly on in presbyteries, and still less in seminaries; that the coadjutor should do what the anticlericalism of the time would not allow to priests in working-class areas. But tasks of this kind, precisely because they were different from those of priests and clerics and therefore subject to possible discrimination,⁶³ had to be exercised with full right and authority.

The repeated use of the term "*padroni*" in Italian (English: master or 'boss') emphasizes the full equality and participation of the salesian coadjutors in the spiritual and temporal advantages of the Congregation. The emphasis was fully intended by Don Bosco and its purpose, as will be stated later at length by the witness who put on paper the document referred to, was to "raise the depressed spirit of the coadjutor confreres".⁶⁴

The second idea well highlighted in the conclusion to Don Bosco's address at S. Benigno states once again a reality which is taken for granted in the salesian plan, but which we do well to endorse because of the twisted meanings given to the concept of "*padrone*". Don Bosco was careful to recall that everything had to be understood in an educational and apostolic sense. Outside this environment the terms used no longer have the meanings he attached to them. Less than forty years later in fact, during the GC12 (1922) some perplexity was expressed regarding the account of the conference at S. Benigno "because there were in it some

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⁶³ Note how wisely Don Bosco extricated himself from these conflicting tensions: on the one hand he did not want to oppose precise indications stemming from contemporary theological principles, from the Church's law, Synods and local authorities which wanted decorum and ecclesiastical spirit to be respected and safeguarded - this in fact had led him to separate the novitiates, i.e. to allow a certain discrimination! On the other hand he did not want to introduce into his religious family a stratification into categories, because they were contrary to his idea of the laity and quite opposed to his own experience.

⁶⁴ In the opinion of P.Stella the difficult situation was caused not so much by the ecclesiastical sector but rather by the coadjutors themselves, "those better prepared from a cultural point of view and more aware of their own professional ability and value. It may be that these (printers, tailors, booksellers, etc.) were the ones to whom Don Bosco was directly replying". (O.c. *Cattolicesimo*, p.425).

expressions that could be badly interpreted" and that would render doubtful its authenticity.⁶⁵ The testimony that followed it however and the kind of reflections to which it gave rise led to the opposite conclusion, and made evident, as Don Ceria would emphasize later in this connection ("Here Don Bosco is to be explained by Don Bosco"),⁶⁶ the importance of not taking in isolation words and expressions used by the Saint.⁶⁷

39 Hardly three years after the visit to S. Benigno, and in a much more authoritative setting with wider reverberations - during the GC4 at Valsalice in September 1886 - Don Bosco took up once again and spelled out the essential points of the identity and function of the lay Salesian. The document, which in fact bore the title "Concerning the Coadjutors", was to constitute the response to the second theme: "The line of approach to be taken with the sector of material work in Salesian Houses and means for developing vocations in young artisans". The terms used and the literary genre of the document as it was drawn up and approved by the Chapter reveal to a large extent the current theological language and emphasize the clerical perspective. In particular they well reflect the historical situation of the Congregation, very concerned as it was about a growing institutional framework and called upon to face up to ever wider pastoral commitments.

⁶⁵ This point was first raised in the tenth meeting of the Chapter on 28 April when Fr Pedemonte, who was presenting the 5th theme concerning the coadjutors, used the hand-written account of Don Bosco's conference at San Benigno (which is referred to here) from the archives of the same house. In the eleventh meeting (29 April) Fr Costa, one of the capitulars, raised the doubts and difficulties mentioned, thereby provoking a lively discussion on the historical value and authenticity of the document itself. Defending its genuine character were Fr Nay (Prefect at San Benigno in 1883), Fr Giulio Barberis who wrote it, and Fr Fascie. The Rector Major himself "confirmed what had been said by Fr Nay, and added that in the 3rd General Chapter, when it had been proposed that the coadjutors form a separate and lower category, Don Bosco had opposed it with deep emotion, exclaiming: 'No, no, no; the coadjutor confreres are the same as all the others'." (Salesian Central Archives, *Minutes of 12th Gen.Chapter, 1922*, AS 04.

⁶⁶ *Annali* I, 704

⁶⁷ This is the conclusion that appears from the minutes of the 12th meeting of the Chapter assembly (1 May 1922): "The meeting opened at 9 a.m. with the customary prayer. After the reading of the minutes it was observed that it would be better to say that the various expressions used by Don Bosco in the conference he gave at San Benigno in 1883 should not be considered in isolation but interpreted in the sense of other conferences he gave on other occasions": AS 04.

The work of this last General Chapter presided over by Don Bosco would seem more clear-cut and understandable if read against the broad background of salesian events in the years 1880-1886.

b. *Salesian events 1880-1886.*

The decrees against religious Congregations in France of 29 March 1880⁶⁸ had certainly prompted the rectors of the three French houses then existing, Don Bosco himself⁶⁹ and the whole directive body of the Congregation to adopt an attentive and preventive strategy. The wave of anticlerical feeling on the other side of the Alps was a potent endorsement of the desirability of having ever more lay Salesians available. They would be able "to do good better and more freely" than could priests and clerics in clerical dress. 40

In the meantime the closer contacts with the Holy See, occasioned by the intense correspondence concerning the first "Three-yearly Reports" and later the project, which subsequently became a providential reality, of the first salesian presence in Rome itself, certainly played a part in giving to the Congregation a physiognomy and outlook ever more inserted into the broad canvas of "Catholic works", which the GC of 1886 specifically dealt with.

The expansion of the Salesians, combined with that of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians under the guidance of Mother Caterina Daghero after the recent death of St Maria Domenica Mazzarello (1881), was of interest not only to Italy with its various zones, but also to Europe with the first foundations in Spain and Latin America, with progress in Argentina and the beginnings of new work in Uruguay and Brazil.

⁶⁸ Cf. the whole of chap.XXXII of the *Annali* I, 362-369.

⁶⁹ The directives sent in writing by Don Bosco to Don Ronchail are interesting; the last of them refers to the point at issue here: "Let it be clearly understood", he advised, "that we are for agriculture, arts and trades ... to train supervisors, teachers, and especially printers and composers": *Collected Letters* IV, Don Bosco to Don Ronchail, Rome 23 March 1880.

41 Then at the dawn of the 1880's a special importance attached to the first entry of the Salesians into the territories of the South American Indians,⁷⁰ an undertaking which the religious romanticism of the end of the 19th century was to support with all the glamour and fascination it could muster. The Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Mgr Aneyros, who had the benefit of salesian help for the Italian emigrants in his diocese, thought that the time had come "to offer to Don Bosco the whole of Patagonia which he had so much at heart".⁷¹ Turin's reply was consistent with the commitment expressed in the well-known phrase of the Saint on the occasion of the first missionary expedition: "We are beginning a great work".⁷²

The missionary dream of 1883⁷³ had only served to foster the enthusiasm and adherence to initiatives for the "new world".

The same year saw the coming of Cardinal Alimonda to Turin. In the following year the long awaited concession of the privileges became a fact, while in 1885 Leo XIII gave Don Bosco a Vicar with the right of succession. The choice fell on Don Michael Rua, aged 48, of which 40 years had been spent at the Founder's side. The appointment was made known by means of a circular which carried for the first time the official badge of the Congregation.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Fr Ceria wrote in fact that "The Salesian Missions of America, in the strict sense of the word, began in 1879; because that year saw the first contact of salesian missionaries with the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia, immense areas and still very largely unexplored": *Annali* I, 378.

⁷¹ "I beseech you", he wrote with expressions dear to prelates of the time, "in the merciful bowels of our Lord Jesus Christ, to hasten to my aid for the saving of so many abandoned souls".

⁷² The work done in Patagonia in only four years was in fact very considerable. The official report sent to the Holy See, with due caution concerning the generous nature of the figures, speaks of 500 Indian baptisms in 1883 and a total of 5328 between 1879 and 1883; it also mentions two colleges at Patagones, one for 69 boys and the other for 93 girls, and of wide-scale explorations covering 1137 km.

⁷³ "It was the feast preceding that of St Rose of Lima (30 August) and I had a dream...". So began Don Bosco's account to members of the 3rd General Chapter concerning what happened on 4 September of the same year (cf. *Annali* I, 423-434). The dream has acquired a special importance and effect with the founding of Brasilia.

⁷⁴ The design was that of Prof. Boidi for the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The circular was first printed with the date "All Saints, 1885"; it was submitted to Don Bosco who read and revised it here and there, and then had it printed with the date 8 December, feast of the Immaculate Conception: cf. *Annali* I, 530ff.

c. *The document of 1886 (GC4).*

It is within this outline of salesian life and events, which in turn must be inserted into the wider context of the Church and contemporary society, that the document "Of the Coadjutors" of the GC4 (1886) must be read and analyzed. Against the background of the substantially unchanged view of the identity of the lay Salesian, the members of the Chapter at Valsalice, in terms at once theological and ascetical, juridical and administrative, seemed to emphasize a particular concern - that of specifying and confirming the specific "offices" of the coadjutor confrere in the list of ever-growing tasks of the apostolate and salesian structures: to help the priests in the works of christian charity proper to the Congregation... by directing and administering the various business concerns of our Pious Society, by becoming craft-masters in the workshops or catechists in the festive oratories, and especially on the foreign missions". 42

Although the list of functions goes back to the first and well known idea of Don Bosco, who left the lay religious with a wide margin of responsibility and authority, it is immediately linked with the character and clerical nature of the Congregation, a requirement on which the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had kept on insisting, both before and after the approval of the Rule.

The separate novitiate for coadjutors, although instituted for motives of access to a workshop and especially to ensure for the clerics a specific formation in ecclesiastical spirit, was begun in the fiery atmosphere of social vindication and advancement of the working class characteristic of the end of the 19th century. This could have given rise to a practical risk: that of fostering in the coadjutor confreres a vindictive mentality, or the sense of an inferior position with respect to the priests, who alone were permitted by the Constitutions to attain the office of "superiors".⁷⁵ 43

⁷⁵ But reference to the salesian ELENCO shows that in reality the only novitiate for coadjutors alone was that of San Benigno, and for practical purposes it ceased to be such during the world war. In 1919 it had only 3 coadjutor novices (ex-military personnel) and in 1920 ceased to be a novitiate altogether. At the same time there were other novitiates with coadjutor novices in the great majority, but with clerical novices mixed in with them.

For this reason the chapter document devotes ample space to the question, and uses a language and emphasis (note the use of capital letters) proportionate to the importance of the content.

“1. (The Coadjutors) will in all times and circumstances show respect to the Superiors and to the Priests, seeing in them true Fathers and Brothers, to whom they must live united in the bond of fraternal charity so as to form one heart and one soul (Reg. Ch. II, 2).

2. They will carry out with diligence the office assigned to them whatever it may be, remembering that it is not the importance of the work which makes it pleasing to God, but the spirit of sacrifice and love with which it is carried out.

3. No outside work or commitments will be taken on without the express consent of the Superiors.

4. In every place and circumstance, in the house and outside it, in their words and actions, let them always show that they are good religious; because it is not the habit that makes a religious, but the practice of religious virtues; and both God and men have greater esteem for a religious dressed as a fervent and exemplary layman, than for one who wears a distinctive habit but is tepid and inobservant”.⁷⁶

12.2 Development in the wake of the origins: from Don Rua to Vatican II

A. Period of office of Don Michael Rua (1888-1910)

a. From workshops to trade schools.

44 The guidelines of GC4 present a line of conduct which sums up the various experiences as gradually revised and corrected by

⁷⁶ Deliberations of 3rd and 4th General Chapters of the Pious Salesian Society held in Valsalice in September 1883-86, S.Benigno Canavese 1887, pp.16-17.

Don Bosco. In the education of the "artisans", as Fr Ceria notes, our Saint did not intend to stop at workshops, but "his ideal was to make them true trade schools; this was to be the work of a time of which he could then see only the dawn ahead".⁷⁷

It was while Don Rua was Rector Major (1888-1910) that this transformation began to come about. The new needs in this field were reflected in subsequent General Chapters, particularly the 7th (1895), 8th (1898) and 10th (1904).

From 1898 the professional schools came to depend on Fr Joseph Bertello (1848-1910), who may be considered their great organizer, not only for the impulse he gave to their extension, but because he sought to put some regular order and method into their technical, cultural and educational organization.

In the environment of the world of the coadjutor confreres, these modifications led to important changes: the new candidates no longer came in most cases from young or older collaborators, or from resident workers already inserted for various reasons in the web of salesian activity, but in ever growing numbers from the "scholastic" artisan or professional sector.

b. Some statistics.

With regard to the numbers of coadjutor confreres, two phenomena are met with of different kinds: one in the twenty years from 1880-1900, and the other in the twenty years that followed. In the period from 1880-1900 there is a notable numerical increase: the number rose from 182 to 1061 coadjutor confreres; whereas between 1900-1920 there was a much more modest increase, from 1061 to 1350. As a percentage of all Salesians the coadjutors were 30% in 1900, and had dropped to 26.4% in 1920. There is also a sharp rise in the average cultural level (with the complete disappearance of all illiterate members), the progressive movement towards obtaining qualifications, and a marked falling off in unskilled work.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ E.CERIA, *Annali I*, p.653

⁷⁸ P.STELLA, o.c. *Cattolicesimo...*, p.420.

c. *Documents.*

46 Every now and then in the documents of the time we find concern shown for the figure and duties of the coadjutor confrere, and an endorsement of the basic indications given by the Founder and the General Chapters. They start from the need for an intense work of vocational recruitment and lay emphasis on the coadjutor's sharing in educational responsibility, and on his irreplaceable apostolic and missionary role.

Don Rua's circular of 31 January 1897 for the ninth anniversary of the death of Don Bosco deals with this very point: "Because of the particular character of our Pious Society, not only is there a vast harvest reserved for the ecclesiastics, but our dear coadjutor confreres are also called to carry out a true apostolate for the benefit of the young in all our houses and especially in our trade schools; for this reason there is need to cultivate religious vocations also among our young artisans and helpers. The coadjutor is specially needed for the trade schools that the Salesian Society wants so much to establish in America, Africa, Asia and various countries of Europe. It was precisely to prepare exemplary salesian coadjutors from among our workers that the Fourth General Chapter drew up many rules marked by zeal, charity and prudence for the moral, intellectual and professional training of our pupils... While insisting that vocations be cultivated, I am not suggesting anything new, I am not asking for anything extraordinary, I am asking you only to imitate the example of Don Bosco and to observe those decisions which, in the desire of doing good, we have made for ourselves in our General Chapters".⁷⁹

Don Rua confirms the considerable change that had taken place in the vocational sector when he sets out the practical details of the strategy to be used: "It is absolutely necessary to observe which young artisans show signs of a vocation, and then cultivate them as aspirants, enable them to take part in a retreat during the

⁷⁹ In M.RUA, *Lettere Circolari*, Turin 1910; the quotations are taken from the 1965 edtn. p.187-189; letter dated Turin, 31 Jan.1910.

holidays, and accept... the requests of those who want to be novices when they reach the age of 16 or 17 years".⁸⁰

In the following year, in the circular letter of 24 June 1898, 47 Don Rua comes back again on the same point: "I exhort you to cultivate not only those young people who show good promise of becoming clerics, but also those who can become good coadjutors and trade-masters. You know that from all sides and especially from the missions we are getting repeated and pressing requests to set up workshops and trade-schools, because one of modern society's greatest needs is the christian education of the worker".⁸¹

Many of the young people in our colleges belonged to families hit by the economic crisis. For many of them the figure of the salesian coadjutor who was concerned about them and who, as a technician and head of a workshop combined stability and the certainty of a proper place in society with the witness of a christian response to current social problems, proved to be a strong incentive for many of them to think about a religious vocation, especially when other professional outlets seemed lacking.

It is striking that no fewer than six new novitiates were opened in these years: at Lorena in Brazil (1890), Bernal in Argentina (1895), Santiago-Macul in Chile (1895), Genzano near Rome (1896), Arequipa in Peru (1897), and Burwash in southern England (1897).⁸²

The dawn of the new century opened the salesian world to a 48 greater hope of work in the missions, because personnel was growing in number and quality. A letter of Don Rua in the early days of 1900 provides news and information which gives us a more up-to-date knowledge of the situation: "I must send a word of well deserved praise to those Rectors and Prefects of our houses who through their industry and zeal have been able to sow and develop the seed of a vocation among our resident workers and cause it to take root. This is an excellent thing because, as well as the great advantage to their souls in becoming religious, they increase the number of our coadjutor confreres of which our Pious

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ M.RUA, *Lettere Circolari*, 207f; dated Turin, 24 June 1898.

⁸² Cf. *Lett.Circolari* n.18, 20 Jan.1898.

Society so greatly feels the need. And in this connection it gives me great pleasure to tell you that the desire I have expressed in earlier letters to see an increase in the number of novitiates for coadjutors and artisans were not just words thrown to the winds, because I am happy to say that there are already seven such houses in existence and they are producing consoling results. It is to be hoped that they will increase still further in number, and that as far as possible every province will have at least one of them".⁸³

The continual growth and expansion of salesian work seems to have led to the desire to make up by these authoritative reminders for a certain hardly perceptible falling off of interest in the novel aspect of the coadjutor confrere. A rapid glance through the rich and lively vocational and propaganda material of the time, at the topics chosen and discussed in the well 'known Cooperators' congresses (at Bologna in 1895 and Buenos Aires five years later) is sufficient to show to what extent attention to the lay component of the Congregation was falling off. The very mechanism for the preparation of the first steps in the process for Don Bosco's canonization and its repercussions served to spread ever more widely around the world the image of the Salesian in clerical dress as the natural and logical prolongation of the "holy priest of the boys of Turin". The Salesian in lay dress took a back seat.

49 In reality the danger was rather to the external image of salesian works. Within the communities "the aspect of harmonization between priests, clerics and coadjutors far outweighed that of differentiation and disagreement. In each house unifying factors were such things as meditation in common, equal treatment at table, shared responsibility in the assistance of the youngsters, and the preparation for theatrical productions and festive celebrations. At provincial level the annual retreat served an analogous purpose. The common qualities of priests and laymen coalesced easily in the figure of the coadjutor, outstanding for his spirit of work, joviality and religious observance. Every house could point to some coadjutor who reflected the models of the

⁸³ M.RUA, *Lett.Circolari*, 245f; dated Turin, 20 Jan.1900.

preceding generation. San Benigno and Turin had the master-tailor Peter Cenci (1871-1939). Valdocco had among others the architect Giulio Valotti (1881-1953). In Argentina Charles Conci (1877-1947), the printer and belligerent journalist, and the architect Henry Botta (1859-1949) were eminent. Ecuador had Giacinto Pancheri (1847-1947), intrepid builder of roads and bridges. Belgium had a musical expert in Antoine Auda (1879-1964). Coadjutors continued to carry out domestic and agricultural work, and some of them were the most spiritually mature among the confreres. Valdocco had Joseph Balestra (1868-1942); Palestine, the Servant of God Simon Srugi (1878-1943)".⁸⁴

All this without prejudice to the fact that Don Rua felt obliged to intervene on 1 November 1906 to stave off, with the same energy and depth of feeling of Don Bosco, the periodic risk of a downgrading: "Not only with words", he wrote, "but also with facts must we make it clear that we regard them as our brothers".

B. *In the expanding Congregation: from the period of office of Fr Paul Albera (1910-1921) to that of Fr Renato Ziggotti (1952-1965) and to Vatican Council II.*

a. *After the first world war.*

After the crisis of the first world war begins that period in the history of the salesian coadjutor that runs from when Fr Albera became Rector Major (1910) to the end of Fr Ziggotti's term of office (1965), a path marked by new ways for seeking more vocations and a new process of religious formation to confirm them.

To meet adequately the demands for personnel, the documents of the Congregation hammer away incessantly at the need for the care and perfecting of the vocations of coadjutor confreres. "From many different parts", we read in a circular of 1920, "pour in insistent requests for personnel, and especially for coadjutors. (...)

⁸⁴ P.STELLA, *Cattolicesimo...*, p.426.

I must insist on this point, because it cannot be said too often that the progress of our agricultural and trade schools depends to a great extent on personnel well trained from both a religious and technical point of view".⁸⁵

The following letter of 24 December of the same year is in the same vein: "It is especially among the humble souls", wrote the same Councillor General for Arts and Trades, then Fr Peter Ricaldone, "educated in an environment of simple propriety, genuine familiarity, solid piety and work marked by a serious approach and increased in value by the self-sacrificing dedication of those concerned, that serious vocations appear and come to maturity".⁸⁶

51 In 1921 Fr Albera intervened with his *Circular on Vocations*"⁸⁷ where, says Fr Braido, "he gives us some rich and significant pages, in which he homes in with discernment and precision on the motive for the apostolic and educational mission that the Coadjutor has in common with the priest, with the peremptory denial of any dualism and the decisive affirmation of his qualities as a member of an effectively educational Congregation".⁸⁸ In this letter there appears for the first time a reference to the fact that the seeking-out and following up of such vocations is entrusted primarily to the coadjutors themselves: "But above all, these coadjutor vocations must be sought and cultivated by the coadjutors themselves, not only in schools and workshops where opportunities may be less readily available, but in times of recreation during which they too should be among the boys, and take a friendly part in their games and conversations. In this field good coadjutors can exercise a more efficacious influence than clerics and priests; in fact the most a cleric or priest can do is

⁸⁵ P.RICALDONE, in ASC 24 June 1920, p.16f.

⁸⁶ Idem in ASC 24 Dec.1920, p.103.

⁸⁷ P.ALBERA, Circular Letter *Sulle vocazioni*, Turin, 15 May 1921, in ASC 4 (1921), pp. 205-207.

⁸⁸ P.BRAIDO, o.c. *Religiosi nuovi*, p.31. It is in this circular that is clearly emphasized the fact that coadjutors do not constitute a second order, since in the Congregation priests and laymen "all enjoy the same rights and privileges; the character of sacred orders certainly imposes greater obligations but priests, clerics and coadjutors all have the same rights".

describe to youngsters the life of a salesian coadjutor, but the coadjutor lives the life before their eyes, offering them a model; and we know that 'verba movent, exempla trahunt': if words can move, it is example that draws people along...".⁸⁹.

b. *Period of office of Fr Philip Rinaldi (1922-1931).*

The elements put forward once again in the circular of Fr Albera, and especially those which were matters of principle, in association with other phenomena of a religious, social and economic nature, form the roots of the complex and organic work carried out in the decade 1922-1931. Fr Rinaldi's years as Rector Major have been called "the most fruitful and fundamental period for a clearer and more mature idea of the coadjutor".⁹⁰

52

This decade saw the combined work of the Councillor General for Arts and Trades, Fr Joseph Vespignani, and the Prefect General, Fr Peter Ricaldone, under the inspiration of Fr Philip Rinaldi, Rector Major.

The GC12 had as its Theme V: "On the basis of our Constitutions [brought into line with recent Code of Canon Law]: to ensure a more solid religious culture and greater professional competence for the coadjutor confreres; to investigate what other forms of professional school could be introduced, in addition to those commonly in use in boarding schools".

53

And the Councillor General for Trade Schools (Fr Vespignani) noted in ASC 16: "The recently concluded General Chapter (...) has pointed out once again our lack of the personnel needed to carry out our mission in the professional and agricultural sectors; in other words we do not know at present how we can provide new salesian professional personnel for the provinces. While every year we use our best efforts to gather from every college and oratory a group of clerical aspirants, we do or obtain little with regard to a contribution from the trade schools, a group that should parallel the first. We must therefore commit ourselves to the

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.84

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.31

utmost to fill the gap as demanded by our very important apostolate, and so seek out from the very beginnings of trade and agricultural schools, from the first acceptance of pupils, from the first classes in trade training, those artisans and agricultural trainees who show in some way the germ of a vocation to be cultivated, and then lead them with loving care to our objective. And indeed to ensure that there are suitable means for forming such pupils to a true salesian life at the level of its professional and agricultural culture, it will be well to give thought to centres of formation where this culture can be not only maintained but perfected. Each one in his own circle of operations needs first to think, and then set about approaching, informing, fostering and cultivating individuals who show some initial hope of success. And given the present scarcity of qualified salesian teachers in this field, who would have to be withdrawn from the central houses of formation to provide for the provinces, I consider it my duty to insist with the Superiors that this scarce element, already partly formed, should not be scattered, but that the effort should be made rather to keep them together so as to establish schools at a higher level, beginning with the more important provinces or assigning a particular house for provinces of the same language, progressing eventually to the possibility of one or more such houses in every country. These houses would be breeding-grounds for trade-teachers or heads of agricultural institutes".⁹¹

Fr Vespignani provides also a historical motivation for the marked increase in both teaching and premises in the trade and agricultural scholastic sector decided on in 1920 for the whole Congregation.⁹² Many of the things he wrote in this connection are preserved in the Salesian Central Archives.⁹³ Although all of

⁹¹ ASC 16 (24 Oct.1922), pp.29-30.

⁹² Cf. circular published in ASC of 24 Dec.1920, pointing out the need to salvage a special prerogative of salesian work: at Don Bosco's death trade-schools accounted for 34% of salesian work; 32 years later the proportion had dropped to 14%.

⁹³ They consist in particular of notes for conferences given at the theologate in Turin (Crocetta), a conference to coadjutors at Sampierdarena, a "History of the Salesian Coadjutor" already referred to in the course of the present work, and some notes for a discussion on the 2nd theme of the GC13.

them are written in the form of brief notes, together they present a "History of the Salesian Coadjutor". The texts we have, apart from their undoubted merit as a first attempt at a historical reflection on previous events, are in fact no more than a simple concatenation of the facts that occurred while Don Bosco was alive, and that have been normally handed down in salesian tradition.

In reality, "*The Salesian Coadjutor in the thought of Don Bosco*", a fundamental letter which Fr Philip Rinaldi as Rector Major published in the ASC 40 of 1927,⁹⁴ well expresses a permanent link with salesian tradition, and especially with that of the origins, which sees the coadjutor confreres as continuers of Don Bosco's mission, and at the same time it brings the coadjutor's figure up to date by applying to it the values that theological progress had brought to light. His words seem to echo the poignant expressions previously used by Don Bosco and Don Rua: "In the Founder's mind", he wrote, "it is true that the priests assume with sacred Orders greater duties and responsibilities, but all have equal rights, priests, clerics and coadjutors; the latter in no way constitute a lower order but are true Salesians, obliged to the same perfection and to carry out each in his own art, trade or profession, the same educational apostolate which forms the essence of the Salesian Society... He wanted the coadjutor equal to himself and to his sons who had been raised to the dignity of priests: the means, equipment, support, goal and merits are the same for all, as is the daily food".⁹⁵

One can detect a new emphasis or line of approach, or rather a new way of looking at the original reality: "The Salesian Coadjutor is not a second-best to the priest, he is not the helper or right arm of the priests who are his brothers in religion but their equal who, as far as perfection is concerned, may precede and outrun them as daily experience can fully confirm. (...) The

⁹⁴ In ASC 40 (1927), 572-580. This important letter was written by Don Rinaldi to mark the foundation on 17 July 1927 of the Missionary Agricultural School at Cumiana, thanks to the donation of a large territory by the Flandinet sisters for the formation of missionary personnel.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Lord's call: 'Si vis perfectus esse...' is not meant only for those who are priests, nor only for the small number of those destined to carry out humble services in religious communities; it is addressed also and still more to those who have a great desire to live the religious life to the full, consecrating themselves by vow to teach in primary and secondary schools, to assist crowds of boys day and night, to be teachers and craft-masters in the schools of the many arts called for by human society, and in the agricultural schools which prepare skilled personnel destined to teach others the profession rendered noble by Jesus in his parables, when he did not hesitate to call it the very profession of his heavenly Father: Pater meus agricola est".⁹⁶

55 Almost as a follow-up to Fr Rinaldi's letter, the ASC of 24 October 1930 carried a simple commentary by Fr Joseph Vespignani on the historic address of Don Bosco at S. Benigno Canavese of 1883, "for the purpose especially of drawing attention to its formative, ascetic and religious aspects".

An important element for the formation of the salesian coadjutor and for a greater sensitization in his regard was the institution and organization of the Aspirantates for Coadjutors and of the Houses for their further training after the novitiate. To the houses of Ivrea, Foglizzo and Penango was added with all the weight of "a work of primary importance", as Fr Rinaldi called it,⁹⁷ the house of Cumiana for aspirant coadjutors being trained to work in the agricultural sector. Three years later, in 1930, another munificent donation, the Count Rebaudengo Institute (Turin) became a centre of formation in arts and trades for the missions. In the Bernardi Semeria Institute, which had been built at Colle Don Bosco since 1918, there was started up simultaneously an aspirantate for training boys in agriculture and trades, and for providing advanced courses for young salesian coadjutors already in possession of basic qualifications.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 572

c. *Period of office of Fr Peter Ricaldone (1932-1951).*

The circular of Fr Ricaldone on "Novitiate" (April 1939) emphasized the validity of the single novitiate for both clerical and coadjutor novices. The letter also contains useful material for taking stock of the concept of the salesian coadjutor at the time and of the relationships existing within the Congregation. "In the first place let it be said that, although can.564, §2 lays it down that coadjutor novices should have a separate section of the novitiate, in our Society there does not in fact exist between clerics and coadjutors the difference found in other religious orders. Moreover, in order definitely to make the union between our confreres stronger and more enduring, it is better to make clerics and coadjutors live like real brothers right from the beginning of the novitiate, seeing that it is a fact that afterwards in our Institutes they will be in constant contact with one another in the carrying out of our salesian work in all its manifold branches. Any separation in the novitiate might seem to savour of a difference of ideals, while in actual fact the Sons of Don Bosco must stand side by side in cooperation, working in fraternal unity for the realization of identical aims in the one mission for all. The salesian coadjutor, though not a priest, is and must be in the first place an educator, and he must carry out this apostolate motivated by the same ideas and purposes, and generally in the same field of work and side by side with the priests and clerics who are his brothers, working with them in the festive Oratories, in the Technical and Agricultural Schools, on the Missions, in assisting in class and in the workshops for the benefit of souls. (...) The practice therefore that is in use among us excludes the necessity of applying to the religious of our Society the ruling of can.558, where it says that 'in Orders where there are two classes of members, the novitiate which is made for one category is not valid for the other'; in our Society there is only one category of confreres. The accidental diversity that comes about from the sharing out of occupations only serves to complete, to perfect and to reinforce the homogeneous nature of the purpose and body of the Congregation. Moreover, article 12 of the Constitutions, speaking of the form of the Society, says

expressly that our Society consists of ecclesiastical and lay members who shall live together in common. (...) It is only natural, however, that this union of clerics and coadjutors in the one novitiate should require that in arranging the house for their formation due account be taken of the proper training required for the different types of coadjutors coming from technical and agricultural schools, and from other houses and institutes. There is no need to set up true and large workshops. (...) In general it will not be difficult to find facilities for tailors, shoemakers, carpenters and wood-carvers; and as time goes on the more indispensable needs of even the mechanics and electricians can be met. For all of them, and particularly for those who were pupils in literary subjects, time and opportunity can be given for exercise in drawing and draughtsmanship. Those destined for agriculture can be given facilities for working in the kitchen garden and on any farms that may be attached to the house. The other coadjutors can always give an efficacious hand in domestic duties about the house".⁹⁸

Although the decision was made to have a single novitiate the arrangement to continue with a separate aspirantate was considered still valid, as also was the two or three year higher course for coadjutors who already had the basic technical qualifications.

57 Thus the GC15 (1938) approved for an experimental period of six years, together with the regulations for all the houses of formation also the courses for the further professional training of the coadjutors.⁹⁹ The decision was renewed in 1947 by the GC16.

The ravages of the second world war, preceded by the civil war in Spain (1936), accompanied by the Nazi persecution in Poland (1939) and followed by the communist expulsions from Peking, by the internment of over 300 Slovak Salesians (1950) and the closing of numerous houses in Europe after the Potsdam Conference, did not weaken the resolute purpose of Fr Ricaldone who, even during those years of violence and martyrdom, felt that a gradual formation programme for coadjutor confreres could

⁹⁸ In ASC 93 (1939), 14-15.

⁹⁹ Cf. ASC 91 (Jan.-Feb.) 1939, pp.23-24.

not be delayed. Alongside this ideal plan there always had to continue the practice of assigning, immediately after the novitiate, some of the coadjutors not working in specialized professional fields to the various communities for domestic services in the house: linen-room superintendents, cooks, assistants to the Prefect, or simply factotums. But the figure of the salesian coadjutor which tended to become prominent and well known in those days, thanks to the cultural formation given in the centres for higher technical studies, was that of the head of a workshop, a technical teacher, or an educator of young apprentices.

In 1948 the review "The Salesian Coadjutor" was first published; it offers several points for analysis. It appeared every three months, and one of its sections of particular importance was entitled: "Vocation and vocations".¹⁰⁰ It contained interventions, contributions and reflections on the identity and role of the lay Salesian. Reading through the issues of successive years it is easy to detect a change in approach and content from the early numbers in which there is a more or less continual reference to the origins and the thoughts of Don Bosco and Don Rinaldi, to those of the period 1954-1957 where the insistence is on the "novelty" of the vocation, on the "apostolate", and on "technical preparation".¹⁰¹ 58

In 1950 the then Councillor General for the Trade Schools, Fr Anthony Candela, presented in the *General congress on states of perfection* held in Rome that year, a report on the Salesian Coadjutor. In this are clearly set out the juridical, historical, religious and pedagogical sources which, in his opinion, give rise to the figure of the lay salesian religious, or even the "salesian in lay attire".¹⁰² Fr Braidò includes this contribution in his collection of "official" texts on the salesian coadjutor, giving various reasons. We 59

¹⁰⁰ In the ten years under consideration, from 1948 to 1957, the following sections appear regularly: *Per la Madonna; La parola del Papa; Su argomenti vari; Vocazione e vocazioni; Giornata del Coadiutore; Oratorio e catechismo; La pagina professionale; La pagina sociale; Profili; Mostre e convegni; Notiziario e corrispondenza; Asterischi.*

¹⁰¹ Cf. e.g. the article: *La vocazione del coadiutore salesiano* (Nov.- Dec.1954); *L'apostolo dei tempi nuovi* (Jan.- Feb.1955) 6; *Coadiutori sacerdoti e coadiutori operai* (Jan.- Feb.1956) 7; *L'apostolato del coadiutore nelle missioni* (Nov.- Dec.1956) 103; *Preparazione tecnica del coadiutore* (Nov.- Dec.1956) 112; *Il coadiutore lavoratore ed apostolo* (Mar.- Apr.1957) 29-49, (July - Aug.1957) 67, (Sept.- Oct.1957) 90; *Maestri di lavoro: un problema attuale* (Sept.- Oct.1957) 97.

¹⁰² P.BRAIDO, *Religiosi nuovi*, p.187. note 6.

emphasize one in particular. The contribution, he writes, "sets out in a clear form the best results of doctrinal tradition and salesian practice on the matter, and may be likened to a kind of 'ordinary magisterium' of the Congregation in this vital sector".¹⁰³

It will be worth our while therefore to reproduce the more significant passages. The salesian coadjutor is presented as "a new figure that is beginning to appear in today's clerical Congregations", a religious who is at the side of the religious priest so as to share with him, according to his condition, the labours, responsibilities and joys of the modern apostolate".

60 The novelty of these lay religious with respect to the former "fratres conversi" is found, in Fr Candela's opinion, in two considerations:

"a) In the tasks entrusted to them: of these there is a great variety and they share them with their priest confreres, except naturally for those which require the priestly character. The flexible structure of these Societies and the multiplicity of their activities offer to laymen a vast field of apostolate. While the less intellectually endowed sanctify themselves in humble tasks in the individual houses, those who are teachers do so in the classroom, from elementary to university level; the teachers of arts and trades in their schools and workshops, in every trade and specialized branch; agricultural experts in the fields; others in the Festive Oratories, as assistants, organizers of Catholic Action groups, sporting and artistic units and others of a similar nature. And all this not only in developed countries but also on the missions.

"b) In their number. The multiple objectives to which these Societies direct their efforts naturally call for a large number of evangelical workers even though they be not priests. In the old kind of convent a few "fratres conversi" may be sufficient to ensure that the domestic work of the community is taken care of. But here on the other hand there is a need to open the way of perfection to all laymen who feel called to sanctify themselves in a community life, while carrying out all kinds of apostolate and christian propaganda".

¹⁰³ Ibid.

d. *Period of office of Fr Renato Ziggiotti (1952-1965)*

The GC17, convoked in January 1952, formed a kind of connecting link between the last arrangements of Fr Ricaldone¹⁰⁴ and the first tasks of Fr Ziggiotti. Its first theme was the study of the cultural, professional and religious formation of the salesian coadjutor. In the ASC of October 1952 Fr Ziggiotti presents the decisions that were made, the "directives for the course of further training of the coadjutor confreres" and the "recommendations" on personnel.¹⁰⁵ 61

All the work that had gone into an era of change, of practical application and work of organization, came together in the codification of all this material which in 1954 became part of the "Regulations of the Salesian Society".¹⁰⁶

The Congregation entered the second half of the twentieth century declaring its increased awareness of the novelty and essential function of the salesian coadjutor. At the beginning of the twenty years that were to follow it was experiencing a progressive overall annual increase of numbers of Salesians, which reached a maximum of 21,614 professed members in 1967.

But it was precisely in those same years that there began to appear, especially in western societies, the first signs of vast and profound changes, and their repercussions were soon to be influencing the structures and life of religious Institutes. 62

¹⁰⁴ Died 25 Nov.1951

¹⁰⁵ Some of these recommendations are significant and even unique: "1. Celebrate annually the Day of the Coadjutor (...). 2. Continuity, as far as possible, in the personnel in charge; this leads to the flourishing of vocations. 3. Foster the formation among clerics in the studentates of Trade Groups to promote interest in artisan vocations and the problems of the Trade Schools. 4. Let the review 'Il Salesiano Coadiutore' be promoted and if possible published in various languages. 5. Read the life of Don Bosco to our boys, and make known the more outstanding figures among the coadjutors. 6. Make it possible for poor boys to be received in the Trade and Agricultural Schools. 7. Be selective in admitting pupils, giving preference to those from large families (...). 8. Promote artisan vocations also among the Oratory members (shop assistants, apprentices). 9. Insist that our coadjutor confreres take the lead in fostering vocations by prayer and good example. 10. Good coadjutor vocations can be found among young people (and even seminarians) who have no inclination for ecclesiastical studies but have in their heart a religious ideal and show an ability for learning a trade."

¹⁰⁶ Cf. edition of 1954, 1st part I, section II, chap.III: art.58-60; section IV, art.331-333.

As far as the sector of salesian coadjutors is concerned, and especially those assigned to the trade and agricultural schools, there began a slow but inexorable falling off in the number of pupils and of the work coming in from outside to purely artisan sectors, like those of carpentry, ironwork, shoemaking, tailoring and binding. The various possibilities for employment in industry and the beginning of a growing automation led young apprentices to seek openings in other directions. Changed market relations coming into existence after the second worldwide conflict compelled the different countries to face up without delay to the new requirements and modify their available professional frameworks. All this meant a revision of scholastic and workshop structures, the revision of subjects to be taught and the requalification of training personnel.

The salesian coadjutors were the first to bear the brunt of the understandable repercussions of these modifications, which were often of a radical nature.

Quite a number of them, who had always worked in a specific sector of activity, found themselves no longer qualified, and obliged to take up activities in sectors of apostolic and educational work which were new, or at least different from what they had been prepared for by their long period of training. If we keep in mind that their average age in 1970 was 42.6 years, it is not difficult to understand the inconvenience and imbalance caused by the situation. The graph of the number of vocations showed a rapid fall, with the percentage of coadjutors of all Salesians dropping from 21% (a figure still being reached in the 1950's) to 18.35% in 1974.

12.3 In the commitment to renewal following Vatican II.

- 63 At a distance of 150 years from the death of Don Bosco, the declaration of Fr Luigi Ricceri, Rector Major from 1965-1977, which was to become the programme for work and government, well expresses the characteristics of the historic moment to which it referred: "Forward with Don Bosco who lives on at the present

day, so as to meet the demands of our time and the expectations of the Church".¹⁰⁷

The Congregation was then some ten years into its second century of life and should have been capable of meeting situations previously not faced and to some extent new and original. The rapid changes taking place in the world, the appeals to which they gave rise, the new conditions even within the Church itself prompted a search for adequate guidelines. These road signs drew their force and inspiration in the first place from the documents of Vatican II. To remain essentially and dynamically faithful to Don Bosco's apostolic and educational project it was not possible to adapt old formulas, good and effective though they had been in earlier years, but because of the unstoppable acceleration in the speed with which ideas were changing, new ones had to be created. The unique climate of the immediate preparation and beginnings of the Council's work acted as a powerful ferment within the life of the Congregation. Already some years before 1968 when youthful unrest and expectations were touched off by events in France, Salesians found themselves challenged as never before in preceding General Chapters to prepare and launch in 1965 through the GC19 their renewal and reshaping. Among the 22 Chapter documents, the 5th bore the title "The Salesian Coadjutor".

In the spirit of the turning-point brought about by the Council, the following twenty years have seen important documents produced on the salesian coadjutor, especially in the environment of subsequent General Chapters. At this point we merely list them in chronological order; they will be the subject of further reflection in later pages.

The GC20 (1971-72) was convoked to comply with the requirements of the 'Motu proprio' "Ecclesiae Sanctae". Prepared as it was by two separate provincial chapters and followed by a third, it gave rise to an intense work of sensitization of the confreres.

64

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Bolletino Salesiano*, June 1965, p.164.

From 31 August to 7 September 1975 the *World Congress on the Salesian Coadjutor* took place in Rome.

The GC21 (1977-78) brought together the results of the first period of experimentation of the renewed Constitutions. Of the five Chapter Documents, the second has as its theme "The Salesian Coadjutor".

The ASC 298 (Oct.- Dec. 1980) carries the important letter of the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, on "The lay element in the salesian community".

The GC22 (1984), as well as making a definitive revision of the text of the Constitutions and Regulations, issued some "Practical Directives and Deliberations", of which the 3rd refers to "The lay component". It constitutes one of the four priorities indicated by the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, in ASC 312 (Jan.- March 1985) to all the Congregation.

All these events had the same purpose which was expressed by Fr Ricceri, as he inaugurated the work of the World Congress in the following terms: "This is the first time in the history of the Congregation that this vital question has been taken up in full depth and in all its aspects with complete and open freedom: The Salesian Coadjutor, what is he and what does he want to be? In the light of present-day reality, how does he live and feel his lay-religious vocation in the service of the salesian mission? What are the obstacles that hinder the realization and full development of his vocation as 'a new apostle for a new world'?"¹⁰⁸

* * *

The chapters which follow will examine the present state of reflection on the Salesian Coadjutor who from this point will be referred to as the Salesian Brother (cf. translator's note at the beginning of this volume) and the overall picture of him which is now taking shape. The purpose of this brief historical outline has been precisely to help in the extraction from present experiences of those forceful elements which are directly present, even though in embryo, in the charisma of Don Bosco the Founder.

¹⁰⁸ *Acts of the World Congress of Salesian Coadjutors, Rome 1976, p.15.*

2. THE VOCATIONAL IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER: SOME THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.0 PRELIMINARY

We have given a broad outline of the history of the Salesian Brother. It is the story not of an idea but of a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church through Don Bosco. It is a gift perceived and loved by Don Bosco himself and ever better understood and appreciated by him as one of the riches of an original and active community in the service of youth.

65

Salesian brothers have given something to the young, but from their contact with them they have also received a gift in return, that of being more effectively what they were before. This is something that emerges very clearly from their history as we have seen; they have learned from the young and the world of youth to be more completely themselves.

It is clear from our history that every salesian vocation is a mystery which is manifested, given, received and grows while in contact with the situation of the young and the poor, and while being exercised in their service. Self-sacrificing dedication to others leads to a development of the vocation itself.

The vocational identity of the lay salesian has been progressively redefined by the General Chapters that have followed Vatican II and have led to a clearer vision of the figure and role of the salesian brother: of special importance is the GC21 which dedicated a special document to the question. The whole thought of the Chapter was subsequently reflected in the renewed text of the Constitutions approved by the Holy See.

The whole Congregation has been deeply involved in this far from easy task which has been carried out following the guidelines of Vatican II, the authoritative indications of the Rector Major, studies by experts and, in particular, the living experience of the lay members themselves.

Today we have available a wealth of information. It is a question of going into it more deeply and making it more clearly understood, keeping in mind also the relevant reflection in the Church which is clarifying two points in particular: 1. the many senses and aspects of this identity, and 2. its lay and secular components. We shall therefore turn our attention to these two points and reflect on them more deeply.

2.1 IDENTITY: ITS MANY SENSES

66 A preliminary explanation of the *terms* we use will certainly help our investigation and lead to a better understanding of the delicate and complex work carried out in the Congregation over the past twenty years to define our identity. A great deal in fact has been said about identity in this period vis-a-vis the Church, the Salesian Family, and in the latter our Salesian Society, salesian priests and salesian brothers. It has been discussed in many senses, of which some of the principal ones are indicated below.¹

21.1 Quantitative and qualitative salesian identity

67 The salesian identity is spoken of in *quantitative* or numerical terms, when questions are asked like: how many salesians are there?, are they increasing or decreasing in number?, and what about the number of salesian brothers?, what do the statistics say about their proportional relationship to salesian priests?

The salesian identity is spoken of in *qualitative* terms, on the other hand, when questions like the following are asked: who are we today in society and in the Church?, who are the salesian brothers for the salesian priests and members of the Salesian Family?, how are they seen by others in society and the Church?

If, as we shall see, the more important problems concern rather the qualitative identity, those regarding the numerical aspects

¹ Cf. DESRAMAUT F. *Problemi di identità salesiana* in DESRAMAUT-MIDALI *La vocazione salesiana*, (Turin LDC 1982) 19-59.

cannot be overlooked. Indeed in the case of salesian brothers they reveal a panorama that can be disturbing.²

21.2 Personal and community sense of salesian identity

Salesian identity is spoken of also in a *personal* and in a *community* sense. The sense is personal when there is reference to the individual salesian considered as a member of the Congregation and of the Salesian Family. 68

The sense is *communal* or *collective* when reference is to salesians considered collectively as a body. In the Congregation relationships of friendship, brotherly communion, collaboration and solidarity, are thought of and applied as something in common, belonging to "us" who have our own proper existence and originality because we are welded together by the common salesian mission and the common spirit of Don Bosco.

The text of the renewed Constitutions uses "we", thus highlighting the communal salesian identity: the individual forms part of the "we"; each one is a salesian not by himself but *with* other salesians.

The relationships between lay and priest salesians are constitutive elements of the identity understood in this sense. The identity of the one group has its effect on that of the other, and neither can be fully described and lived without a reciprocal reference of one to the other. The presence therefore of lay salesians in a salesian community is not accessory or something marginal. It involves fidelity to the practical community plan of Don Bosco and is something which touches the identity itself.³

21.3 Relational identity

The person and the group exist only in a much wider social body which is the world. 69

² Cf. VIGANO E, *The lay element in the salesian community*, in ASC 298, p.34-38; IDEM, *Report of R.M. to GC22* (Rome 1983) 237f.

³ Cf. VIGANO E, *Lay element...*

The traits which define the identity are intelligible only if they form part of the tapestry of relationships which the individual or the "we" collectively have with other persons and with the religious universe in which we are situated.

To redefine the identity of our Society the text of the Constitutions indicates not only its internal characteristics (the apostolic consecration and form: C 2, 3, 4), but also the kind of relationship with the Salesian Family (C 5) in the Church (C 6, 23), with the contemporary world (C 7) and with the religious universe both christian (the presence of Mary and our Protectors: C 8, 9) and non-christian (C 7).

More precisely, the components that must be considered include: the name and title, age, number of components, the purpose pursued by the Congregation, its juridical structure, the values it lives or seeks, the positive or moral laws which govern it, the cultures in which its members live or of which they are promoters.

We shall consider all of these.

21.4 Real and ideal identity

70 In the ensemble of relationships that constitute the qualitative identity there is a distinction between the real identity and the ideal identity.

The *real* identity is that lived and produced consciously or spontaneously by the individual or group through the manner of daily living or acting.

Every salesian has his identity. He lives and reveals it in his way of working, praying and speaking, in his behaviour with his confreres, with the young and with those with whom he comes in contact. He may be more or less conscious of it, and become especially aware of it in moments of difficulty and when he takes stock of his life.

Every salesian community, local or provincial, has its identity also. It expresses it in its daily life. It can be perceived in its daily communal mode of living, and particularly in the various forms

of community encounters and its external relationships in the area in which it works.

The *ideal* identity is that aimed at as a goal to be attained, because considered more perfect than the one actually being lived, which is always defective in some way.

In redefining our identity the Constitutions have taken into account the experience of salesians and their communities, and hence their real, qualitative and communal identity. They have applied the criterion of experience. But at the same time they have sought also to define our *ideal* identity, so that it can conform as closely as possible to the Gospel, the example and teaching of Don Bosco, and the authoritative indications of the Church's present-day magisterium.

In presenting the vocational identity of the lay salesian, we shall refer to his real identity and especially to the ideal set out in the Constitutions.

21.5 Institutionalized identity

The salesian is not an isolated being. He belongs to a Congregation, to a communion of persons regulated by norms. He is a member of a religious and apostolic institution. 71

This institutional aspect enters into the personal identity of the individual and the collective identity of the salesians. And this is precisely the so-called *institutionalized* salesian identity.

When the Constitutions and Regulations indicate the various kinds of activities and works in which we engage as missionaries of the young, when they describe the salesian community at various levels and give indications and norms for the practice of the evangelical counsels, for initial and ongoing formation, and for the service of authority, they are in fact defining the *institutional* aspects of our identity.

21.6 Expressed identity: necessity and limitations

The *expressed* salesian identity is the description of our real 72

or ideal and institutionalized identity, made through statements, pronouncements and norms.

When a salesian or a community writes or speaks of itself, its life and activity, its relationships with others, its attitudes and way of acting, its values and plans, it *expresses* its identity and moreover does so in a spontaneous way.

But there is an *authorized* form of doing this, and it consists in official statements made by acknowledged authorities like the Pope, the Rector Major, General Chapters, and Superiors at various levels.

To do this at the present day they have recourse to the intentions and example of Don Bosco the Founder, to tradition, and especially to the Constitutions and Regulations which are the approved and authoritative text in which are described the fundamental outlines of our identity.

This kind of "authorized" discourse is indispensable and to it belongs almost exclusively what we shall say in speaking of the lay salesian. Nevertheless it is not a discourse to be made excluding entirely the spontaneous description of the salesian identity. Within its limitations, the latter often anticipates and prepares for official pronouncements. If the confreres had not expressed and made known their experiences and convictions, it would not have been possible to conclude the complex work of the revision of the Constitutions with the rich results we possess today.

We shall be careful therefore not to reduce our personal or communal identity to the reflections we shall make on it, and especially not to think that the identity problems it poses for priest and lay salesians are all solved by the simple fact that they can count on clear and distinct ideas. These are useful and even necessary for an authentic living of the salesian vocation, but they do not express all the varied spiritual and apostolic experience of the Congregation, nor do they pretend to solve the often dramatic problems they present.

21.7 The historical development of the salesian identity

73 Every discussion tends to fix the identity in a kind of snapshot. Those who are averse to change want it to be immutable and

seem unaware that tension between permanence and dynamism is something vital and regulates the development of all spiritual entities.

The identity of individuals and institutions changes with time. At the age of fifty a person is different from what he was at twenty: life has changed him even though his consciousness of self remains the same. Our Congregation has a date of birth. From that date it has gradually developed and spread throughout the world, it has become organized in provinces and regions, it has partly modified its juridical configuration, and has adapted itself to different cultures and different generations of salesians. What in fact has happened in the last thirty years, prompted by the renewing thrust of Vatican II and the changed situations in which we live and work, is more than evident.

This is not to be wondered at! On the contrary the Congregation, involved as it is in historical events in continual evolution, in order to live and make progress in its service has had perforce to assume new cultural expressions, or readjust its position in their regard and share or otherwise their characteristic aspects.

Our identity therefore has a *temporal dimension*; it is subject to the evolution and dynamism of history. As far as salesian brothers are concerned, as we have already seen, this is well illustrated by the changes and mutations that have taken place.

Our tradition has summed up this process in the expression: "with Don Bosco and the times", while the salesian magisterium has long preferred to speak of "dynamic fidelity".⁴

21.8 The sense of collective identity

In periods of vocational crisis an individual will frequently question himself on the "sense" of his own life. In the years that have followed Vatican II our Congregation has asked itself whether the figure of the salesian brother could still have any sense in a world so changed. Some were even resigned to its disappearance,

74

⁴ Cf. SGC, doc.2, nn.192-273.

so little did they believe in it. It was an attitude certainly open to criticism and was rightly denounced, but it was unfortunately very real.⁵

A personal and collective identity has sense as long as its components are consistent and meaningful for the individuals concerned, and when its objective values are seen as credible for others. If this consistency is lacking, if it becomes in any way insignificant or wanting in clarity or credibility, the identity loses all its value and goes into crisis.

The enormous amount of work done by our Congregation in the last twenty years has been aimed at the re-establishment and assurance for priest and lay salesians of the fact that their vocation is relevant in today's Church in the service of the vast world of the young, and especially the poorest of them.

2.2 SOME GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER: CRITERIA

75 Having now clarified the senses in which salesian identity is spoken of nowadays, we can look at its various aspects. Some of them are essential and determining; others are not so, but are important none the less.

The professed objectives and values constitute without any doubt the components which determine our vocational identity. When the Constitutions speak of our apostolic consecration, which includes the salesian spirit, mission, fraternal community, practice of the evangelical counsels, and dialogue with the Lord in prayer, the reference is to the moral and religious values in which we believe and which nourish our life and activity.

They are vocational outlines so central and important as to deserve separate consideration, and this we shall give them.

Here we shall concentrate on other aspects of our identity which have an influence in various ways on the essential points and condition them to some extent. For this reason they call for due consideration.

⁵ Cf. VIGANO E, *Lay element* 16; IDEM, *Report to GC22* 237f.

22.1 Numerical consistency and geographical distribution

The numerical consistency of salesians, priests and brothers, and their geographical distribution are factors of our identity to which the Congregation has been particularly attentive. Superiors and General Chapters have been concerned about these points, and have drawn from them reasons for both hope and concern, according to the data offered by statistics. The last declaration in this connection was made by the Rector Major to the GC22 in his report on the state of our Society: "I must raise a cry of alarm. In the first part (of the report) we have deliberately gone to some length to present the statistics referring to the brothers in every continent, and the resulting panorama is disturbing. While in the Church the 'hour of the laity' is often spoken of, it would seem that male institutes of active life (ours among them) have not been able to include this aspect in the process of renewal of their religious communities. And we salesians, the more we address ourselves to those to whom we have been sent, especially to the third world, the more we feel with distress the negative impact of the fall in the number of our brothers.

76

"The salesian community cannot prescind from this so characteristic figure among our members which is one of its constituent components. Let us list some of the grave problems that remain open:

— in the first place, the fall in the number of brothers; the fact that there are several provinces without brother novices;

— the persistence in many confreres, through ignorance or prejudice, of a mentality insensitive to this urgent problem;

— a certain antagonism in some, fostered by preconceived ideas which look at the values of the priesthood and the lay state, beginning not from a synthesis of mutual complementarity proper to the salesian spirit, but from general considerations that combine to weaken the particular character of our community; [...]

— the weakening and lessening of the specific contributions of the priestly ministry in the action of the community in conformity with the pastoral criteria of the preventive system;

— a growing secularism in the mentality and attitude of more than a few of our priest confreres. [...]

"It is not so much a category of members that is in crisis but the lay component of the community itself which is challenged and must be rethought in fidelity to Don Bosco and the times".⁶

The fall in numbers is a problem, but it should not give rise to negative attitudes marked by bitterness, pessimism and lack of trust. It should rather prompt a renewed commitment to the task of making known and esteemed, both within the Congregation and in the wider area in which we work, our identity of salesian priests and laymen, so as to give continual attention to the local situation, its perspectives and the new possibilities opening up, and to promote an enlightened, courageous and trustful pastoral work for vocations.

22.2 The terms "coadjutor", "brother" and "lay salesian"

77 To choose, accept or change the name of a group is not a matter of indifference or a mere formality. Whether we want it or not, the name classifies an individual or group, reveals the membership of its members in a particular cultural world and a connected range of positive and negative values which touches the identity itself.

We have already seen that in religious orders and congregations which are not exclusively lay, the lay members are called by a variety of names: 'fratres conversi', oblates, servants, brothers, confreres, coadjutors, auxiliaries, disciples, etc. These are titles born in christian contexts and recall (or recalled) to believers some evangelical values: e.g. the 'conversi' bring conversion to mind, the oblates self-donation, servants christian service, brothers or confreres religious brotherhood, coadjutors help and collaboration, disciples evangelical discipleship.

On the other hand they were names used in specific contexts. This meant that in addition to gospel values they also indicated other aspects of the life and activity of lay religious, both within

⁶ VIGANO E, *Report to GC22* 237f.

their own Institutes and in the wider setting of the Church and society. In practice they indicated:

- the offices, simple or with varying degrees of importance, and the roles (usually subordinate ones) of the lay religious;
- their manner of presence in community life as a separate category or as brothers on a par with the religious priests;
- their relationship with the latter based on service, help and equal sharing;
- their degree of formation and cultural level.

In brief, their names indicated their social, cultural, canonical and religious status, as also their standing as a group, category or "class".

Don Bosco, as we have seen, in designating the lay members of his Congregation observed the canonical legislation of his time and chose the name of "Coadjutor". The title was already a problem for contemporary salesians, but he did not want it changed in the Italian context and language.

78

The problem has cropped up again in the last twenty years. In the General Chapters of the post-conciliar era there has been fresh discussion as to whether the name "coadjutors" should be preserved or changed.

For some, this was the name given by the founder, Don Bosco. It carried with it values linked with our tradition and with so many wonderful figures of lay salesians. To modify it would be to leave ourselves open to the risk of breaking with our roots and with the salesian and cultural heritage of our Society.

For others the name "coadjutor" poorly reflects the significance of tradition and is entirely incomprehensible today outside our own environments. It brings to mind too an image characterized by a certain dependence, emargination and discrimination. This is an image one can no longer propose to possible aspirants to the salesian life. For this reason a change was considered not only useful but even necessary.

In the light of these various arguments, and especially the fact that "our Society is made up of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same

vocation",⁷ the renewed Constitutions have chosen for both groups the noun "salesian" which denotes the one vocation, to be linked with "coadjutor" or "lay" and "presbyter" or "priest" (as *adjectives*), to specify the particular vocational form.⁸

Translator's note: the above paragraphs are a translation of the Italian text and therefore refer directly to the Constitutions in Italian. The English-speaking members of the GC22, which prepared the revised Italian text for definitive approval, decided that in order to avoid the lack of comprehensibility referred to above, and which is still greater in English, the word "coadjutor" would be translated as "brother" in the English version of the Constitutions. For similar reasons the expressions "lay salesian" and "priest salesian" are used in the present translation where the two terms are used in apposition.

In this way was realized the desire on the one hand to be faithful to Don Bosco's wishes, and on the other hand to harmonize with present terminology and meet the rightful expectations of the confreres. But the intention was above all to emphasize the relationships of complete equality between priest and lay salesians desired by our Founder and reiterated several times by his successors as an original aspect of our identity.

22.3 The influence of structures

79 Structure forms part of identity; and the various kinds of structures in the Congregation have their influence on our own identity.

We salesians "are recognized in the Church as a clerical religious institute of pontifical right, dedicated to apostolic works".⁹ This is a statement of the essential juridical outlines of our identity in the Church.¹⁰

It should be noted that the 'clerical' character of our Congregation should be understood technically in its specific

⁷ C 4

⁸ C 45, 116, 45, 106

⁹ C 4

¹⁰ For an authoritative comment on this point, cf. *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*

canonical sense. It expresses in juridical form an aspect of the charismatic reality. It implies in fact that the service of guidance (i.e. of animation and government of the community which is called as such to be the driving nucleus behind youth pastoral work) be entrusted at the various levels to a confrere who is a priest, qualified for the task by the grace of the priestly ministry, personal competence and pastoral sensitivity. But the characteristic of this service, which Don Bosco wanted and tradition confirmed with motives, is strictly linked with a specific and positive exploitation of the lay component. In fact in the salesian community "clerics and laymen complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation", says art.4 of the Constitutions. In it, adds art.45, "each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one salesian vocation".

This contribution of varied riches nourishes our family spirit and obviates discriminatory attitudes among confreres.

Other structures have an importance in this regard which should not be underrated. They are: 80

- operative structures: schools, oratories, parishes, centres of higher studies, publishing houses, bookshops, mission stations, reception centres, centres of spirituality;
- formative structures: school camps, aspirants, novitiates, studentates, universities;
- communication structures: Acts of the General Council, Salesian Bulletin, provincial newsletters, visits of superiors, community meetings at local, provincial, regional and international level, and congresses;
- government structures, such as the exercise of authority at various levels;
- financial structures: administrative and financial offices at various levels.

Leaving aside the government structures for the moment, it would seem opportune to offer some reflections on the influence exerted by the others on the individual and collective salesian identity.

81 The deep and rapid social and cultural changes that have taken place in the last thirty years have sometimes called for changes of some importance in structures of activity and formation. Their new professional roles have required certain salesian brothers to reach a very high level of qualification. To meet the new and greater needs of the technical schools, publishing centres and higher level institutes, training became necessary at university level with the acquisition of academic degrees. On the other hand these very requirements led to the elimination of some other sectors. The progressive closure of certain workshops (tailoring, shoe-making, carpentry), and of trade and agricultural schools, compelled a certain number of salesian brothers to abandon prestigious professional tasks which in many cases they had practised for long years and turn to others frequently less satisfying and for which they were less qualified. These very tasks often rendered impossible their direct and prolonged contact with young people; the latter in consequence could no longer meet and be in living contact with the lay salesian way of life, with all the significant consequences.

These phenomena led also to a certain interchange of roles: tasks like trade teaching, direction of publishing centres, workshop masters, which until the recent past had been the province of salesian brothers, were taken up by salesian priests.

In short, the changes in operative structures have a definite influence to a smaller or greater extent on the evolution of the identity; they cause a crisis in roles and condition the flow of vocations.

82 In the phases of initial and ongoing formation therefore it will be necessary to give due consideration to this phenomenon for various reasons, some of which are positive but others disturbing. Social and cultural changes brought about by continual progress in science and technology have caused some roles to disappear and new ones to emerge; they call for people who have been formed in such a way as to be open to periodic requalification, to the assuming of new tasks and acceptance of new values without the negative effects always associated with deep and rapid changes.

83 Today our structures are highly organized. The Constitutions.

Regulations, the Ratio and various directories, together with the indications provided by our secular tradition, constitute a body of norms which give structure to our life and activity.

In addition to written norms there are also usages, customs and practices which are not institutionalized but have an influence nonetheless on our way of living, working and praying.

Our modified structures fulfil the purpose of leading us with certainty to an authentic salesian life only when they are willingly accepted and faithfully put into practice. Our identity is influenced more by the interior acceptance of structures than by their codification, even though for this acceptance it must necessarily be identified as regards its values, and codified.

That our identity as priest or lay salesians is vitally affected, positively or negatively, more by norms which are observed than by those merely existing on paper, has been experienced - and often suffered - in the period following Vatican II, in the extent to which the renewed Constitutions and the deliberations of the various General Chapters have been put into practice.

In any case, recent experience convinces us ever more that the renovation of our structures, especially those relating to work and formation, calls for and in fact presupposes a renewal of our individual and communal mentality by both priests and brothers. In the last analysis it comes down to a question of the renewal of our identity.¹¹

22.4 Economic and aesthetic values

Together with and in dependence on the moral and religious values that are certainly central and essential and will be dealt with later at greater length, there exist in the Congregation other values of an economic and aesthetic kind: the useful and the beautiful, joy and family spirit, which affect our identity perhaps more consistently than those who are too idealistic might suppose.

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¹¹ Cf. SGC 184; GC21 206; VIGANO E, *Lay component*, 40f; *Report to GC22*, 236-238.

Economic goods play their part in the life and activity of the members of our Society. We need only recall the importance they assumed in Don Bosco's own life: what worry they caused him, how much work, how many initiatives, how much correspondence and what great trust in Providence, all with the purpose of raising the necessary money to maintain his boys, sustain his works and create in them an atmosphere of joy. To leave aside this aspect of the life of our Founder would be to render him unintelligible from some aspects and would in any case obscure his figure as an organizer, educator of the young and priest of divine Providence.¹²

Economic means are indispensable for the attainment of the cultural, educational, pastoral, social and missionary objectives pursued by our Congregation with its multiple works and activities.

85 In the more distant and recent past salesian brothers have offered (and do so still) a contribution often outstanding both as regards their ability and industry in finding or administering these goods, and in financing and sustaining works that are often extremely costly.

In our present materialist culture outside observers, more or less kindly disposed or sometimes critical in respect of religious institutions, are particularly alert to these values. The property, goods and chattels of an Institute can communicate a message of poverty, of service, of sharing. On the other hand they can also provide a counter-witness to these things. In practice they are never indifferent; they help to give religious (be they priests or lay) a credible image, but they can also put their identity in crisis, together with its authenticity or force of appeal. Art.77 of the Constitutions imposes a duty on us in this regard: "Following the example and spirit of our Founder we accept ownership of the means we need for our work, and we administer them in such a way that all may realize they are being used for the service of others. Our choice of works and their location is made in response to the needs of those in want; the criterion for our buildings is that they be simple and functional".

¹² Cf. STELLA,P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale, 1815-1870*, (Rome, LAS 1980).

Orders and Congregations have also to a greater or lesser extent their aesthetic values, their own architectural or artistic patrimony of monasteries, convents, churches, schools, hospitals and houses, characterized by their own particular style, severe and austere in some cases, wealthy and appealing to the senses in others, restrained and joyful in still others.

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Salesian pretensions in the aesthetic sector are on the simple side. Nevertheless they have given to the world plans for churches and schools, illustrations and images, examples of theatrical activity, all of which have left and are still leaving their mark on the collective identity of the Congregation.

This patrimony is worth boasting about because it frequently reflects popular tastes and is in harmony with them; but sometimes it is open to criticism because insufficiently sensitive to the architectural and iconographical forms of the countries where we are working.

This is an example of the many aspects of the relationship between culture and the salesian life.

22.5 Incidence of culture on the salesian identity

Culture in effect is another of the components which play a major part in the determination of our individual and collective identity. Together with the others already mentioned, and with which it is vitally related, it makes a big contribution to the imprinting of the main original characteristics on the physiognomy of the Congregation and its members.

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A. *Culture and cultures*

The world 'culture' is usually taken to mean a collection of ideas, beliefs, arts, usages and all the other kinds of abilities and habitual activities proper to man as a member of society. It is the life of a people. It includes values which animate it, the negative values which weaken it and those which, being shared by the vast majority of its members, unite them on the basis of a 'common

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awareness'. Factors in culture are also the forms through which these positive or negative values are expressed and manifested: i.e. customs, language, institutions and structures of social life, when they are not obstructed or repressed by other dominant cultures.

There is not just one single culture: many cultures exist; they correspond to the variety of peoples and environments: they are characterized by different modes of understanding life, of using things, of self-expression and relationship with others, and especially of attitude to the Absolute, to God. In them are to be found elements which reveal the common human foundation and the divine action on humanity, even before the proclamation of the Gospel.¹³

B. *The Church, the Congregation and cultures*

88 The Church cannot ignore these cultures, even though she does not identify herself with any of them. She needs them to express her own faith,¹⁴ to deepen her message of salvation,¹⁵ and to be able to make concrete decisions in her work of evangelization.

It is not difficult to understand therefore why the Church tries to understand their elements of unity and their differences from each other, so as to embody herself in them, assume them and promote their purification, enrichment and transformation so as to open them "in both continuity and discontinuity with the present situation"¹⁶ to adherence to God and service to man.

Religious Orders and Congregations too have their particular culture. To the extent that this depends on the christian culture of a specific period in history, it will be easy for the Institute concerned to choose and display some aspects congenial to its charism and more useful to its apostolic activity, thus becoming a Catholic subculture.

¹³ Cf. AG 4

¹⁴ Cf. EN 63

¹⁵ Cf. LG 13

¹⁶ EN 28

Don Bosco and our Congregation have made their choices and have put in circulation a salesian culture which owes much, from so many aspects, to the christian culture of the last century and of our own. Their spiritual and pedagogical geniality is revealed and expressed more in apostolic activity and in the moments of reflection which always accompany it.

Today art.7 of the Constitutions declares: "Open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel".

The salesian culture (or subculture) has its own places of production, its own diffusion network, and a sufficiently complete cultural system: place, network and system can all be identified.

C. The places of production and the diffusion network

The places where salesian culture is produced are all the centres which have the task of drawing up doctrinal and operative guidelines for those belonging to the various groups of the Salesian Family, and hence primarily the SDB and FMA Generalates. Then come our centres of study and formation, our publishing houses and various kinds of schools. The need to bring about an inculturation of the Gospel in line with our charism will be satisfied to the extent that these centres of cultural elaboration, distributed in various contexts and competent in a salesian and scientific sense, exist and function efficiently and well.

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Along with these production centres of the so-called "learned" culture, there are others of due value: trade and technical schools of various kinds; oratories and youth centres which gave rise in the past and do so still (especially through the work of lay salesians) to a "culture of work", characterized by solidarity, sharing and professional attitudes; and a "popular culture" which has now been strongly revalued.

The diffusion network of the salesian culture is constituted by the means of communication it uses: the press from the time of Don Bosco himself, and more recently by other forms of the mass media. Our works themselves are transmitters of culture, and for

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various reasons become instruments also for the transmission (in more or less filtered form) of rival or simply different cultures. One need only recall the fact that in more than a few countries our schools are linked in various ways with study programmes laid down by lay governments and with teaching personnel who are not salesians, and frequently not even chosen by salesians. In such cases there is the risk of our salesian identity and originality being lost.

Every salesian, priest or brother, is to some degree both a receiver and transmitter. To the extent to which he himself has assimilated salesian culture he spreads it in his vicinity, integrating it with that of the environment in which he is working. The power of these transmitters varies from one salesian to another. A lay or priest salesian who has lost or gravely impaired his own identity becomes a blocked channel of communication, with all the consequences we know to follow in the matter of pastoral and vocational formation.

D. *A cultural system*

91 This network endows the Church and society with a salesian cultural system whose aspects vary from time to time, and which deserves to be considered at least in its main outlines. The first article of the Constitutions refers in a general way to this system.

a. *A salesian history and calendar*

The principal points in this salesian sacred history are well known and generally remembered. They comprise certain important moments in the life of Don Bosco, marked by the divine presence and intervention. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* written by Don Bosco and the *Biographical Memoirs* provide very clear evidence of this.

Even if greater care is given at the present day to the assessment of their content, it is undeniable that this salesian sacred history has transmitted and continues to transmit events which form part of the roots of our life and spirit.

Like other religious Institutes, the Salesian Family too has its own calendar, which is inserted in that of the Church and is adapted to its own life. Beginning with the feast of All Saints it takes up the cycle of salvation, emphasizing it with pious and joyful moments: they are the feasts and commemorations proper to our own calendar - encounters which mark in a prayerful manner the principal moments of our day, month and year.

b. *A salesian geography and nomenclature*

The geography is concentrated around the places where our Father and the other saints of his Family spent their earthly lives. Their names, with those of the Sacred Heart and Mary Help of Christians are titulars in various countries of works, institutions, ecclesiastical and civil localities. Together with the titles by which are designated various offices in the Congregation (Rector Major, Councillors, Provincials, Rectors, Economers) they form, so to speak, the salesian nomenclature. 92

c. *A salesian ritualism and ethical sensitivity*

The salesian tradition includes a religious ritualism derived from popular local customs and then propagated throughout the world: the sign of the cross on rising each morning; prayers before and after work and meals; the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament; the recital of the Angelus three times a day; the three Hail Mary's before getting into bed at night. In some countries local religious customs have been added to or replaced those just listed. 93

Peculiar to the salesians is also a characteristic ethical sensitivity which refers back to the doctrine of St Alphonsus; it shows a particular delicacy in the matter of chastity, fosters an obedience and even a personal love for the Pope and the Bishops, and sets a particularly high value on the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

d. *A philosophical, theological and social consideration at the basis of the preventive system*

In the matter of philosophy and theology the salesians, 94

although undertaking serious studies in their first formation and going on to committed specialization, have preferred simplicity. When serious and repeated demands have been made they have given the common replies inspired by christian common sense of the time. In the period following Vatican II they have made notable progress, prompted by the renewal inculcated by the Council itself. In any case the educational system left to them by Don Bosco as a "precious heritage" has obliged them to take a stand from the beginning concerning the lot of needy youth. This is true at the present day more than ever before, because the practice of the preventive system, which now forms part of the pedagogical patrimony of the Church, leads them to seek and use the results of the human and educational sciences, and so respond to the demands and challenges of the present time and conditions of youth.

e. *A salesian "policy"*

95 By tradition the salesian policy is to respect all authorities, civil and religious, and aim at making friends everywhere, without this necessarily meaning in every case tolerance of the established "order". The "common good" rather than "power" comes first, and our commitment is to educate to social responsibility.

The General Chapters following Vatican II have shown an updated sensitivity which, in harmony with the directives of ecclesial teaching and the true sense of our tradition, define the attitude of the salesian in this matter which is always difficult and a source of problems: "We labour in economically depressed areas and for poor youth. We collaborate with them, educating them to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility. In this way we contribute to the development of both people and environment. We share in a way appropriate to religious in the witness and commitment of the Church to justice and peace. While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity. The advancement to which we dedicate

ourselves in the spirit of the Gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which makes men free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us".¹⁷

f. *A salesian hagiography*

The Salesian Family has available at the present day a rich literature dedicated to the figure and work of the Founder, his successors, the saints of his spiritual family, and other eminent and even simple figures, all of them of significance. 96

Reference to such models of sanctity is important for our life and activity. They bear witness to a salesian identity that has produced successful results, in some cases canonized by the Church.

A progressively deepening knowledge of their lives, and more especially their virtues, should become an irreplaceable factor in pastoral work for vocations and in initial and ongoing formation.

E. *Incidence of culture on the identity of the salesian brother*

The "culture" factor has a considerable incidence on the lives of salesian brothers and their relationships with salesian priests; it can condition their contribution in various ways. In our history the necessity was perceived, and is now fully recognized by the Constitutions, of assuring for lay confreres an adequate humanistic, theological and professional formation in line with their abilities and aptitudes. This is an indispensable condition if they are to be producers and competent diffusers of salesian culture, academic or popular as the case may be, especially if placed at the service of the world of work. 97

The crisis through which all religious Institutes, including lay Institutes, have been passing in various ways has cultural roots among others. It must be ascribed to the more or less deep repercussions caused by the rapid cultural changes of recent times on the religious and cultural identity of the various Institutes.

Consequently the search for solutions cannot prescind from a clear diagnosis of the reality of the situation in the countries in which we are working, and from its correct interpretation in the light of faith. In this way it will be possible to accept and understand the demands, appeals and in the last analysis the moral imperatives destined to guide the making of options and practical interventions.

2.3 FUNDAMENTAL OUTLINES OF THE IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

98 It has already been said that the objective and the moral values constitute the aspects that most deeply characterize our identity as salesians, brothers or priests. We now take up these points at greater length.

23.1 The SDB community an original one in the Salesian Family

In a description of objectives and values, the Constitutions have made use of the language of Vatican II. They speak of Don Bosco's charisma, of salesian vocation, apostolic consecration, mission to youth, fraternal communion, the practice of the evangelical counsels and the spirit of Don Bosco.

"Salesian vocational identity" is the brief formula used by our official texts to express this rich collection of gifts.¹⁸ Here we touch on the deep reason underlying our existence and work, what it is that identifies and characterizes us. If the vocational identity becomes weak, the components so far listed become of little value, even though appreciable in themselves. Rightly therefore were the recent General Chapters concerned that the Constitutions should redefine above all our vocational identity.

In carrying out this delicate work of discernment they referred back to Don Bosco, his life and work, his spirit and, in general, his

¹⁸ GC21 171

apostolic project. "We, the Salesians of Don Bosco", says art.2 of the Constitutions, "form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life."

This plan involves a vast movement of persons who work in various ways for the salvation of the young. Forming part of it are the various Groups who make up the Salesian Family. "Within this family, by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater public effectiveness".¹⁹ Within this framework our identity is re-expressed: "The salesians", declared the Special General Chapter in beginning its reflection on the Salesian Family, "cannot re-think their vocation in the Church without reference to those who share with them in carrying out the Founder's will".²⁰

In turn the vocational identity of the priest or lay salesian has been defined from the starting point of his membership of the salesian community: "The apostolic mandate which the Church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility".²¹

It is in the context of the community that the lay salesian lives, works, prays and bears witness to his vocation, accompanied in fraternal fashion by his confreres and sharing responsibility with them. There he reveals to himself and to others his true identity.²²

A. *A fraternal community*

The text of the Constitutions presents in the first place our collective identity as salesians.²³ Within this picture it then

¹⁹ C 5

²⁰ SGC 151

²¹ C 44

²² Cf. GC21 171

²³ Cf. C 22, 23, 45, 46, 52

identifies the characteristics proper to the lay salesian and the priest salesian in so far as they receive their vocation from God in view of their entrance into a community. "Each one of us", says art.22, "is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society". And he lives his vocation within it in the awareness of his common dignity as a brother among brothers as Don Bosco wished and salesian tradition has several times endorsed. "Among the members of the Congregation", declared Don Bosco, "there is no distinction: all are treated in the same way, whether they be artisans, clerics or priests: we consider all of them as brothers".²⁴

Don Rinaldi wrote in 1927: "When Don Bosco began to think of founding a new religious society he wanted all its members, priests, clerics and laymen, to have the same rights and duties. For him, although the priests assumed greater obligations and responsibilities because of their sacred character, the rights are equal for them, the clerics and also the brothers, who do not constitute in any way a second order, but are true salesians obliged to the same degree of perfection and to exercise, each in his own profession or trade, one and the same educational apostolate which forms the essence of the salesian society".²⁵

In 1930 he further endorsed this vocational characteristic of the lay salesian in the following words: "The brothers are not just auxiliaries of the community but true and perfect religious, just as much as are our priests; they too are educators and teachers in an important part of our social programme".²⁶

101 The text of the Constitutions puts forward this salesian brotherhood as an expression of living faith and evangelical charity: "To live and work together", says art.49, "is for us salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation. This is why we come together in communities, where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit and so create communion between person and person".

"God calls us to live in community", says the following article, "and entrusts us with brothers to love. Brotherly love, our apostolic

²⁴ BM 12, 121f

²⁵ ASC 40, p.574

²⁶ ASC 55, p.915

mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion. We thus become one heart and one soul to love and serve God, and to help one another”.

“The family spirit”, art.51 now, “is the hallmark of the salesian community and inspires every moment of its life. [...] In an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows, and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences”.

According to art.52, “the community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity. It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts of nature and of grace. It provides for his needs and sustains him in moments of doubt and difficulty, weariness and ill health. [...] The confrere pledges himself to build up the community in which he lives. He loves it despite its imperfections; [...] he gives his own generous contribution to its life and work. He thanks God that he is among brothers who encourage and help him”.

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In his community the lay salesian plays an equal part with the salesian priest in the responsibility for the planning, realization and revision of the community’s educational and pastoral plan.²⁷ He takes an active share in the communion of prayer, listening to the word of God, and the celebration of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.²⁸ He is constantly animated in fidelity to his particular vocation, and becomes with his brothers a credible sign of the brotherhood founded on earth by Christ.²⁹

B. *An apostolic community open to secular values*

According to the thought and practice of Don Bosco, the new Society he had founded was to move not in the direction of the monastic ideal of separation from the world but rather in that of the apostolic religious ideal lived in close contact with the reality of the young and the poorer classes.

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²⁷ Cf. C 65-66, 76-77, 79

²⁸ Cf. C 85-95

²⁹ C 24, 49, 52, 63

Starting from his experience as a secular priest, Don Bosco intended to start a vast apostolic movement aimed at the young and the poor, immersed in and adapted to the social and cultural reality emerging at the time. The oratory, in which he and his first collaborators lived and worked, "was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves".³⁰

When he set out to condense his ideas into a "rule", he wrote also a chapter headed "Externs" in which the first article clearly expressed the novel aspect of his project: "Any person", he wrote, "even though living in the world in his own house and family, can be a member of our Society, etc."³¹

104 He showed a keen interest in opening his operative plan to individuals living in a secular condition who carry out the salesian mission while practising the evangelical counsels. Don Rinaldi sought to realize this ideal. He formed and organized the group of devotees of Mary Help of Christians which today has developed into the Don Bosco Volunteers.

Our Founder later came to realize, through interior inspiration and with the advice of Pius IX, that to attain his objective it was indispensable to ensure a central animating nucleus with the stability and consistency of a religious Congregation. And so he shaped his Society, which is precisely a religious Congregation born of a secular apostolic experience and open to secular values.³²

It had therefore to assume new characteristics with regard to other religious Institutes; he had to find a means of adapting its form to the demands of the nascent civil society. And so the family style of living together, the structural flexibility, attitude towards the ownership of goods, easy adaptability, dress, terminology to be used (house, provincial, director, assistant, etc.), the sectors preferred for the exercise of the apostolate, close contact with the world of work, should all be expressions in line as far as

³⁰ C 40

³¹ MB 10, 889. 1308

³² Cf. VIGANO E., *Lay component*, 30-32

possible with certain requirements of a society which was going ahead and developing in a manner becoming ever more marked by a progressive process of secularization.

The various kinds of educational and pastoral activity were of their nature directed to providing a witness and service open to the realities of the surrounding world. A characteristic spirituality which, modelled as it was on the humanism of St Francis de Sales, inclined the salesians to action and temporal values and helped them to ensure that their life of union with God and the practice of the evangelical counsels gave new energy to the task of educating the young in view of the building of a love-based society. 105

To put Don Bosco's apostolic plan into effect, the salesians had to evangelize through professional commitments which were largely of a secular nature: teaching, social and cultural animation, social communication, tertiary activities, domestic offices and sport.

Don Rinaldi once remarked, in a statement which has rightly become famous, on this opening of the Congregation to the secular world: "The new spirit impressed on the Constitutions by Don Bosco, a spirit which was ahead of its time, caused many obstacles to their approval; but he worked on, insisted, prayed and got his boys to pray, and waited patiently for fifteen years, allowing in his Constitutions only those changes that could be reconciled with their modern character, flexible and easily adaptable to all times and places. He had envisaged a pious society which, although a true religious congregation, would not have the latter's traditional external appearance: it was enough for him that there be in it the religious spirit, the one factor of perfection being the evangelical counsels; for the rest he was sure he could adapt to the requirements of the times. This flexibility in adapting to all forms of good continually arising in humanity is the spirit proper to our Constitutions, and on the day in which we introduced some change contrary to this spirit, our pious Society would be finished".³³ 106

In this Congregation and in its communities, open as they are to secular factors, the salesian brother is a characterizing presence in virtue of his quality as a *lay* salesian.

³³ ASC 17 (1923) 41\

His is a vocational form differing in part from that of the salesian priest but equally charismatic, says the GC21,³⁴ because the vocation to the salesian life as a brother is a gratuitous gift, a charism of the Spirit. At the root of the differences between the lay and priest salesian is not a negation - that one is not a priest, nor the lack of an ecclesial qualification, but rather a choice in response to a call: "the Brother has opted for a positive christian ideal, not determined by the sacrament of Holy Orders but constituted by a number of values which of themselves form a true vocational objective of high quality".³⁵

23.2 The vocation of the salesian brother is characterized by its lay nature

107 The salesian brothers are *lay* members of our Society. The lay qualification impresses on their vocation a concrete and complementary trait. This is the reason why side by side with the traditional term of salesian brothers the official texts are now using indiscriminately also the term lay salesians.

The recent General Chapters and pronouncements of Rector Majors have helped clearly and efficaciously to clarify the kind of lay character that marks the salesian brother because of the fact that he is a religious, a member of a particular apostolic community.

It is a complex argument which has delicate implications for the present and future of all members. We give it ample space because of its interest and its urgent charismatic and historical importance. We shall deal with it in two parts, first with general points about the lay state and its different kinds, and then later we shall define the kind of lay state proper to the salesian brother.

In current civil and ecclesiastical terminology the terms "lay" and "lay state" indicate various realities often differing widely from one another and presenting a whole range of meanings, some of them precise, some rather vague, and some quite erroneous;

³⁴ GC21 179

³⁵ VIGANO E., *Lay component*, 10

some can be properly applied to salesian brothers, some only partly so, and some not at all.

To list and explain all of them in detail is beyond the scope of the present work. Here we limit ourselves to a presentation of those more familiar and widely known and more useful for our present purpose.

A. *"Lay" with reference to creation*

When speaking of the lay state, lay values and lay mentality, there is often an underlying intention and desire to respect the autonomy of earthly affairs: "all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order", because they have been created by God and are his creatures.³⁶

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It is man's task to discover them through science, respect them, use them and order them through work and technology "by applying the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts".³⁷

Vatican II calls all this the "autonomy of earthly affairs", and declares that when understood in the sense just explained it is "entirely right to demand such autonomy, because it is not merely required by modern man but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator".³⁸

A correct lay mentality therefore demands a deep professional sense which is not always easily attained. To put it more precisely, it is concerned with the objective reality of things; it seeks constantly to know them even if they are complex and require deep study, modern scientific knowledge and techniques, and careful experimentation; it is clear and precise in describing situations, critical in evaluating them, realistic in programming their improvement, undisturbed about verifying their results be they positive or negative, and courageous in making modifications; it is generous in collaboration and has a high regard for organization.

³⁶ GS 36

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Cf. GS 36

These requirements are also a positive contribution to the process of secularization which in varying degrees has marked our modern and contemporary period of history.

109 Applying these principles to our own case, the fact that we are christians and salesians prompts us not to renounce a recognized professional quality and competence, but rather to esteem them the more: "It is a mistake", declares 'Gaudium et spes', "to think that, because we have here no lasting city but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfil these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one".³⁹

Created things, although having a value in themselves, have also a necessary and irreplaceable reference to God: "For without a creator there can be no creature. In any case, believers, no matter what their religion, have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of creatures".⁴⁰

The actual process of secularization purifies the christian faith from mythical and irrational visions; it avoids opposing God to man as though they were two antagonists representing the sacred and profane. Between God and creatures there exists in fact a relationship of continual creation: "God by holding all things in existence gives them their identity".⁴¹

A correct lay mentality, enlightened by the christian outlook, discovers in the truth, goodness and beauty of all things the relationship which links them to God and reflects him: it knows that to contemplate them and use them properly stimulates a grateful dialogue with their Creator.

110 But it must be said that the process of secularization is often accompanied by statements that defend the radical independence of things as though they did not depend on God and men could dispose of them without any reference to the Creator.⁴² Man himself would attain his freedom because finally liberated from

³⁹ GS 43

⁴⁰ GS 36

⁴¹ GS 21, 36

⁴² GS 36

God. In many environments "lay" implies not lawful autonomy but the total independence of people, society and the sciences from any ulterior religious reference: a kind of atheistic laicism and secularism, springing from a degeneration of what is meant by "lay" in the evangelical sense.

In the context of a situation like this, to have a correct lay mentality means for the salesian brother or priest being able to resist and oppose various forms of materialism and atheistic laicism, or of religious indifference which are unfortunately present in many of the sectors in which he carries out his apostolate.

B. *"Lay" with reference to the Church's mission*

With reference to the mission of the Church in human history we speak of the "lay faithful" to distinguish them from the clergy and religious and to indicate that "they carry out their own part in the mission of the whole christian people with respect to the Church and the world".⁴³ The term "lay" is used to emphasize the fact that such faithful carry out the mission of the Church while immersed in the world. This is their proper secular characteristic about which more will be said later. 111

It should be noted in fact that the People of God as a whole is "sent by Christ to the whole world to be a sign of close union with God and of unity of the whole human race".⁴⁴ Entering therefore into this unique and universal mission of the Church is the duty "to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel".⁴⁵

But this happens in different ways: "Certainly all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension", says Pope John Paul II in the Exhortation 'Christifideles laici' (n.15), "but in different ways": the lay faithful share in it in one way, secular priests in another, members of Secular Institutes in another, and members of Religious Congregations in yet another.

⁴³ LG31; cf. CL 9-14

⁴⁴ LG 9, 1

⁴⁵ AA 5

In this context the 'world' is taken to mean not so much creation as the 'world of men', "the theatre of human history", marked by man's work and by his failures and successes; "the world which has been freed from the slavery of sin by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its fulfilment".⁴⁶

Let us therefore look at these modes of life and christian commitment in the world.

a. *The "lay character" proper to the lay faithful is connected with their "secular characteristic"*

112 The laity, declares the decree of Vatican II specifically dedicated to them, have "a special and indispensable role in the mission of the Church".⁴⁷ This is due to the secular character which is "proper and peculiar", even though not exclusive to them. It is present in fact, in different ways and degrees, also among the clergy and in religious Institutes, as we shall see in due course.⁴⁸

The secular character of this kind, properly called 'secularity' and not to be confused with secularization and secularism, has a double aspect: one is anthropological and sociological, the other ecclesiological and vocational.

The secular character in an anthropological and sociological sense indicates the fact of being in the world, of living in the ordinary conditions of family and social life, and the fact of having to fulfil temporal obligations concerning the family, health, education, science and culture, the world of work, the professions, industry, economy, justice, politics, relations with others, and peace. It covers all temporal human realities with the structures proper to them and the historical evolution in which they are involved.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ GS 2; cf. CL 15

⁴⁷ AA 1; referring to LG 30, 33

⁴⁸ Cf. LG 31; GS 43; cf. CL 15

⁴⁹ Cf. LG 31; AA 2. 6-8. 11-14; AG 32; cf. CL 15

The secular character in an ecclesiological and vocational sense emphasizes the christian commitment to ensure that these same realities are related to God, developed according to Christ, and constructed following the inspirations of his Gospel.⁵⁰ What characterizes the *christian* secular character of the simple secular condition common to all men is the commitment to ensuring that relationships between members of a family or work group and civil and social relations in general be free from human sin and evil, and meet the gospel requirements of justice, brotherhood, freedom and peace.

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The lay faithful carry out this mission by acting with direct responsibility from within these same structures. In this sense they animate them like ferment in an evangelical manner,⁵¹ and must express a spirituality closely adhering to their concrete forms of life and activity, to their abilities and aptitudes, and to the gifts received from the Spirit. Among these various forms of lay spiritual life Vatican II makes express mention of associations which take their inspiration from religious families, as is the case with the Salesian Cooperators.⁵²

The salesian brother, on the other hand, is a religious and by his religious profession modifies his secular condition, because he leaves his own family and insertion in the common civil and social structures in order to enter and form part of a salesian community. He also modifies his secular mission, because he no longer carries it out from within secular structures as do the lay faithful, but rather within the context of salesian works, and especially in line with his apostolic consecration as a member of a salesian community.

b. The consecrated lay state or secularity is proper to those who profess the evangelical counsels in the world, as do the members of Secular Institutes.⁵³ They remain in the world and operate from within it. They do not withdraw from their secular condition,

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⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Cf. LG 31; CL 15

⁵² Cf. AA 4

⁵³ PC 11

because they choose to remain in their own families and work from within one or other of the very many civil and social institutions. For these reasons they remain lay and secular, and preserve their secular character in the anthropological and ecclesiological sense already explained.

But in virtue of a specific vocation they practise the evangelical counsels while remaining in the world, thus becoming consecrated lay or secular persons. They have their own theological and juridical statute, distinct from that of religious. They do not live in community, even though they foster relationships of communion between the members of the Institute. They do not exercise a "confessional" apostolate, i.e. one carried out in the name of the Church and their own Institute, because the efficacy of their secular type of christian witness and action is strictly connected with a hidden and unseen presence in society. Their practice of obedience, poverty and chastity takes on secular characteristics adapted to their condition and mission in the world. This is the framework within which the Institute of the Don Bosco Volunteers finds a place.⁵⁴

The case of the salesian brother is a different one. When he becomes a religious he modifies his secular condition and mission. He lives and works in a religious community, takes part in the mission it carries out in the Church's name and openly practises the evangelical counsels according to the plan indicated in the Constitutions. All this specifies the nature of his lay state, and if on the one hand it imposes certain limitations, on the other it highlights it and characterizes the associated witness and efficacy connected with particular aspects of the salesian mission.

C. The lay state with reference to religious life

115 There are in the Church some forms of the lay state and of secularity which are compatible with a religious vocation and can be realized within it.

⁵⁴.v. DBV Constitutions

The lay faithful who become religious do not renounce their lay state, understood as respect for temporal realities and a christian view of creation, but rather strengthen it to the extent that they are guided and sustained in the total donation of themselves to God. By their life and activity they testify to the fact that God alone is the creator of all things and the Lord of humanity.

When they become religious they renew the commitment, already made in baptism and confirmation, of taking part in the common christian mission of those sent to their fellow men and of fulfilling the priestly, prophetic and regal functions common to all members of the People of God. The various forms of religious life do not imply a separation from the world and its problems: "Let no one think either", declares Vatican II, "that their consecrated way of life alienates religious from other men or makes them useless for human society. [...] They cooperate spiritually with their contemporaries so that the building up of human society may always have its foundation in the Lord, and have him as its goal; otherwise those who build it may have laboured in vain".⁵⁵

Not all lay religious live their lay and religious qualifications in the same way, but in line with the particular characteristics of the specific religious Institute to which they belong.

Many Institutes are in fact lay in nature: "A lay Institute is one that is recognized as such by ecclesiastical authority because, by its nature, character and purpose, its proper role, defined by its founder or by lawful tradition, does not include the exercise of sacred orders".⁵⁶

Other institutes, like our own, are made up of ecclesiastics and laymen, and it belongs especially to the lay members to realize the lay component of their original charismatic nature.

It frequently happens that certain Institutes, both clerical and lay, that engage in educational, pastoral or missionary apostolates or for the sick, are deeply and vitally inserted in the secular reality. They are in daily contact with the young and people of the neighbourhood, with local families and civil institutions. But above

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⁵⁵ LG 46

⁵⁶ CIC 58, 3

all and directly, their intention is to confess God as the absolute value, and bring within these contexts their witness as religious and the spirit of their founder. But from a sociological point of view and personally, through a particular sensitivity that they acquire in the course of their work, they take on to some extent in their religious life the signs of a secular physiognomy. This is the case of the lay confreres of our Society, born at the dawn of the industrial civilization and wholly dedicated to the realization of a great educational or pastoral commitment for the benefit of the young and the poor.

23.3 Characteristics of the vocation of the salesian brother

117 For a fuller understanding of this particular characteristic of the salesian brother, we must keep in mind also some others, which combine to define the vocation of the lay salesian.

A. A vocation which is grafted into the christian vocation

In harmony with the teaching of Vatican II, the GC21 states: "The vocation of the salesian brother is a development of the consecration conferred by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, by which he lives integrally the christian values of the People of God: sanctified and sent by God the Father for the salvation of the world, he takes part in the mission and activity of Christ, prophet, priest and shepherd, and thus inserts himself in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel and bear witness to it". To this end he manifests and gives value to "fundamental christian orientations such as awareness of our common dignity as children of God and brothers in Christ, of our common responsibility in the task of building up his Mystical Body, and of our common call to sanctity; evangelical freedom, the gift of the Spirit; a vivid sense of belonging to the local Church, presided over by the Bishop; a sense of renewed presence in society; christian solidarity, especially with the poor; sensitivity and openness to

the 'signs of the times'; creative involvement in contemporary problems".⁵⁷

These general indications are taken up and expressed in the text of our Rule of life. "The salesian vocation", says art.6 of the Constitutions, "places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission". "Our love for Christ", declares art.13, "necessarily gives rise to our love for his Church, the People of God, the centre of union and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom. We feel ourselves a living part of her, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity". "The community lives and expresses its apostolic commitment within the particular Church", asserts art.48; and art.7: "Our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history". Art.19 completes this: "The salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord manifests his will also through the demands of time and place".

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B. *A vocation which practises a radical evangelical style of life and activity*

The salesian brother is aware that God's initiative lies at the origin of his vocation. By calling him to the salesian life the Father consecrates him by the gift of his Spirit, prompts in him a response to the call he has received, and gives him continual support in fulfilling his obligations.

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He responds to God's loving initiative by his profession: "We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and send us out to be apostles of the young. Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom".⁵⁸

⁵⁷ SGC 174

⁵⁸ C 3

The consecrating action of God embraces not just one or other aspect of the life of the lay salesian but his entire person and all his activity. By his active presence the Holy Spirit inserts him into the divine life of charity; it animates him and sustains him in the fulfilment of his mission, in living fraternal communion and in practising the evangelical counsels.

The response too which he gives reflects not one or other aspect of his life but the whole of his interests. By his religious profession he offers the whole of himself to God: his being and his activities for the salvation of the young. He commits himself to the salesian mission and a life of communion. In the practice of the counsels he finds a guarantee of supernatural efficacy for his mission and a source of brotherhood and pastoral charity, of apostolic thrust and dynamism. The vows render him completely available for others and commit him to live and work with his confreres to bear witness to the Gospel and proclaim it to the young.

The formula of profession well expresses these new aspects of his being and obligations: "God my Father, you *consecrated* me to yourself on the day of my baptism. In *response* to the Lord Jesus your Son, who *calls* me to follow him more closely, and led by the Holy Spirit who is light and strength, with complete freedom I *offer myself totally* to you. I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom *you will send* me, especially to young people who are poorer; to live in the Salesian Society in communion of spirit and action with my brothers, and in this way to share in the life and mission of your Church. And so [...] I make the vow to live obedient, poor and chaste, according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions".⁵⁹

C. *A lay religious vocation*

120 The salesian brothers are the lay members of our Congregation. We now take up again a reflection begun earlier in terms of the lay character, so as to examine it more completely and at greater depth.

⁵⁹ C 24

a. The salesian brother lives out his lay vocation as a salesian religious

To describe the lay dimension of the salesian brother, the SGC goes back to the teaching of Vatican II concerning the three functions shared by all the faithful in virtue of the sacraments of initiation, but it reshapes them beginning from the fact that the brother is a salesian religious and this has its effect on his lay status. The salesian brother, says the SGC:

- “lives with the characteristics proper to religious life his vocation as a member of the laity, seeking the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God;
- exercises his baptismal priesthood, prophetic witness and kingly service, and in this way truly shares in the life and mission of Christ and of the Church;
- with the intensity that derives from his specific consecration and by ‘mandate’ of the Church, and not merely as a private individual, he fulfils the mission of spreading the Gospel, and of sanctifying in a non-sacramental manner;
- undertakes works of charity with greater dedication within a Congregation dedicated to the integral education of youth, especially those in need;
- as regards the christian renewal of the temporal order, since he has renounced worldliness he exercises this form of apostolate as a religious in a most efficacious manner, educating youth to the christian renewal of work and to other human values.”⁶⁰

The present text of the Constitutions takes all this for granted. By first outlining the salesian characteristics common to all members of the Congregation and then dealing with the identity of the priest salesian and lay salesian only within that context, the intention is evidently to make it clear that the brother is first of all a salesian religious; the awareness of having embraced a specific form of consecrated life, the salesian form, which has the purpose

⁶⁰ SGC 149

of realizing Don Bosco's apostolic project, modifies his awareness of being a lay christian, and both permeates it and enlivens it.⁶¹ He is "responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and lay characteristics".⁶²

b. The salesian brother lives as a lay salesian his communal religious vocation

121 The GC21 makes what was said by the SGC its own,⁶³ but also adds something to it. It defines the lay nature of the salesian brother beginning from his religious vocation, but it indicates also and especially how the lay characteristic specifies and gives shape to all his religious life. It is an essential co-determining factor. He lives as a layman the sum total of the community values which make up the salesian vocation.⁶⁴ In other words the fact of being lay has its influence on the way in which the confrere lives and acts as a salesian religious in communion with the other confreres. The following are the passages which concern us more closely.

This lay nature is not to be understood negatively, as though the only thing necessary to be a layman was not to be a priest, but positively as "the sum total of the values that constitute a lay christian, conditioned by the salesian religious consecration".

Neither is the lay character confined within the limitations of specific services or functions which the lay salesian carries out in the setting of his own community: the lay state, says the GC21, "is not to be understood simply as a service or a function".

It extends rather to his whole life: "The lay dimension permeates the entire life of the brother: his salesian mission, his life in community, his apostolic activity, his religious profession, his life of prayer, his spiritual life - all of which are lived by him as a salesian religious layman.

122 The point is emphasized that in virtue of this lay characteristic "his whole existence becomes focussed into a life of witness to the

⁶¹ Cf. C 2

⁶² C 45

⁶³ GC21 178, quoting SGC 149

⁶⁴ C 3

salesian ideal with regard to his priest confreres, the people who are in his care, and various branches of the salesian family. All this gives to the salesian community a characteristic of its own as envisaged by Don Bosco: the enriching presence of a lay dimension which makes it possible to meet the world in a way that is apostolically more efficacious".⁶⁵

In particular it does not isolate the community from the associated priestly dimension.⁶⁶ The Congregation is made up of ecclesiastics and laymen united with each other by solid bonds of unity between the members. If individual salesians were to be considered as being outside these mutual fraternal bonds, the danger would arise of forming an idea of salesian life that would be individualistic or, worse still, categorized.⁶⁷

The present text of the Constitutions sums up, briefly but efficaciously, the development of this process: "The salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which makes him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life".⁶⁸

D. *A vocation at the service of the salesian mission*

For the realization of his project of life and apostolic activity, Don Bosco considered the contribution of the lay religious as being very necessary. 123

He wanted the Society of St Francis de Sales to be a union of "priests, clerics and laymen - artisans especially - who wish to work together, trying to help one another and others spiritually".⁶⁹

In shaping the Society Don Bosco laid it down that it be composed not of ecclesiastics alone nor of laymen alone, but of both of these united in a single communion of life and work.

⁶⁵ GC21 178

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ C 45

⁶⁹ BM 12, 121

Faithful to this intention, art.4 of the Constitutions says: "Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation".

Every salesian, layman or priest, participates in the mission entrusted to the community and shares the responsibility for its realization. "The apostolic mandate is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important".⁷⁰ Art.175 emphasizes the point: "The local community is made up of confreres [...] who in unity of spirit under the authority of the superior share responsibility as they carry out their apostolic mission". And art.45 further specifies: "Each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one salesian vocation".

E. *A salesian vocation which is concrete and complete*

124 God calls each one by name and for a particular mission to be carried out among his people at a determined moment in history.

The mission of the salesian brother, like that of the salesian priest, is a call that God gives to the individual and makes him what he is. "Each one of us", says art.22 of the Constitutions, "is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society; because of this God gives him personal gifts".

The call is not a generic one; it is specific: each one is called to be concretely a priest salesian or a lay salesian. To realize his apostolic project Don Bosco in fact founded a congregation "made up of clerics and laymen". This is the *form* of our Society. It is composed (art.4) of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation.

Without any doubt each one always discovers his own concrete vocation through a process of progressive discernment. Vocational and pastoral work and the initial formation period are designed to accompany this process.

⁷⁰ C 44

Among the People of God the Holy Spirit distributes various gifts, all of them rooted in the common christian vocation.⁷¹ They represent different ways of fulfilling it, adapted to the person of each one of the baptized. Every vocational gift or form is therefore complete in itself. The decree of Vatican II on the consecrated life says in this connection: "Lay religious life for men is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels which is complete in itself. [...] And so this sacred Council confirms the members in their vocation".⁷²

Within our Congregation there is a common salesian vocation lived in different ways, the way of the layman and that of the priest. Hence there are not two vocations differing in value or degree, i.e. with that of the priest salesian a complete one and that of the lay salesian incomplete, or vice versa. Art.3 of the Constitutions assures us that that the vocation of the salesian brother includes all the elements inseparable from our salesian apostolic consecration: the special covenant with God, the mission, brotherly communion, practice of the evangelical counsels, and the salesian spirit with which this consecration is lived.

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Consequently the salesian brother shares in the realization of the plan of life and activity of the community by direct and not merely indirect title, i.e. on the basis of his particular vocation and the specific mandate received from the Church. "The ecclesial mandate entrusted to us by the Church"⁷³ is rooted in the free gift of the salesian vocation. The Church recognizes this and tries by her intervention to bring it to fruition.

F. *An original vocation*

Don Rinaldi wrote that "the salesian brother is a genial creation of the great heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians".⁷⁴ He insisted on this "modern and genial element" and suggested the reasons underlying it: "The brother is not a

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⁷¹ Cf. LG 7, 12

⁷² PC 10

⁷³ Cf. PC 8

⁷⁴ ASC 40, 574

second-rate person, not just a helper nor the right arm of the priests and their brothers in religion, but their equal who may indeed precede and outstrip them in perfection, as is amply confirmed by daily experience".⁷⁵

The GC21 in analyzing this theme more deeply further declared that "this vocation is therefore a 'specific' vocation different from others: both in the Church because it is at the service of the salesian mission, and in the salesian family because it is lived by a lay religious in a community with its own characteristics bestowed by the Founder".⁷⁶

G. *A meaningful vocation*

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It has been said that if an individual or group is to remain alive and healthy, the corresponding identity must have and express a sense which is intelligible and active.

Certainly in the case of salesian brothers who have generously followed out their vocation, the fact of living and working with Don Bosco has given sense to their lives. Their daily witness has attracted others and led them too to become lay salesians.

Although perhaps little known and sometimes not well understood, their identity has been frequently held in high regard both within the salesian family and also in civil and ecclesiastical circles. And this not only because, as Don Rinaldi wrote, "it is a kind of life of perfection and apostolate [...] accessible to all kinds of individuals",⁷⁷ but also because "it covers all life's dimensions, and offers the possibility for a full development of the personality",⁷⁸ and as far as the mission is concerned responds fully, in different places and cultures, to their needs and especially to those linked with the 'world of work'.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ GC21 173

⁷⁷ ASC 40, 575-577

⁷⁸ GC21 173

⁷⁹ Cf. VIGANO E., *Report to GC22*, 322.

2.4 ESSENTIAL RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LAY AND PRIEST SALESIANS

The network of relationships within the Congregation which unites brothers and priests enters into their vocational identity.

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This a theme to which our General Chapters, and especially the GC21 and GC22, have repeatedly returned.

24.1 Vocational reciprocity

Speaking of our Society, its form and its particular purpose, art.4 of the Constitutions declares: "Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen". In the Church it has an original physiognomy which is both "religious and secular" at the same time, as Pius IX said;⁸⁰ it has its own specific manner of living and acting, adapted to the new features of the present times and the kind of pastoral and educational service it carries out. This particular form depends precisely on the fact that it is "made up of clerics and laymen". "It consists of clerics and laymen", declared Don Bosco in the text of the Constitutions of 1875, "who live in common and form one heart and one soul...".⁸¹

This is the concrete way of life in which the same vocation was lived with Don Bosco in the first Oratory. This "experience of the Holy Spirit" which our Founder began and which the Church has recognized as a "charism",⁸² as a gift from God, is one of the basic elements which make the Congregation to be what it ought to be according to God's will.

It is our communal charisma: "each one of us is called by God to be part of the Salesian Society",⁸³ to live in close communion with others by virtue of the same vocation.

Because of their baptism and confirmation salesian brothers and priests are already united with each other in ecclesial

⁸⁰ BM 13, 62

⁸¹ Const. 1875, II 1

⁸² ET 11; MR 11

⁸³ C 22

communion. The salesian vocation causes the vocational form of each one to be linked by a new title with that of the other, so that a real vocational reciprocity exists between the two.

129 Correlation and reciprocity do not indicate subordination or opposition, nor loss or fusion of the specific lay and priestly characteristics. They signify rather mutual communion and communication between salesians having their own proper characteristics; they imply an exchange of respective values and an equal sharing in the realization of Don Bosco's apostolic project.⁸⁴

Don Bosco's seventh successor says in this regard: "The differences in the image and role of the confreres are not to be considered as limitations or degrees, but as sources of riches they share in common; there is no question of something lacking, but rather the integrating potential to share each other's excellence; an harmonious contribution to a unique type of religious and apostolic community."⁸⁵

24.2 Complementary brotherhood

130 Art.4 of the Constitutions specifies: clerics and laymen "complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation". It is not a question of just any kind of complementary relationship, but of a "particular kind of organic complementarity".⁸⁶ It requires a balanced dosage between the lay and priestly components, which is not fixed once and for all time but open to a continual revision that allows for correction and opportune adaptation to time and place.

The phrases "the same vocation" and "complement each other as brothers" demand in general full equality among the members in religious profession, constitutional reciprocity between clerical and lay members, and adequate formation for this mutually correlated way of life.

⁸⁴ GC21 194

⁸⁵ VIGANO E., *Lay component*, 7

⁸⁶ GC21 196

A. Complementarity at the level of personal awareness

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For this brotherhood and complementarity based on *ideal* values to become founded on *real* values, all salesians must be fully aware and convinced in their regard. They must be ever more rooted in their consciousness and manifested in their internal and external attitudes.

The Rector Major has said in this connection: "Every confrere, be he cleric or lay, if he has a true awareness of being a 'member' will feel that he shares the responsibility for everything, bringing to it the gift of himself and his particular vocation. The priestly and lay components do not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, running on parallel lines and eventually putting together the efforts of each group, but rather a single community which is the true recipient of the one salesian mission.

"This requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each clerical salesian there is an intimate feeling of being linked to and co-involved with the lay dimension of the community, and in the heart of each lay salesian in turn there is the same feeling in respect of the community's priestly dimension. It is the salesian community in each of its members, which bears witness to these sensitivities and carries out undertakings which are at the same time both 'priestly' and 'lay'."⁸⁷

The community must foster and develop these attitudes since it will be this awareness, lived in its consequences, that will do away with any "clericalist" mentality that tends to undervalue lay contributions, or a "laicist" mentality that opposes or at least remains aloof from priestly values, often on emotional grounds. Impoverished mentalities of this kind are a source of tensions and bitterness, of discrimination and lack of communication, and they destroy our specific apostolic communion.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ GC22 80

⁸⁸ Ibid.

B. Complementarity at apostolic level

132 What is implied at the level of apostolic activity by the fact that lay and priest salesians complement each other as brothers? Art.45 of the Constitutions says: "The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness". Consequently the community would not be fully itself if the presence of one or other were lacking.

Don Bosco's intention was that the young should be dealt with through activities in which they themselves take part, but accompanied by close collaboration between lay and priest salesians, who are brothers in the same religious community.⁸⁹

Art.44 of the Constitutions takes up this same conviction: in the provincial and local communities "the members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility". And the following article specifies: Each one of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characters of the one salesian vocation".

133 As far as the specifically lay component is concerned, the presence of the lay salesian enriches the apostolic activity of the community. It reminds the priest members of the values inherent in the lay religious vocation and recalls them constantly to an active collaboration with lay people. It also recalls to the salesian priest the vision of an apostolic goal and ideal that is complex in its reality, because it goes beyond priestly and catechetical activity in the strict sense".^{89b}

The significant and credible presence of the salesian brother presents to the young "the values of the lay religious vocation as an alternative to the priestly religious vocation. To those who do not feel themselves called to the religious life it offers a more

⁸⁹ Cf. *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*, p.384

^{89b} Cf. GC21 195

immediate model of the christian life, of sanctified work, and of the lay apostolate". It provides the salesian community with a particular apostolic incarnation in the world and a particular presence in the Church's mission.^{89c}

24.3 Influence of reciprocity and complementarity on identity

The reciprocity and complementarity between lay and priest salesians have an influence on the identity of both, as also on that of the community and of the entire Congregation. 134

A. *Reciprocity and complementarity characterize the identity of the individuals*

Since they are closely related to each other in the internal affairs of the community, the salesian brother and priest mutually characterize and influence each other. It is not possible to define adequately the identity of the brother without reference to that of the priest and vice versa. The crisis of identity or the changed perspective of the one involves and affects the other to some extent. Their spiritual strengths enrich each other, and the poverty of spiritual life, whether lay or priestly has a negative effect on both".⁹⁰

So that the salesian community may remain faithful to its original project and its members may faithfully develop their own characteristic physiognomy, salesian priests and brothers must understand each other and both must be open to the understanding of God's gift: "Thus it will be possible to realize this wonderful exchange, in which each one remains himself but is oriented toward the other, and both toward the ones to whom they have been sent. A priest who does not regard his brother confrere in this light, or who belittles his real presence and prophetic mission, is a priest who does not have a full grasp of his own identity".⁹¹ And vice versa.

^{89c} Ibid.

⁹⁰ GC21 196

⁹¹ Ibid.

A similar uneasiness should disturb the conscience of all.⁹²

B. *Reciprocity and complementarity characterize the Congregation and its communities*

135 "The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up", says Art.45 of the Constitutions. This reaffirms the explicit will of Don Bosco, repeatedly recalled in the course of our history, concerning the form of our Society.⁹³

The salesian brother is a "necessary factor in salesian work", wrote Don Rinaldi.⁹⁴ The GC19 declared him "a constituent element" of the Congregation to such an extent that the latter would no longer be what Don Bosco wanted it to be, if the brothers no longer existed.⁹⁵

The GC21 explained the underlying reasons: "The special religious vocation of a lay salesian affects the global tone of the Congregation, and together with the priestly dimension defines its identity. The theme of the brother", continues the declaration of the GC21, quoting the sixth successor of Don Bosco, "touches the very nature of the Congregation. To ask 'what is the brother?' is equivalent to asking 'what is the nature of the Congregation, its mission and its spirit?'. Because the Congregation that Don Bosco willed and founded cannot be thought of as other than an apostolic community of consecrated laymen and clerics. If you look closely, the problems of the brother are the same as the problems of the Congregation. They are our most real and most essential problems".

"The Congregation therefore", concludes the Chapter's declaration, "must stay faithful to the charismatic nature that Don Bosco gave it. This must not be just a theoretical or doctrinal fidelity, but one that is concrete and historical. In other words, it must not merely be said that it is both clerical and lay but it must

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ C 4

⁹⁴ ASC (1927), p.621

⁹⁵ GC19, p.65

really be so, in a clear visible manner, as shown in its attitude, in its life and external manifestations. [...] Perhaps it should also be added that when in some provinces the proportion of brothers to priests is seriously compromised, then in those places at least we no longer give a complete and exact witness of what we are charismatically".⁹⁶

The seventh successor of Don Bosco came back on these same points in his letter (already quoted) on the "Lay element in the salesian community", and in his various interventions in the GC22.⁹⁷ "It is not simply a case", he said, "of this or that confrere arbitrarily, independently and haphazardly preferring the ministry or things temporal; no, it is a matter involving the salesian community as a vital organism, i.e. the Congregation as such, which has of its essence a peculiar and simultaneous sense of both the priestly consecration and the lay dimension, each imbuing the other and forming together a unique life of communion".⁹⁸

The various reasons set out above explain the Rector Major's "cry of alarm" at the GC22.⁹⁹

24.4 Participation in the life and government of the Congregation

The structures of animation and government influence the identity of both individual and group. Now that we have clarified the relationship of reciprocity and complementarity between lay and priest salesians in the community and in the Congregation, we can decipher and better understand on the one hand the responsibility of lay salesians in the structures of animation and government, and on the other the service of the salesian priest who is the community's superior.

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⁹⁶ GC21 197-198

⁹⁷ Cf. VIGANO E., *Lay component; Report to GC22* 320-322; GC22 79-82

⁹⁸ VIGANO E., *Lay component*, 15

⁹⁹ VIGANO E., *Report to GC22*, 322; GC22 81

A. *The responsibility of the salesian brother in the structures of animation and government*

Our history manifests the rich and varied contribution made by salesian brothers to the life of the community, by their presence in roles of direct responsibility and in organisms of animation and government at all levels.¹⁰⁰

At local level they fill offices of responsibility in both the religious and the educative community: we can find the brother as the principal of a school, head of a workshop, technical director, director of a publishing house, treasurer, etc., and as a member of the local council.¹⁰¹

At provincial level he may take part in all the province's structures of animation: consultant groups, secretariats, etc.; he can be a member of the provincial council,¹⁰² and a delegate to the provincial chapter.¹⁰³

At world level he can be a member of the General Chapter,¹⁰⁴ and be elected as a member of the General Council of the Congregation.¹⁰⁵

He thus makes a contribution which is not only responsible and effective, but also correlated and organic,¹⁰⁶ to the animation of the fraternal and apostolic community with a true authority founded on the principles of participation, subsidiarity and decentralization.¹⁰⁷

This authority he exercises "in imitation of Christ and in his name according to the spirit of Don Bosco as a service to brothers for discerning and fulfilling the Father's will."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Cf. GC21 192

¹⁰¹ Cf. C 44, 45, 51, 66, 176, 178-179

¹⁰² Cf. C 161, 163-166, 169

¹⁰³ Cf. C 170-174

¹⁰⁴ Cf. C 145-151

¹⁰⁵ Cf. C 141

¹⁰⁶ Cf. C 44, 45, 51, 66

¹⁰⁷ Cf. C 120, 122-124

¹⁰⁸ Cf. C 121

B. *The service of the salesian superior as a priest*

The service of the salesian superior is conceived and carried out in the context of the fundamental reciprocity between lay and priest salesians. Its purpose is to strengthen these relationships in harmony with the specific kind of formally pastoral mission assigned to the community.

It is a question of a service which our tradition entrusts, as stated in art.121 of the Constitutions, to a priest confrere who "by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers".¹⁰⁹ All members, of both groups, need him and his ministry.

This should ensure the pastoral aspect of our activity and works: not only the aspect common to all the faithful in so far as they are active elements in the Church's mission, but also the specific aspect which is linked with the exercise of the priestly ministry. "Every community is called, in fact, to be a kind of 'mission station' for young people. The one who guides the community must have the discernment and sensitivity of a 'shepherd', so as to give to the common mission a particular ecclesial slant".¹¹⁰

2.5 APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

Reference has already been made several times to the apostolic activity of the salesian brother. To complete what has been said and in line with the particular contents of the present chapter, we add here some elements concerning:

- the foundations of the salesian apostolate of the brother;
- the fact that his whole life must be apostolic;
- the "world of work" as the special field for his activity.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ *Project of life of Salesians of Don Bosco*, 114f; 881-883.

25.1 The foundations of the apostolate of the lay salesian

139 The foundation of his apostolate is the consecration received in baptism and confirmation. It finds its full and practical fulfilment in the apostolic consecration of the salesian profession.

A. *The common christian vocation to the apostolate*

The salesian brother is called, as are all christians, to take part in the Church's mission by virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. This is a truth emphasized several times by Vatican II. Here are some examples of the Council's declarations:

"The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary".¹¹¹
"The christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well".¹¹² "There is no such thing as a member that has no share in the mission of the whole Body".¹¹³ The pastors "know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world".¹¹⁴

In the sacraments of baptism and confirmation the faithful are conformed to Christ the priest, prophet, king and Lord. Consequently they have the right and duty to exercise an apostolic activity that is sanctifying or cultural, prophetic and witness-bearing, regal and contributing to the renewal of the temporal order, so that they can be conformed to God's plan.¹¹⁵

B. *The salesian manner of sharing in the Church's mission*

140 There is a whole variety of specific vocations and hence different ways of participating in the Church's mission and of carrying out apostolic activity, common to all christians.

Our apostolic consecration is the salesian manner of living the consecration received in baptism and confirmation. Our mission

¹¹¹ AG 2; v. also AG 35; LG 9, 17.

¹¹² AA 2

¹¹³ PO 2; v. also LG 13, 17, 30, 32; AG 5, 6, 10, 35-37.

¹¹⁴ LG 30, 32

¹¹⁵ Cf. LG 10-12, 34-36; AA 2, 3.

to the young and the poor is the salesian way of sharing the mission of the Church. Our educational and pastoral service to the young and the lower classes is the salesian way of sharing the evangelizing action of the Church.¹¹⁶

The christian who becomes a salesian brother commits himself to carrying out the Church's mission and the three functions proper to Christ by sharing in the realization of Don Bosco's apostolic project as a member of a community who is both an educator and evangelizer.

His apostolic consecration received at religious profession is the salesian way of living his baptismal consecration and realizing his calling to the apostolate.¹¹⁷

25.2 The whole life of the salesian brother is apostolic

The whole of the life and activity of the faithful christian must be apostolic, and not just some moments of it. In the same way the whole life of the salesian brother and all he does must be transformed into apostolate. 141

Apostolate is not reducible to certain actions, like catechesis, preaching and the administration of the sacraments. Vatican II, referring back to the Bible, includes in apostolate every action aimed at ensuring that the whole world be oriented to Christ, or in other words that those concerned live and work in communion of faith, hope and love with God and with each other, following the example given us by the Lord Jesus.¹¹⁸

Let us look briefly at two practical consequences.

The first consists in the fact that the tasks carried out by lay salesians (domestic services, tertiary activities, cultural and educational work) cannot be considered only as trades or professions or non-sacred activities. A correct christian mentality cannot accept this watering down, because it would amount to 142

¹¹⁶ Cf. C 6, 31

¹¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Cf. AA 2

accepting, even unconsciously, a kind of attitude and approach reflecting laicism. To transform them into apostolate a right intention is not by itself sufficient. To offer the day's activities to God is an element contributing to the good quality of an action, but it is possible for a person to act with a right intention and at the same time do a work badly through incompetence. Work must be looked upon as a task entrusted to each one by the Creator, to be performed in an honest and competent manner and directed to the service of other people. Professional competence remains an important aspect of every authentic apostolate.¹¹⁹

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The second consequence lies in the fact that the activities of lay salesians are not a kind of indirect apostolate, but an active and conscious participation in the direct apostolate of their own community. The Gospel is proclaimed so that it may be lived, and living the Gospel means inserting in personal relationships the values it poses.

The salesian brother who in the fulfilment of his office sees to it that his relationship with those working with him, or to whom his service is directed, are marked by respect, understanding, a keen sense of justice and sincere fraternal charity, transforms his activity into apostolate because he lives the Gospel, bears witness to it by deeds, and reflects it in his behaviour.

Rightly did the GC21 emphasize the need to confirm and specify "the apostolic dimension of the work entrusted to the brother and of his educational activity in the school scene, avoiding the pitfall of entrusting him with only the professional training of the students".¹²⁰

25.3 The "world of work", a special field of action for lay salesians

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Some activities, of their nature and because of the social and cultural environment in which they are carried out, can be more meaningful for the salesian brother and better suited to his lay

¹¹⁹ Cf. GS 67, 72

¹²⁰ GC21 182

identity, provided he fulfils them as a salesian religious, and hence as an active member of an educational and evangelizing community. The GC21 in particular had a good deal to say on this point.

"Considering the importance and incidence of the working classes in many countries, it is clear that activities connected with this area will certainly be the most significant apostolic field of action for the brother in these regions, even if not exclusively so".¹²¹

"With his usual sensitivity to the needs of the times, Don Bosco had already emphasized that one of the distinguishing tasks of the brother was to inject christian values in the world of labour, from which he himself had reaped virtues some of which are still valid today: for instance, the spirit of competition, strict self-discipline, the sound and enriching apologetic value of a religious workingman in the face of a public opinion that is particularly sensitive to the meaning of human labour".¹²²

At the present time the concept of the "world of work" has progressed a long way, of its nature and because of the reflections provoked by a series of ecclesial documents, from "Rerum novarum" of Leo XIII and "Quadragesimo anno" of Pius XI, to "Mater et magistra" of John XXIII, "Gaudium et spes" of Vatican II, "Populorum progressio" of Paul VI, and finally "Laborem exercens" and "Sollicitudo rei socialis" of John Paul II.

It appears as a vast and complex phenomenon that has given rise to numerous social categories with their own specific characteristics, interdependent on each other and often shot through with tensions and conflicts. It is also a source of rights and corresponding duties. It creates new cultural models and forges new types of humanity. It is a powerful factor in the development of the individual. Situations of exploitation, emargination, unemployment or employment only part-time, all pose grave educational and pastoral problems especially in the youth sector.

¹²¹ GC21 183

¹²² Ibid.

For Christians it is an area in which they can live and give expression to a specific spirituality. By their labour in fact the faithful participate in the work of the Creator, follow Christ - the "man of work", share his painful journey marked by the cross, but sustained by the sure hope of resurrection.¹²³

The lay salesian is a constant reminder to all the community of the urgent responsibility towards the world of work that we have in common.

25.4 A specific contribution to the Congregation's opening to secularity

145 The contribution by means of which lay salesians cause our Society to take on characteristic secular traits compatible with the religious spirit is indeed important.

Their functions and activities, about which more will be said later in connection with formation, are largely secular in character, i.e. common to those usually carried out by people in the world. The works in which they are engaged, whether salesian or non-salesian, are prevalently temporal and mundane, e.g. technical and trade schools, youth centres, educational and cultural works, all of them by now widely open to the social and cultural environment in which they are inserted.

The need also to live and work among young people implies the acceptance of certain conditions of life proper to seculars, with ample possibilities and opportunities for cooperation with them, with lay collaborators, with the parents of pupils, and with the very many clients of our numerous works.

In addition, because of the need at times to make contact with youth and the poorer classes in their own environment so as to get closer to them, to love them in Christ and to remedy their needy situation by sharing their lawful aspirations for a more humane society, lay salesians are led by this very service to live in a secular condition and give it Christian animation.

¹²³ Cf. e.g. LG 25-27

To sum up, the secularity of salesian brothers, though necessarily limited by the fact that they are religious, is still very wide from other standpoints and is often much broader than is possible for salesian priests. "There are things", said Don Bosco, addressing brothers, "that priests and clerics cannot do and you will do them";¹²⁴ they are precisely the things that the condition of the lay salesian allows and enables him to do.¹²⁵

2.6 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE LAY SALESIAN

By the expression "spiritual life" we mean here the practical way in which the believer accepts, experiences, develops and lives the presence in him of the Holy Spirit. Understood in this way, the spiritual life is the sum total of the interior attitudes and external expressions and behaviour by which the christian lives his specific apostolic vocation in the Church and in the world, in docility to the Lord's Spirit. 146

26.1 Spiritual life is equivalent to living the salesian spirit

In the Church there are many ways of living an authentic spiritual life in conformity with the Gospel. For us, the sons of Don Bosco, spiritual life is immediately linked with the salesian spirit, i.e. the original style of life and activity lived by our Founder, and passed on to us as a precious heritage. 147

It is not only a doctrine (though this it obviously is) but rather the ensemble of attitudes and ways of acting assumed and expressed by Don Bosco's followers as they live and work for the realization of his apostolic project.¹²⁶

The salesian brother is called to live and bear witness in the community to an evangelical experience which corresponds to his

¹²⁴ MB 16, 313

¹²⁵ Cf. VIGANO E., *Lay component*, 17, 26, 32-34

¹²⁶ Cf. C 12

specific vocational form. He is called to live the salesian spirit as a lay confrere.

In harmony with the principles of the salesian spirit, the centre and quintessence of the spiritual life of the salesian brother is "pastoral charity characterized by youthful dynamism ...; it is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone".¹²⁷

Drawing his inspiration from the example and teachings of his Founder and father, he "finds in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father" "the model and source" of all his spiritual and apostolic life. He is grateful to the Father because he calls all to salvation; he is aware of sharing in Christ's predilection for poor youth; he is conscious of being one of God's collaborators, a humble instrument but a necessary and efficacious one; in his actions he makes his own the "preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving"; he has a deep-rooted sense of human brotherhood and lives in fraternal communion with all, following the example of the Lord Jesus.¹²⁸

As he works as a lay salesian for the salvation of the young, he "experiences the fatherhood of God and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work. [...] He cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father whom he feels close at hand. He is attentive to the presence of the Spirit".¹²⁹

He carries out the apostolic mission, lives in fraternal communion, and practises the evangelical counsels "in a single movement of charity towards God and towards his brothers". This is the 'da mihi animas' which characterized the life and activity of his Founder and his manner of contemplating God; it is the concrete way, following Don Bosco's example in which the salesian brother meets God, who works through human beings and manifests himself in daily events for the salvation of the human race.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ C 10

¹²⁸ Cf. C 11

¹²⁹ C 12

¹³⁰ C 3, 12, 19, 21, 95

26.2 The salesian brother lives, as a lay salesian, the attitudes and behaviour proper to the salesian spirit

A. *He lives his salesian vocation with joy and gratitude*

He is grateful to the Father for the precious gift of his vocation of which he is fully conscious. He lives it with joy as a lay salesian and considers it a value which is positive and complete, meaningful and essential for the Congregation.¹³¹ 148

Aware of his responsibility, he entrusts himself to the fidelity of God who first loved him, and he daily renews his response to the special Covenant the Lord has made with him by his religious profession. He makes of this the whole reason of his life, his only path to holiness.¹³²

B. *He lives in communion of spirit and action with priest salesians*

Called as he is to share with his confreres who are priests in carrying out the common apostolic project, and to live with them a life of brotherhood, work and prayer, he has a sense of 'we' and identifies himself with the life of the community. 149

Moved by this conviction, he commits himself to ensuring that his spiritual life and apostolic activity are characterized by relationships of close communion and effective collaboration with salesian priests.¹³³

He is careful to eliminate from his way of thinking, speaking and acting any idea, gesture or expression that could reveal in any way either a sense of unease or recrimination, or worse still of resentment or aversion. He is generous in forgiving and forgetting any slights or wrongs he may have suffered.¹³⁴

He expresses in a practical manner his living sense of the Church as a family in which all are children of the same Father,

¹³¹ V. above at 24.3

¹³² Cf. C 2, 14, 22, 196

¹³³ Cf. C 16, 44, 45, 49-52

¹³⁴ Cf. C 52, 90, 91

brothers in the one Lord with equal responsibility, even though with different roles and ministries, in building up the Body of Christ and in extending his Kingdom.¹³⁵

He is aware of the original nature of his contribution, and on this account of his need for help.¹³⁶

C. *He lives in the "world of work" some values of the salesian spirit*

150 The "world of work" is usually the special field for his apostolic activity. In it he comes in contact with various phenomena which characterize that world: solidarity, concrete situations, adaptability, and various forms of tension and conflict.¹³⁷

All this enables him to acquire personal and particular experience of certain values of the salesian spirit and to bear witness to them in such settings: the sense of the concrete and of urgent needs, the spirit of initiative and creativity, a critical ability, effective solidarity, and the family spirit.¹³⁸

D. *He lives in close proximity to the young and the lay faithful, with optimism, diligence and restraint*

151 His lay condition and the kind of work he usually does enable him to be close to the young and the lay faithful in characteristic fashion.¹³⁹ He practises the salesian style of relationships in an original manner: simplicity, openness and cordiality, delicacy and tact in dealing with others. And he cultivates the social virtues recommended to the lay faithful by Vatican II: "uprightness, the spirit of justice, sincerity, courtesy, strength of will, the art of living with others, of cooperating in fraternal fashion, and of being able to dialogue".¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Cf. C 4, 13, 57

¹³⁶ Cf. C 44, 45, 49-51

¹³⁷ V above at 25.4

¹³⁸ Cf. C 18, 19, 79

¹³⁹ V. above at 25.4

¹⁴⁰ Cf. C 15-17

The kind of work he does keeps him close to creation, to art and technology, and prompts him to the practice of salesian optimism. He knows how to perceive and make grateful use of terrestrial values; he admires creation and in it the power God has entrusted to man; he rejoices at progress made in science and technology. On the other hand he is also well aware that unfortunately such progress is not always accompanied by a corresponding human, moral and religious development. And so he adopts an enlightened attitude and critical approach without giving way to pessimism, distrust or lack of effort. In meeting difficulties and problems in his work he remains always cheerful and undisturbed.¹⁴¹

Following the example of Don Bosco he "gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation, He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom. Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered. He does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it".¹⁴²

"In his daily labours he is at one with the poor who live by the sweat of their brow, and bears witness to the human and christian value of work".¹⁴³

E. *Living and working in the salesian spirit, he celebrates the liturgy of life*

Consecrated as he is by the Spirit, the salesian brother becomes a spiritual temple, shares in the priesthood of Christ and is able to offer to God as a "spiritual sacrifice" all of himself, his work, his apostolic initiatives, his daily toil, his spiritual and bodily solace, and even the trials of life.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴¹ Cf. C 17

¹⁴² C 18

¹⁴³ C 78

¹⁴⁴ Cf. LG 10, 34

In his life and work he strives to attain that "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God that should be characteristic of the sons of St John Bosco", and so celebrate the liturgy of his life.¹⁴⁵

F. *He lives in characteristic fashion his devotion to Mary*

153 Religious profession has "the power to conform the christian more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also". So asserts "Lumen gentium".¹⁴⁶ And the Decree "Apostolicam actuositatem" adds that the laity find in Mary the "perfect model of their spiritual and apostolic life".¹⁴⁷

In her are present to perfection both the religious and lay dimensions. Imitation and harmony with her become two requirements of the vocational form of the salesian brother. As a son he venerates Mary as Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, imitating the intimate apostolic relationship of Don Bosco.

26.3 The spirit of the Founder, the seat of unity

154 The two vocational forms of the lay and priest salesian, and their consequent spirituality belong constitutionally to disciples whom the Spirit has brought to birth for Don Bosco and his mission.

The reality which allows salesians, both brothers and priests, to unite at the level of reflection and life their distinct spiritualities, the one lay and the other priestly, is the *salesian spirit*. The SGC described it as "our own style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, in putting into operation the specific vocation and the mission which the Holy Spirit does not cease to give us".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ C 95

¹⁴⁶ LG 46; PC25

¹⁴⁷ AA 4

¹⁴⁸ SGC 86

The salesian spirit not only embraces and informs lay and priestly religious spirituality, but builds them into a unified project with salesian characteristics. This uniting and specifying role was keenly understood by Don Rinaldi, who wrote: "Our holiness consists not so much in the kind of life embraced by salesian profession, nor even in the imitation alone of the virtues of our Father, but in ensuring that the salesian life we have embraced and the imitation of Don Bosco's virtues be animated by the spirit in which he himself lived and practised them".¹⁴⁹

26.4 Heroic witness to lay salesian sanctity

The outlines of spiritual life presented so far are not an abstract ideal. They represent values that have been lived in practice by those salesian brothers who have been faithful to Don Bosco and are faithful to him still.

155

Deserving of quotation here is an authoritative declaration of the GC21: "When the spiritual life of the salesian leads him, in imitation of Don Bosco, to practise charity to an heroic degree, then we can say that he has reached the summit and becomes a source of enrichment for the entire Congregation. We have reason to believe that this gift has been granted to several salesian brothers. Each one of us knows some confrere who has attained this fullness in different places and under varied circumstances, sometimes in the most hidden and self-sacrificing ways. Many have found a place in the annals of the Congregation. Some of them, martyrs for the faith or heroes of charity, have become candidates for canonization.

"All these instances give further evidence of the charismatic richness found in the salesian lay vocation".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ ASC 10 (1929), p.733

¹⁵⁰ GC21 191

3. THE VOCATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER IN SALESIAN PASTORAL WORK FOR VOCATIONS

156 The GC22, while seeking to take stock of the situation as regards the salesian brother, pressed also for greater practical efficiency in both pastoral work for the fostering of vocations and in the formation sector. God gives his gifts so that when used in his service they may bring about an extension of his Kingdom.

History has shown us the birth and growth of a vocational form in view of a mission; and the deeper analysis we have made of it has revealed its originality, beauty and practical efficiency.

This gift must therefore be sought where it is to be found. Whoever has it must recognize the fact and consciously and deliberately develop it in himself. He must willingly set about working so that he can identify and assimilate interiorly its component values. Theology, pastoral work for vocations, and formation all have a share in a task which is a specific one and at the same time necessary, progressive and continuous.

3.1 PASTORAL WORK FOR VOCATIONS

31.1 The pastoral element in vocational work

157 Behind every invitation addressed to the young to adopt a particular christian life-plan lies a basic vision, not always explicitly formulated, of vocation in general and vocational pastoral work. It will not be necessary for our purpose to go fully into the vision as it appears in the present thinking of the Church and the Congregation.¹

¹ Cf. *Sviluppi della cura pastorale delle vocazioni nelle Chiese particolari: esperienze del passato e programmi per l'avvenire*, General theme of 2nd International Congress for Vocations. Concluding document, Rome, Ed. Rogate Ergo, 1982.

* Youth Pastoral Dept. *Outlines for a provincial plan for vocational pastoral work*, Rome 1981.

Here our argument is specific and restricted: it concerns the lay salesian vocation. It therefore takes the general basic facts as already known and accepted. A brief reminder of some of the fundamental concepts of vocational pastoral work will help to set our reflections on the right lines and give shape to the initiatives for fostering this particular vocation. We have used the word "pastoral", a term which makes us think automatically of the Church. Pastoral work is in fact the action of the Church and, in communion with the Church, of individuals and communities, which tends to stir up faith in Christ, to form and consolidate communities of believers, and to bring the ferment of the Gospel into human history. In this way men become aware of the saving presence of God in their lives, and when they respond to this grace by their conversion they enter into communion with the Lord and with each other.

To this end is directed the task of enabling individuals to perceive the particular dialogue that God initiates with each of us from the first moment of our existence and throughout our lives, so as to incorporate us in an active way into his plan of salvation. The Church therefore is the environment within which God's call is felt, and where one discerns the originality of different vocations; the place where vocations arise, are recognized, mature and become committed in the service of the community.

In this sense the vocational apostolate is a special help and assistance given by the christian community to each of its members and all men of good will, to enable them to discover God's plan and realize it in their lives.² It is therefore addressed to every individual throughout his life, in accordance with his state and circumstances. The response to the Lord's call cannot, in fact, be considered as something made once and for all time; it must be continually renewed.

But pastoral vocational work is particularly concerned with the period of youth when, in the process of the maturing of the personal identity of an individual, decisions are taken that mark the course of his future existence.

² GC21 106

Vocational orientation and personal growth are so interconnected that they cannot be adequately distinguished one from the other. The objective of human and christian maturing is in fact that of enabling the individual to make free and valid choices. For this reason the vocational apostolate is closely linked with pastoral work for youth, i.e. with the collection of initiatives directed to the education of young people to the faith, lived in the ecclesial community. This is one of the definitive conclusions of the present practice: "pastoral vocation work finds its vital space in the field of pastoral work for youth. The latter becomes complete and efficacious when it is open to the vocational dimension".³

The statement is concerned less with organization than the concept of vocational pastoral work, and is to be understood in a double sense: in the sense that every vocational development is founded on a progressive spiritual maturing of the individual as he places God and his will at the centre of his own experience: "The vocational apostolate is the ministry offered to adolescents and young people in the formation of their christian identity... showing respect for the action of the Holy Spirit which reveals itself throughout the individual's life, within the unique situation of his personal and social history";⁴ and in the sense that in every pastoral activity directed towards the young must be inserted explicit and systematic vocational guidance as an essential dimension of our apostolate.⁵

31.2 Fundamental signposts for the vocational apostolate

159 This activity of the christian community is animated from within by certain convictions.

The first regards the very nature of the vocation. It is, and must be thought of as such in connection with its practical and operative effects, a gratuitous initiative on the part of God who reveals himself in the individual conscience as a personal call of love.

³ *Sviluppi...*, o.c. n.42

⁴ GC21 112

⁵ GC21 113

This is what appears from Scripture and especially from the Gospels: "Come and follow me"; "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you". Christ calls people to "stay with him";⁶ he calls them to a vibrant knowledge of his mystery and a total adherence to his person, extending to a radical choice of his love. At the same time he invites them to collaborate in the salvation of men through a mission. "And he called the twelve together ... and he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal".⁷

This consideration of vocation takes us back to the underlying motivations which are at the foundation of its authenticity; they must be already present, at least in embryo, in the invitation itself and be purified during the follow-up process. It also provides the fundamental criterion for discerning the ways of a true vocational apostolate, and to single out the attributes that must characterize vocational promoters. It must all be seen as a "grace", a mysterious encounter between God and the young person in a setting of freedom.

From this first conviction there follows a second: the person called carries the main, and at certain times the exclusive, responsibility for the process and decision concerning vocation. Unless the latter matures in his heart in freedom and generosity it will lead to an incurable inconsistency in his relationship with God and in his own life.

The discovery and acceptance of God's initiative, in fact, is realized through a deep exchange in which the subject must listen and make a personal response. The vocation, which is a divine initiative and call, emerges and develops within the texture of life's experiences through the dynamism and free choice of the individual. It is deeply rooted in his history. Its manifestation in his conscience and its subsequent clarification are favoured or impeded by everything that serves to define him in the face of God and his grace.

From this follow two fundamental pedagogical indications.

⁶ Cf. Jn 1, 39

⁷ Cf. Lk 9, 1-2

Conditions must be created around the person that favour listening and docility. And at the same time there must be a guarantee that decisions made are personal, internal and properly motivated in proportion to the age of the individual concerned.

To these two indications responds vocational direction, which must make suggestions and at the same time keep in mind that the principal role is played by the subject.

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The process must be understood as an interior development of the subject who verifies his own availability, faces up to the signs of God's call, and accepts the obligations that make a response possible. It is he who takes the decision about which way to go.

The animator or promoter helps the process along by providing support and guidance. He does not take the place of the subject and is careful not to make the latter dependent on his decisions. His task is to foster the freedom which must overcome conditioning from both the individual and the environment, the generosity that must extend beyond immediate interests albeit lawful ones, and the intelligence which must be able to grasp the horizons of God and learn to interpret the relevant signs.

And so there emerges a third broad and specific element which is indispensable in all vocational apostolate: the need and tasks of "mediations", i.e. of those communities or persons whose purpose it is to help the individual in perceiving the call of God and responding to it. To everyone is given in embryo from birth a collection of qualities and aptitudes to be brought to fruition. Environments, persons, teachings and activities of various kinds develop these germs, revealing new possibilities for the expression of love and opening up horizons for commitment.

Pastoral work for vocations consists in providing efficacious mediation at the right time. Some stimuli can come only from the community, others from those charged with such work or particularly gifted in this field. These are in fact two complementary kinds of mediation, both of which are necessary.

To concentrate on "seeking" vocations by individual promoters without attending to the witness and environment of the community or the candidate's relationship with the community, provokes credibility crises.

On the other hand, to exclude any personal invitation and expect everything to come from the environment or from interior inspiration is to misunderstand the laws of incarnation and endanger the flourishing of many good dispositions.

Christ gives us the example of vocational mediation. To the fascination of his human person, he added a direct appeal made to individuals.

31.3 The tasks in the vocational apostolate

After clarifying the fundamental principles from which pastoral work for vocations draws its inspiration, we must now set out its tasks. These can be summed up in the four words: *pray, proclaim, call, welcome*.

"*Prayer* is not a means for receiving the gift of divine calls but the essential means commanded by Christ".⁸ The example of Jesus and the practice of the Church, expressed today in authoritative invitations at world level (cf. the World Day of Vocations) and in a whole variety of group initiatives, put prayer in the first place as a means for obtaining vocations, as an experience provoking their materialization, and as a step towards their maturing.

The *proclamation* of vocation takes place through witness and the word.⁹ It consists in presenting in practical form, rather than by the mere provision of information, Christ's great and universal call to life and faith and, linked with this, the further call to a greater love and to sanctity. A progressive catechesis will demonstrate the gifts of the Kingdom which become riches of the community: the priestly ministry, the radical 'sequela Christi', secular consecration, the missionary possibility. It also shows their mutual relationship for the building of the community, so that they be not understood as individual privileges. They bring an awareness of the world's needs, through which God calls others to share his love for man, and of the different opportunities for service that exist in the Church.

⁸ *Sviluppi...*, o.c. n.23

⁹ *Ibid.* n.25-

The document of the second World Congress on vocations speaks of "evangelizing vocations" and explains the meaning of the expression as follows: "A catechesis is needed which is first of all able to guide believers (and especially the young) in seeing the christian life as a response to God's call. The whole of catechesis thus acquires a vocational dimension. Specific catechesis in turn highlights the particular character of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, the missions, and consecrated secular life, so that the believing community may understand their importance for the Kingdom of God".¹⁰

But proclamation is not enough. There are times when the promoter or animator must provide the *personal call*, and will do so when he sees that the necessary conditions exist in the subject. Failure to open a horizon of love and commitment through excessive caution, or through fear of becoming implicated in an individual's future with its uncertain aspects, is to deprive the young person of a possibility to which he has a right.

Because of this, a period of excessive caution has given way at the present day to talk of "regaining the courage to give a call". The GC21 expresses this as follows: "To respect God's plan for each person means that, besides leading everyone to a knowledge of himself and of the human and ecclesial situation of the community in the light of faith, we should have the courage of total honesty and integrity to help him to be open in generous availability to all vocations in the Church... A christian youth may not refuse to consider the hypothesis of a consecrated life and of the priesthood. Not to propose to him such possibilities would limit rather than respect his freedom."¹¹

Finally there is *welcome* and *follow-up*. "It is a service of listening, of sympathetic understanding, of hope..."¹² The fulfilment of this obligation requires in animators and promoters respect for the freedom of the young person, doctrinal knowledge, practical experience of discernment and spiritual direction, and attention to the signs indicative of various vocations.

¹⁰ Ibid. n.15

¹¹ GC21 113

¹² *Sviluppi...*, o.c. n.131

Welcoming acceptance is expressed in solidarity by all who come in contact with a vocation, even though the process of follow-up be subsequently carried out by particular individuals or communities.

31.4 The process of vocational promotion

Through these tasks pastoral work helps young people to follow a process that is typical in vocational maturing. In the first place it creates in the youngster the desire and taste for a committed form of christian life and disposes him to listen to God's voice. It means the joyful acceptance of the reality of God in his own life as a dominant relationship and determining presence.

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When the candidate begins to feel attracted towards a broad area of values, models and activity, the promoter assists with information and experiences.

When his attention becomes concentrated on a particular kind of life or person, which he sees as corresponding to his own existential expectations, the task of pastoral work is to accompany him in his first steps towards an initial decision.

In this process a part of the greatest importance is the discernment of the signs which make God's call perceptible in the one who receives it and by those who, in the Church's name, must judge of its presence and authenticity.

The main such signs are: interest, the absence of absolute or prudent counter-indications, the general dispositions which guarantee the development of a religious personality and the specific ones for the type of life to which he aspires, and the motivations which need to be sifted to assess their validity and authenticity.

As well as making a judgement on the objective existence of the signs, it is part of vocational work to follow up the free response to the call on the part of the subject. This is something dynamic and progressive. It may suffer arrest and regression. It is on this dynamism more than on natural aptitudes, valuable though they may be, that spiritual formation and openness to grace exert an influence.

3.2 THE VOCATIONAL APOSTOLATE OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

165 Keeping in mind the above-mentioned criteria, which serve as guidelines for the whole of pastoral work for vocations, we can explain in greater detail some particular aspects proper to the promoting of the lay salesian vocation. They are concerned especially with two tasks or phases: the proposal or suggestion, and the follow-up process.

There is a certain difficulty in presenting to young people the religious, spiritual and apostolic physiognomy of the lay salesian in all its richness, in a manner which they can understand and may meet their aspirations.

Various congresses on the vocation of the lay religious have sought to specify the causes for this: the somewhat obscure role played by the lay faithful in the christian community, the scarcity of models with whom to identify, the "clerical" mentality of some religious communities, the lack of distinctive signs about the lay religious, a history which at times may have made him look like a secondary figure in religious families predominantly priestly in character, the line of approach in the vocational apostolate, and the natural tendency of young people to link vocation with religious service to people.

In the Congregation suitable ways are being sought to help youngsters to understand the original nature and splendour of this vocation.

32.1 Talk about Don Bosco

166 The first of these ways is to tell young people the story of Don Bosco, of his intuitions, the founding of the salesian Congregation beginning from an original experience of pastoral charity. Love for youth living in situations of poverty led Don Bosco to concern himself about every aspect of their lives by means of a project for their overall advancement. He thought of their eternal salvation in the first place, but he saw this as linked with immediate

problems of their earthly existence, such as work, education, and a place to live.

When his work became extended to poor people in general he maintained the same characteristics: together with the priestly service of preaching and religious care, he took to heart such problems as emigration, the spreading of christian culture through the printed word, and the organization of collaboration for social objectives.

And so he started and developed a work which in its material structure embraced not only the church, but also workshops, schools and playgrounds; where prayer, catechism and the frequenting of the sacraments were taught; but where one could also learn trades and youngsters were instructed in other matters too and prepared for life in society; where music and the theatre were cultivated and other forms of expression promoted.

In this way Don Bosco intended to form "good christians" for the ecclesial community through the means the latter has available, but also (and especially when dealing with christians) "upright citizens" for civil society, able to work responsibly and play their part in renewal.

The initiative was looked on by believers as a "pious religious work", linked to the Church; all others saw it as an educational enterprise of human solidarity, social concern and advancement.

Don Bosco liked to present his work as "something civil society deserved", and sought the collaboration of believers or of anyone who had even merely humane feelings. He prompted the interest of secular forces, entered cultural fields and made contact with persons and organisms at State level, always with a view to the good of his boys.

To realize his complex project for the young and the poor, he gathered around him from the outset other priests and clerics. But he also sought and obtained the collaboration of numerous other people who were neither one nor the other and who, together with their friendship, contributed also their skill, apostolic enthusiasm and social prestige.

And so when through God's inspiration he began the salesian Congregation, his intention was to found a union of "priests, clerics

and laymen (especially artisans) who wish to work together trying to help one another spiritually".¹³

168 The salesian Congregation was born, as we have seen, with two components which intimately complete each other, and which appear as mutually necessary for the fulfilment of the original mission among the young and the poorer classes: priests and laymen.

From the very beginning all of them were called to the radical following of Christ and to holiness; they lived in equality and brotherhood under the fatherly guidance of Don Bosco; they contributed their own specific abilities for the attainment of a single objective, inspired by the same pastoral charity: for some it was in the ministerial priesthood, for others in administrative offices or public relations, the direction and management of workshops, offices of trust in domestic affairs, or artistic activities.

The figure of the lay religious (given the name "coadjutor" in Italian by Don Bosco, and now generally known as "salesian brother" in English) was something that concerned him all his life. It had come to him by divine inspiration as a requirement in his mission to youth, and he gradually perfected it as new horizons for work opened up before the Congregation and new candidates enriched the brother's image with the new things they were able to do.

The brother was not a marginal addition but a constituent element of the Congregation's identity. Don Bosco considered his lay religious just as essential as the priests for the fulfilment of the mission God had entrusted to him. We can recall in this connection his whole demeanour towards the brothers, his complete trust in them, his words concerning the importance of their duties and responsibilities and their participation in the life of the Congregation.

169 This is how the salesian vocation developed, and how it can be lived at the present day in two vocationally distinct forms: the priestly form, expressed mainly in the ministry of the word, sanctification through the sacraments and animation of the christian

¹³ BM 12, 121

community; and the lay form, which places secular sensitivity and aptitudes at the service of charity, witness and the proclamation of Christ.

Each of these forms concentrates and expresses a characteristic which extends throughout the Congregation, present in every community and active in every member.

Every salesian priest has in fact, like Don Bosco, the gift and ability to take up the problems in the lives of the young, and not only their insertion in the Church. He is an educator. And every brother is a proclaimer of the Gospel, able to bring the young to Christ and not only teach some art or trade. He is an apostle.

Together, in the organic structure of the same community, they carry out the service of the integral development of the young through complementary attributes, sensitivities and approaches, all of them necessary for the attainment of the single objective.

But the brother also assumes, keeps alive, expresses and concentrates the ability of Don Bosco and the Congregation to work in the midst of secular realities, the ability to contemplate secular realities in a way which is both pastoral and technical, keeping in close contact with men and their temporal activities which are necessary for the development of life.

In this way he gives to the community an original physiognomy, making possible its insertion in the Church and in the world in many different ways. A salesian community is not one of priests but of persons who follow Christ for the benefit of youth, for whom they want to be signs and bearers of the love of God.

32.2 Describe the present-day experience

After setting out an appropriate image of the salesian community's apostolic identity through the story of Don Bosco and his work, one can pass on to another point and dwell on the practical life of the salesian brother at the present day: who he is, how he lives, what he does, and how he develops spiritually.

He hears a call from God. His is a true and original vocation: he gives himself totally to God, making available for the Kingdom

his human abilities and qualities and his professional skill. All of these, taken up into the radical following of Christ, become directed by love to the salvation of the young.

By calling him, God consecrates him and unites him to himself in a particular way, communicating the Holy Spirit to him so that he may live in all its fullness the grace and faith he received in Baptism.

In this way the brother, like the salesian priest, is placed in the heart of the Church in whose mission he publicly shares through the commitment of the Congregation to the young and the poor. By the Church's mandate and in her name he educates and evangelizes in the sectors entrusted to the salesian apostolate and in its particular style.

And through this publicly recognized apostolate he gives christian animation to the temporal order, to which he associates his lay vocation even after religious profession.

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His apostolic activity takes on many forms according to the present-day requirements of the salesian mission for the benefit of the young. He is always seen therefore, with specific skills and apostolic spirit, engaged in training youngsters for work; involved in teaching and the animation of free time; busy in planning, administration and maintenance; occupied in social communication for the education and evangelization of the poorer classes; dedicated to the social development of needy areas, practically interested in scientific research and artistic creativity; and providing an irreplaceable contribution to work in missionary territories.

But in his work for the benefit of youth, in union with his priest and lay confreres, he enjoys a deep experience of Jesus Christ and develops a spiritual life in which his religious consecration and lay character become fused in a unity of life characterized by the salesian spirit.

He reproduces in himself and brings to life again at the present day the heart and style of Don Bosco, and is called to resemble him just as much as are the priests. He feels himself identified with Christ whose patient love he shares in teaching, healing, welcoming the young and the poor, and in building a new world.

He is aware, and rejoices in the fact, that he is one of God's

humble collaborators in the salvation of men, and especially of needy youth; he lives a deep attachment to the Church, and feels his communion with all the forces working for salvation; he feels the apostolic brotherhood existing in the salesian community, conscious of the contribution he himself can make and grateful for what he receives from his priest confreres; he develops the experience of the values linked with his lay state, of which we have already spoken.

All this renders him and his mission particularly genial and attractive to the young and the poorer classes. He makes himself loved, and is always available to lend a hand when his ability and humanity can be of help.

For this mode of being, living and working, he has a preparation which includes at one and the same time: a salesian religious formation, an apostolic qualification which enables him to do pastoral work, a cultural and educational competence which helps him to promote the growth of the young in faith and humanity, and a professional qualification suited to his lay religious character.

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32.3 Provide some living models

The most efficacious way for making these points intelligible and credible is by experience, i.e. by contact with a salesian community and some model brothers.

In the *community* can be perceived the complementary nature and the fusion of the vocations which enrich the salesian mission, and one can also observe the brotherhood which unites all the members in equality, brotherly love, joy and the service of God. Its awareness and witness of its own lay and priestly originality, the adequate expression of its mission, and the relationships existing between its members, are more efficacious than any invitation in words.

Here we may recall one of the directives of the GC21 concerning the vocational apostolate: "Beginning with the person of the salesian and his community life... the authenticity of our christian

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and salesian life is fundamental, and so is the image of a Congregation which presents a clear salesian identity truly sensitive to the needs and aspirations of youth and expressing itself in joyful self-giving. The apostolic witness of each confrere will always be the most powerful incentive and the most efficacious mediation to inspire youth to make a generous response to Christ".¹⁴

The *models* show, albeit with the limitations inherent in every life, the characteristic features of the lay salesian vocation. They can tell of their own experience, explain why they made the choice they did, and describe their own life since that time. For this reason it is hoped that in making plans for vocational pastoral work, in every team, or at least in every initiative for promoting vocations, there should be a brother involved whose presence may appeal to the young and provoke their response: an invitation to think about the value of a lay salesian vocation, and a response to their concrete questions about its nature and realization.

The witness of models is completed by contact with the settings in which they carry out their more characteristic activities: trade and technical schools, youth centres, centres of social communication, etc. They provide a first-hand idea of what is implied by a lay competence and ability assumed into religious consecration and an apostolic mission. For this reason, from the early days of the Congregation the preferred sectors for seeking lay salesian vocations have always been the environments where the young were being trained to enter the world of work, or where adults were already committed in a religious manner in the world.

Side by side with living models one may also present exemplary figures of brothers from the past, emphasizing those traits and events that show in more striking fashion the originality and splendour of a life consecrated to God for the young. The Congregation has available printed collections from which emerge singular figures of brothers of different periods and every region, who worked in the most unexpected circumstances and in widely varying apostolates.¹⁵

¹⁴ GC21 112b

¹⁵ Cf. CERIA E., *Profili di 33 coadiutori salesiani* LDC. Colle Don Bosco 1952.

Outstanding among them are some, considered "saints" in their neighbourhood and by their confreres, who reveal the heroicity of charity and the intensity of the experience of God to those who have this vocation, when the response is generous.¹⁶

These biographies, when presented and studied in pedagogical form, constitute the most real, efficacious and complete "vocational catechism" of the salesian brother.

32.4 Explain the lay character more deeply

Behind the story of Don Bosco and his work, the description of the life of today's salesian communities and the presentation of models of today and of yesterday, always taken for granted is a certain idea of the lay state and what it implies: the nature of the lay commitment, the relationship existing between temporal realities and salvation and holiness, and the possibility of combining an authentic lay character with a radical and public religious consecration.

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Anyone explaining the different vocations must be able to inculcate a correct and rich impression of the lay experience. His images and references, even though taken for granted, must be verified so as not to give any support to the idea of detachment and incompatibility between the world and religious experience which is all too common in the modern mentality.

The realities which make up man's life in the world (environment, work, family, culture, science, art, technology, politics) can be the place and objective of a total donation by an

*BIANCO E., *La mano laica di Don Bosco. Il Coadiutore salesiano*, LDC, Turin 1982.

*BIANCO E., RICO J.E., *Salesiano Coadiutor*, Ed.CCS, Madrid 1984

*FORTI E., *Fedeli a Don Bosco in Terra Santa. Profili di otto coadiutori salesiani*, LDC Turin 1988.

¹⁶ Cf. *ENTRAIGAS R., *El pariente de todos los pobres*, Ed.Don Bosco, Buenos Aires 1961.

*BIANCO E., *Artemide Zatti, il parente di tutti i poveri*, LDC Torino 1978.

*FORTI E., *Un buon samaritano. Simone Srugi, Salesiano Coadiutore*, Scuola Grafica Don Bosco, Ge-Sampierdarena 1967.

*FORTI E., *Da Nazareth qualcosa di buono. Seruo di Dio Simone Srugi*, Ed.SDB Rome 1981.

individual to the Lord. They are not just "external" circumstances of the relationship with God but part of the story of the individual's salvation.

In effect they bear the sign of God's creative action: they were assumed by Christ when he became totally man; they are situations in which the saving presence of God is at work through human mediation; they are capable of consecration through the fulfilment of God's design for them.

In them christian charity is radically committed to bringing about their transformation by directing them to God and applying them to the temporal and eternal good of man.

175 The lay experience can be lived in various forms but here we shall concentrate on the consecrated form, leaving the others to what has already been written. This form is proper to those who, without abandoning a substantial connection with secular realities, emphasize that they are ultimately ordered to salvation, and bear witness to the fact that they can be directed to man's good only through the spirit of the Beatitudes and reference to Christ. And so they make a public profession to follow Christ through the evangelical counsels, they join a religious community and take on an apostolic work that includes their lay option.

The radical following of Christ is not linked especially to the priestly character. The lay condition can be chosen in imitation of Christ and to identify with him. And it is no less radical or less meaningful through not being linked with the priestly ministry.

In confirmation of this one could quote the many forms of religious life, the many ways of being "disciples of Christ", right down from the first ages of christianity (cf. Chap.1). Some passages from Vatican II also lend it support: "Lay religious life is a state for the profession of the evangelical counsels".¹⁷ God calls both priests and laity "to enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church and to contribute, each in his own way, to the Church's saving mission".¹⁸

It seemed to us particularly urgent and necessary to insist on

¹⁷ PC 10

¹⁸ LG 43

the content of this vocational plan: salesian spirit, religious consecration, lay character.

The terminology used will necessarily vary in speaking to children, young people and adults, according to the catechetical level each group has reached. Sometimes it will be helpful to use pictures, stories, experiences, models and audiovisual material. But it is important that whatever material is employed should express the true message that derives from a correct understanding of the Church and of the salesian religious vocation in particular.

3.3 ACCEPTANCE AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE VOCATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

33.1 Objectives of the follow-up process

As is the case with every other vocation, that of the salesian brother needs to be encouraged and fostered, so that the dispositions of the subject mature towards a conscious and definitive choice. "When a young person or an adult becomes aware of the divine call, and seeks and receives advice, he feels the need and usefulness of help and guidance to enable him to see the road ahead of him with growing clarity and to follow it. It is the problem of support and follow-up".¹⁹

This work of encouragement and support has a double objective. The first is more general and concerns the aptitudes and conditions which predispose an individual to listen to God's voice and be generous in responding. This is the principal objective. It is a matter of spiritual formation through participation in the life of the christian community, the interior assimilation of the fundamental evangelical attitudes, and the practice of the christian life: the sense of the presence of God, existential reference to Christ, assiduity in prayer, attention to the word of God, the life of grace, ascetical efforts, frequenting of the sacraments, and apostolic commitment.

¹⁹ *Sviluppi...*, o.c.

This should form the foundation of a well balanced personality, whose development is governed by an objective self-image and calm self-acceptance, by the positive composition of interior tendencies (promptings, ideals, plans), and by self-sacrificing openness to others; this last is manifested in the ability to make sincere and enduring relationships, in a rich contact with reality and broadening cultural horizons, and in an ability to look to his own future and its realization in evangelical terms.

177 The second objective is more specific and aims at cultivating aptitudes, providing an organic body of knowledge, and developing skills typical of a particular vocation.

The two objectives are complementary and interdependent. There can be no vocational clarification without processes of faith and interior growth in Christ. And vice versa every sincere effort to discern God's will in our life is accompanied by an opening to grace.

But there are periods in which particular attention must be given to just one of these objectives according to the phase of development reached by the subject.

In the initial support process the first objective is particularly necessary. Solid bases of human and christian formation must be laid down which guarantee an authentic response to any vocation involving special consecration. Into this main effort, which leads especially to generosity and predisposes to discernment, is gradually inserted through information and experience what is characteristic of the lay salesian.

Support and follow-up is realized in various forms and activities which take place simultaneously: personal spiritual assistance, maturing experiences in line with the particular vocation of the subject, sharing in an environment suitable for the development of the germs of a vocation and their development, which will lead to a sufficiently well motivated first decision.

33.2 Individual assistance

178 Individual support and follow-up is always necessary, even when a candidate is placed in an environment designed for the

purpose. Often it may be the only form of support possible. It develops into spiritual direction even when it begins only as a pedagogical dialogue and guidance consultation. It has been described as "a service of listening, help for interior clarification, experience of spiritual life and hope", on account of which "the person carrying out such a ministry is respectful of the freedom of the young person in following out what is always a personal process".²⁰

Its specific objectives are quite clear: to create an interpersonal situation, through which the individual can acquire greater freedom to understand the reality challenging him and the signs of God calling him; to offer him elements for an unclouded vision of his own interior feelings and the motives behind his behaviour and aspirations; to make him aware of the grace of God and help him to verify his own response, laying the foundations of a solid christian spirituality; to accompany and direct the effort of conversion of mentality and attitude (criteria of life, ascesis, virtues); to control those tendencies not in harmony with christian growth (lack of constancy, permissiveness, scruples, devotional excesses, etc.).

This is a service that can be carried out by any salesian who dedicates himself to the christian formation of the young: rectors, confessors, catechists, pastoral animators, teachers. "Every pastor of souls or other responsible person should feel the need to be concerned about young people and adults who show an interest in their own particular qualities... The awareness of what concerns the recognition of signs of a vocation, and training in the art of discernment and spiritual direction, belong to the formation programme and the ordinary field of activity of the pastor of souls and others responsible for the fostering of vocations".²¹

Apart from what appertains to the administration of the sacraments, it is not required that the one encouraging and guiding a priestly or lay vocation in its first stages be either priest or layman.

²⁰ Ibid. n.50

²¹ Ibid. n.50

But such a service requires of the one carrying it out, whoever he may be, that he accept the responsibility for assisting a vocational process, putting himself too in an attitude of prayer and listening; of testifying to a mature personality and joyful experience of his choice in his own case; of keeping up to date his theological formation and acquiring a certain knowledge of youth psychology in general and of what regards vocation in particular; of conforming to the indications of those who speak authoritatively in this sector; and of exercising a true function of support in the seeking process, ensuring the presence of the conditions that make it authentic.

In salesian practice, behind every individual who carries out this work there stands the community which, under the guidance of the rector, lays down common criteria, suggests opportune methods and helps in the discernment process.

33.3 The youth group

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"In the various particular Churches there are examples of many different kinds of group activity: groups for exchanging experiences of faith and apostolate; groups for reflection concerning ways of life; groups for deepening knowledge of vocation in the choosing of a consecrated life style".

"The group can play a particularly efficacious role in the process of human and christian maturing and in the acquiring of affective balance; and also for the consolidation of faith, especially in situations where the environment is marked by widespread indifference and disbelief"²²

In salesian practice two kinds of group are commonly met with: educational and apostolic groups on the one hand, and those specifically vocational in character on the other.

There are many vocational factors present in both. A first elementary experience of community which leads young people to see, judge and act together creates a habit of vigilance that

²² Ibid. n.51

enables the individual to react in a christian fashion in the face of various phenomena. The apostolic activity which the group promotes constitutes a first manifestation of self-donation, a contact with the needs of others, and an experience of the transforming power of the presence of God. In the groups takes place the personal encounter necessary for the process of identification with the various vocations in which the Church's mission is expressed: priests, laity, religious, parents, leaders.

The climate of reflection trains the person to work joyfully in options made in view of the good of men, of the Church and of its saving mission. Within the group a personal relationship can easily arise through which educators discover the dispositions and inclinations of the young members and help them to realize their ideals in practice.²³

Vocational groups add some further and more specific elements. They are made up of boys and young people who want to reflect more deeply on their calling in life. They are therefore structured in a way that fosters a searching for God's will in respect of the future of the members.

The programme includes a study plan based on the two vocational objectives we spoke of earlier. Regular meetings for study give to these groups the characteristics of an environment of vocational reflection. They are guided by a vocational animator, who follows the individual members with particular care as they slowly move towards the choice of a state of life, and when necessary he passes them on to a spiritual director. The commitments of the group and of each member are selected in line with the vocational objectives. While maintaining the greatest possible openness, those experiences are chosen which are more significant and indicative from a vocational standpoint.

As far as the maturing of the seeds of a lay salesian vocation are concerned, the groups provide an opportunity for meeting models and experiencing various settings, and offer the possibility

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²³ Cf. Youth Past.Dept. *Outlines...*, o.c. *Sviluppi...*, o.c. n.51

for presenting the doctrinal, historical and practical elements we have spoken of.

Emphasizing the complementary nature of the different vocations, the groups can try them out in working camps which develop attitudes typical of lay vocations: the orientation of educational settings, voluntary work, cooperation in social development, active presence in the neighbourhood, etc. All of these help to perceive the incidence of faith on worldly realities.

But no activity is formative or will provide inspiration on account of material elements alone. The animator must provide the necessary motivations and enlightenment so as to make evident the inherent values, the activating energy, the motivations and the objectives, which give particular evangelical significance to the activities and tasks.

33.4 Welcoming and encouraging communities

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Finally thought must be given to the provision of environments suitable for the development in candidates of the seeds and dispositions of a lay vocation.

Such environments are of various kinds. They are in fact adapted to the conditions of the subjects, e.g. number, age, desirability or otherwise of separation from family or local surroundings, and the programme of studies that needs to be followed. But one must begin from an objective view of the salesian vocation that will suggest a pedagogical line to be followed as regards the form and style of the community, the contents of the programme, and the educational experiences possible.

The General Regulations²⁴ and practice of the Congregation indicate three kinds of environment for the purpose: the aspirantate,²⁵ the community designed for older youths,²⁶ and a salesian community in which the young candidate is inserted.²⁷

²⁴ Cf. R 16,17

²⁵ R 17

²⁶ GC21 118

²⁷ R 16

A. *The Aspirantate*

The nature and purpose of the aspirantate are described in Reg.17: it is "a centre of vocational guidance. It keeps itself open to the neighbourhood and in contact with families, and helps older boys and young men who show an aptitude for the religious and priestly life to know their own apostolic vocation and to correspond with it".

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The specific elements of its educational plan can be summarized as follows:²⁸

- a community of prepared educators available for vocational guidance;
- a setting in which the characteristics of the salesian spirit and style of education are cultivated and lived together by educators and young people;
- specific objectives, periodically verified, which include basic human and christian formation, the development of the seeds of a salesian vocation, and a preliminary personal choice through the discernment of signs, with a view to entering the novitiate;
- a programme of human, christian and salesian content suitable for the realization of objectives, e.g. information, experiences, capabilities;
- a programme of studies, similar to that of their contemporaries, of civil value, opportunely complemented with cultural and religious elements;
- normal openness to families, human and ecclesial environments, and lawful manifestations of youthful life.

The manner in which these fundamental points are put into practice depends on many factors, among which the principal ones are the age of the candidates and the degree of vocational decision they have reached (dispositions, intentions, signs already shown).

If in particular circumstances it be thought better to organize a similar setting for candidates ranging in age from pre-adolescence to the immediate pre-novitiate, it is considered necessary to divide

²⁸ *Outlines...*, o.c. n.49-50

it into at least two phases: one of "general guidance and seeking; and a second more clearly centred on the hypothesis of a salesian vocation".²⁹

The difference between the two phases concerns the style of the community (shared responsibility by the candidate, development of personality, possibility of self-determination, apostolic commitments), the selection of candidates from whom a progressively more explicit intention to embrace the salesian life is required (even though it be not yet totally firm and decided), and a more committed attention concerning the vocational content that directly concerns them.

The differences between the two phases as regards the manner of organization suggest the creation of settings which are distinct and different. As far as arrangements for candidates wanting to become salesian brothers are concerned, there are two possibilities: the specific aspirantate and the integrated aspirantate.

184 The specific aspirantate aims at the consolidation and maturing of the germs of a lay salesian vocation. It follows the line indicated in Reg.17 and the further practical indications given in documents of the Department for Youth Pastoral Work. But it realizes them by altering some of the typical elements of an aspirantate. In the community there is a preponderant and significant presence of brothers. The programme of studies and qualifications leans towards technical and professional training. A more careful attention is given to the history and characteristics of the lay vocation, and greater emphasis is placed in the life of the community on certain attitudes and abilities typical of such a vocation.

But as in the case of aspirantates for candidates to the salesian priesthood, so too in those for brothers the salesian vocation is presented clearly and positively in its two possible forms, and openness is maintained as regards a wide vocational perspective. This formula would envisage a more frequent and direct contact with brother models, a more direct experience of the traits of the lay salesian vocation, and the possibility of a more specific kind

²⁹ Cf. GC21 118; *Outlines...*, o.c. n.48

of guidance. It is also desirable to avoid the danger that the dispositions appropriate to this vocation may be suffocated in some candidates by an environment which, through an unsatisfactory pedagogical set-up, prevents the stimuli towards the priestly ministry from prevailing.

This formula works well when the candidates are relatively numerous (e.g. where the birth-rate is high, vocational promotion is successful, and families are cooperative) so that a specifically structured environment can be set up; and when the age and development of the candidates is such that they already have a well motivated intention, and the programmes of study differ to some extent from those followed in aspirantates for candidates for the priesthood.

Many provinces however are compelled by circumstances to adopt the integrated form of aspirantate in which all candidates for the salesian life, priestly or lay, are gathered together in the same environment.

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The basic reasons for this go back to the guiding criteria for the educational and pastoral project itself: to provide for christian formation and follow up the first inclinations of vocations founded on the common basis of salesianity, leaving time for the development of a more mature option as to how to live it.

The advantage to be expected from this is that it may render more effectively understandable the character of the single call to an apostolic consecration according to Don Bosco's plan which is for everyone; and will accustom all candidates to live from the outset in mutual esteem and complementarity in the style of a salesian community.

In assessing the circumstances due weight will be given to the number of candidates and to the possibility of meeting in a single environment the different study demands, which will depend very much on the social and cultural context.

When this kind of set-up is adopted, steps must be taken to ensure that among the formation personnel there is a consistent and qualified presence of brothers, with some of them in important roles, and an environment which does not give undue emphasis to priestly motives, which in any case are inappropriate at this

stage. The spotlight should be on the salesian vocation to a consecrated life and mission to the young, while each one is helped and guided in making his personal option.

B. Vocational communities

186 "The timely care of these youths can be undertaken also in other ways: communities of vocational referral..."³⁰

The working document prepared for the second International Congress on Vocations (1982) states: "The minor seminary should not be considered the only kind of structure in which a vocation can grow and mature. Indeed it is necessary to intensify vocational work with boys and adolescents through new forms and experiences which complement those of the seminary itself".³¹

These alternative forms belong to the tradition of religious life and are increasing in frequency once again at the present day. Religious life has found its own communities, especially in these days of marked charismatic interest, the best environment for the growth of vocations. The example of Don Bosco's Oratory at Valdocco is eloquent in this respect.

Local circumstances and pastoral requirements may suggest the creation of a small reception community for a purpose identical with that of the aspirantate, but with a different approach that corresponds better to the situation of some young people from particular cultural and ecclesial contexts.

Such communities, characterized by personal relationships and shared responsibility, pay due regard to the diversity between candidates, keep them in contact with their own family and youthful setting, take advantage of the many scholastic structures frequented by the candidates in line with the various kinds of education in which they have been already involved, and can evaluate their capacity to react in the face of current positive or negative stimuli.

³⁰ GC21 118

³¹ *Seminarium*, Oct-Dec.1981. p.991

But it is indispensable that these communities ensure and guide the vocational process, and that their programme and methods be not left to the decisions of individuals, but be assured under the responsibility of the provincial community.³²

In these communities too, as in the aspirantates, candidates for the salesian lay and priestly consecrated life may be separated or kept together. The reasons in favour of one or other of these solutions are identical with those already given.

C. *Insertion in a salesian community*

Finally there is the insertion of the candidate in a community involved in normal salesian work, and considered suitable for encouraging and following up a vocation.³³

As a general rule every community in a province could and should be able to provide a suitable environment, example and support for new vocations. Each community in fact lives the characteristics of the salesian mission which combines the priestly and lay vocations in a single religious type, and is called upon to assume that kind of service typical of salesian pastoral work which is the care of vocations.³⁴

They can therefore be expected to offer candidates opportunities for gaining authentic experience, information about the salesian life, and spiritual assistance.

But whatever choice be deemed most opportune, a thing to be avoided is any division of communities into those capable of such vocational accompaniment and those not. The GC21 recommended that the problem of vocations be tackled starting from the person of the salesian and the life of the community. "The authenticity of our christian and salesian life is fundamental, and so is the image of a Congregation which presents a clear salesian identity in its evangelical motivations, in the persons for whom it is intended and in its educational outlook... The apostolic witness

³² Cf. GC21 118

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cf. C 28, 37

of each confrere will always be the most powerful incentive and the most efficacious mediation to inspire youth to make a generous response to Christ".³⁵

For those with an inclination to the lay salesian life those communities will be preferred in which this vocation finds more important and appealing expressions.

3.4 CONCLUSION: ANIMATION AND PRAYER

188 What we have been saying is entrusted to particular responsibilities fulfilled in a community fashion. Because the vocational apostolate involves multiple convergent interventions it calls for shared convictions, the active involvement of the community, programmes realized together and coordination of roles - and with everything sustained by a complete trust in grace and prompted by the desire to serve God, the Church and the young. Vocational pastoral work implies and supposes spiritual attention, updated knowledge of specific questions, an acquaintance with modern methods, and organizational and practical support.

Animation too is seen to be necessary, and in it one must pass from mere individual action to community involvement, from occasional interventions in different areas to stable and organic plans, from an unattached vocational "sector" to integration into a complete programme of youth pastoral work, from a functional character of our interventions (to gain more confreres) to an educative criterion (to help the individual to grow in accordance with God's plan for him).³⁶

At both provincial and local level, animation puts on the line both responsibilities in government and supporting roles.

The first define the shape of pastoral work for vocations, and guarantee a prominent place for it in the overall youth pastoral

³⁵ GC21 112b

³⁶ *Outlines...*, o.c. n.53

work. This is the obligation of the Provincial and the Rector with their respective councils. To the second belong the tasks of activation, stimulation, support and coordination. These roles can be played by individuals or by teams, but "more than persons delegated to perform certain actions they should be channels of communication supplying new ideas and information to the various communities".³⁷

As far as the vocation of the salesian brother is concerned, animation will aim primarily at ensuring the mentality and witness of the individual communities.

Mentality includes a proper view of the originality of the charism, mission and salesian community as shown in verbal expressions, organization and evaluations.

Witness refers to the life of the community, to its internal relationships, and to its esteem for lay aspects in attaining the educational and pastoral objectives which belong to salesian activity.

But in addition to mentality and witness care must be taken to see that vocational guidance is explicitly included in the educational and pastoral plan at three levels with various activities at certain times: for all boys, for those who show signs of particular vocations, and for those who are aiming at salesian life.³⁸ And to all of these should be presented the lay salesian vocation in the richness of its many possibilities.

It will be necessary therefore, always with the coordination of animators and those in charge, to translate guidelines into objectives attainable by the particular individuals to whom they are addressed; in practicable experiences in which all elements of the community are involved, albeit with different contributions (setting, relationships, personal dialogue, specific moments).

Essential too are periodic verification and replanning. This will enable profit to be made from whatever has been found successful, and new ways for presenting the vocation of the salesian brother to be tried out.

³⁷ GC21 114

³⁸ Cf. C 6, 28, 37

But the main point about animation is the keeping of the community in a permanent state of prayer for vocations. We have already spoken of this as a fundamental task in the vocational apostolate.

Prayer is invocation and petition, but it also includes an effort at conscious awareness in God's sight, meditation, openness to his designs, communion with those who have gone before us on the path we are trying to follow. Intentions, prayer formulas, readings, intercessions (the salesian brother Servants of God!)³⁹ will help to include our concern for the salesian lay vocation in the prayer we address each day to the Lord that he will "send labourers into the harvest".

In particular we must never forget what the Constitutions say about the joyful family atmosphere of the salesian community: "This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation".⁴⁰

³⁹ Salesian Brothers Artemide Zatti and Simone Srugi. Cf. biographies in note 16.

⁴⁰ C 16

4. FORMATION OUTLINES

4.0 INTRODUCTION

In his closing address to the GC22 the Rector Major, commenting on the originality of the figure of the salesian brother, invited us to be converted to a more authentic salesian sensitivity and a really renewed formation. He pointed out that in the Congregation there are some problems that still remain open: those of numbers and vocations but also, and more seriously, a certain lack of sensitivity and a false criterion in the understanding of the aspect proper to our vocational identity (the "lay dimension"), linked with the particular make-up of our communities and the realization of our mission.¹ It was not just a matter of things to be done, though of these some certainly remained, but of something deeper - a conversion and more authentic salesian sensitivity accompanied by the need for appropriate interventions. 190

40.1 A special commitment to formation

Formation, all formation - both initial and ongoing, and the formation of all, helps in the realization of this conversion: "I want to insist on responsibility in the task of formation. After all that has been said, it is plain that this is not limited to young brothers, but extends to all confreres, both brothers and priests, and embraces initial and ongoing formation. Without extraordinary and earnest emphasis on formation I believe it impossible to achieve radical change in a short time. But if the formation is given in a thoroughly renewed fashion, especially for the younger generation, there is good promise for the future".² 191

¹ Cf. GC22 79-86

² ASC 298, p.43

The common commitment in the Congregation is a serious one and is directed to these objectives. The results of an analysis of the provincial directories lends support to this view. The provinces are trying to coordinate among themselves the flexible organization of formation curricula; they make it clear that they want to do at once everything that is possible, as though they have finally entered on a period of greater practical application:³ they accept the challenge that first steps cannot produce guaranteed results and will moreover be bedevilled by some people's indifference; and finally, there is a conviction emerging about the need for interprovincial collaboration, to ensure more easily the realization of all the various conditions needed to make the different phases really formative.⁴

The provinces therefore have moved towards a "creative reaction"⁵ and the realization of the "special commitment to formation" referred to by the Rector Major, and so are helping themselves to improve both its content and structures.⁶

40.2 The deeper reasons

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This whole enterprise is based on deep underlying reasons and is urgent in character. This is evident from the nature of the salesian vocation, the environment, and the condition of the world of youth. The formation of the salesian brother is directed not only to the realization of his specific vocational form, but also to enriching that of the salesian priest and the community. When the gifts proper to one or other are missing or weakened, the lay or priest salesian suffers personally as a result, as though he were no longer what he should be. And the community, as the operating area of the two forms, suffers as well. No one can be a priest salesian or a lay salesian in isolation. Each vocational form is

³ Cf. GC22 9; FSDB 407. 474

⁴ Cf. FSDB 412

⁵ Cf. AGC 323, p.27-37

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

concrete and complete in itself, but part of its concrete and complete nature is its relationship to the other.

That is our charismatic characteristic.⁷

This is a first motive for our formation. It is a reason which is internal to our charism, so to speak. But there are others too, that we could call "environmental reasons".

Cultural pluralism, and the ever more accelerated rhythms and rapid transformations in the world, force everyone to continual re-adaptation. Ours is a form of life which accentuates the search for a characteristic pastoral charity that takes into account the innovations emerging in the world of youth and the conscience of the Church.⁸ As educators, in fact, our efforts are directed to that part of humanity, the young, so inexperienced and sensitive to change that we cannot dedicate ourselves to their service without a permanent effort at updated and creative formation.

In this connection art.19 of the Constitutions should be kept in mind. It is entitled: "Initiative and flexibility" - one of the traits of our spirit.

4.1 THE OVERALL CONTENT OF THE FORMATION PROCESS

Following on what the Rector Major has written in his letter: "The lay element in the salesian community", in the ASC of Oct.-Dec. 1980, we would like to make some remarks about the global framework enshrining these "Formation Outlines" for the salesian brother.

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41.1 The specific content

The Rector Major echoed a concern of the GC21, that of a certain "absence of contents typically salesian" in the formation of

⁷ GC21 237f.

⁸ Cf. FSDB 74-8

the salesian brother,⁹ and he indicated certain points to be kept in mind in every phase, with the constant integration between study and reflection on the one hand and experience and practice on the other.

They are:

- a religious and salesian formation that will help the brother to understand the original nature of our Society;
- an adequate human, pedagogical and salesian preparation;
- a sufficient apostolic competence and an appropriately deep knowledge of theology and catechetics;
- a technical and professional preparation, according to the capacities and possibilities of each individual in line with the educational and pastoral character of our vocation.;
- a social and political education which prepares him for some specific educational activity, in particular in the working world.¹⁰

Naturally in all this, he concluded, account must be taken of the many different facets of the lay dimension and the practical circumstances of each individual.¹¹

Some of these indications refer to human values and those of grace; others are attitudes prompting action, while others denote skills to be acquired.

We therefore require a formation process which will help in identifying the values of the lay apostolic consecration, already expressed to a large extent in previous pages; a process moreover that will render such values personal, make them the primary motives for thoughts, desires and work, and the primary reasons underlying attitudes and behaviour, with appropriate ways and means.

Discussion of this matter will be all-embracing (“it is necessary in all phases of the formation process”, wrote the Rector Major),¹² even though for some of them (the post-novitiate and the period

⁹ GC21 247

¹⁰ Cf. GC21 302

¹¹ Cf. *Lay component...*, ASC 298, p.46

¹² *Ibid.* p.45

immediately following practical training) it will need to be more detailed and direct because of the complexity and importance of these particular sectors.

41.2 The arrangement of the contents

We shall consider therefore in order:

- the values and attitudes proper to the apostolic consecration of the salesian brother. After identifying them in a general way (in “the special covenant that the Lord has made with us”¹³, the mission, fraternal community, and radical style of evangelical life), we can highlight some of those more decisive from the standpoint of formation; 194
- the constitutive dimension and characteristic sensitivity with which the brother lives them: his own lay nature;
- his humanity, into which the values and attitudes of his apostolic consecration are engrafted as a gift, and through which they are expressed in witness, proclamation and pastoral charity;
- the method by which he makes them his own. No vocational value is valid merely in itself, but only if it becomes part of his life and the primary motivation of his options;
- his intellectual formation and study programme, especially just after the novitiate and again after the period of practical training.

41.3 A unified and complex process

It is not difficult to see that the process must be a unified one: “All formation tends to the development of the vocational identity of salesians” and finds in it the “roots of its unity”.¹⁴ Hence the need for the truest and most certain idea possible of the salesian identity.¹⁵ 195

¹³ C 195

¹⁴ GC21 242; C 97. 102

¹⁵ Cf. GC21 242

But it is a complex process too. It has a single objective, but is lived in specific and complementary vocational forms. Educators and evangelizers of the young become so either in the lay form or the priest form. It is a common vocation, equally salesian in both forms but distinct and complementary as regards service and ministry.¹⁶

For this reason both the one and the other, the priest-salesian and the lay-salesian, receive the same kind of initial formation with "curricula of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives. The necessary differences are determined by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate".¹⁷

The formation process is complex for another reason also; it aims at developing in the individual in their totality the dimensions which go to make up his vocation, harmonizing them in a balanced and vital humanity without any fragmentation.¹⁸ Its purpose is also to guarantee their assimilation by the adoption of suitable ways and means, once possible impediments have been removed. This is a decisive point of great interest if our aim is that of "renewed formation".

4.2 IDENTIFYING THE VALUES

196 Art.3 of the Constitutions provides a good frame of reference. There the values are clearly listed in a certain order, distinct from each other but inseparable nevertheless, and hence mutually influencing each other and irreplaceable: "We live as disciples of the Lord", says the article, "by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young. Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom. Our apostolic mission, our fraternal

¹⁶ Cf. C 98. 4

¹⁷ C 106

¹⁸ Cf. C 102, GC21 262

community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers. Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life, it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families”.

42.1 In “a special Covenant”

In a “special Covenant” the apostolic mission, fraternal communion, and a style of life lived in a radical evangelical manner, are the values proper to the salesian’s consecration.

These are the values which make him authentic and motivate him in his life and activity, when he lives them “in a single movement of charity towards God and towards his brothers”.

It is useful to recall these things. They should not be taken for granted, because without them everything becomes falsified.¹⁹ The point was emphasized by John Paul II in an address to the plenary session of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes: “It is necessary to emphasize that formation of religious must aim at ‘wisdom of the heart’, that gift of the Spirit which makes one truly intimate with the Lord and have a profound knowledge of his will. This wisdom contributes much more to the salvation of the world than a multiplicity of external activities not animated by the supernatural spirit”.²⁰

The grace that was given to Don Bosco and shared with his sons is something inherent in a mystery of Covenant. Fundamentally it is a particular theological experience, into which enter the following of Christ so as to build up the Kingdom of God in the young and in themselves,²¹ union with the Father who consecrates us and sends us,²² and attention and docility to the Spirit, the source of sanctification and renewal.²³

¹⁹ C 3; cf. C 3. 23. 26. 40. 49. 50. 63. 64. 73. 82. 85. 88. 125

²⁰ *Oss.Rom.*, (Eng.edtn.) 19.12.1988

²¹ Cf. C 3. 11. 23

²² Cf. C 3

²³ Cf. ET 11. 12; SGC 3; C 1

If the mystery is to remain alive and be the driving force behind every activity, the corresponding attitudes must be cultivated.²⁴ They are: the absolute nature and central position of Christ the Lord who communicates in the Father and the Spirit his strength and love; the gift of the fatherhood of God who continually gives new life to the divine dimension of our activity; the feeling of his own condition as God's son, manifested by his participation as a lay salesian²⁵ in the Church in God's fatherly love, finding in it "the ultimate origin and fount that permanently nourishes the salesian mission";²⁶ and finally the presence of the Holy Spirit, always ready to welcome every initiative and activity leading to growth in love for God and young people.²⁷

It should not be thought that all this will be immediately realized once the values are known, esteemed and earnestly cultivated, or when enthusiasm for them begins to grow. They are all good things, but by themselves they are not sufficient. After recognizing what it means to be a salesian (as far as values and attitudes are concerned), it is then necessary to become one "by living and working for the common mission" under certain conditions.²⁸ This means that each one must follow the process for his own formation, using those ways and means that the educational sciences and our own tradition consider to be most congenial to our spirit and efficacious for attaining the purpose intended.

Neither must we think of them in a general and abstract way, as though the values exist as things in themselves. They are lived in vocationally distinct forms. The salesian priest lives them as a

²⁴ Cf. ASC 296, p.5; C 23

²⁵ Cf. C 12

²⁶ GC21 579

²⁷ Cf. - 1. Participation in liturgical life: C 87. 88. 89; SGC 283-288. 340. 540. 664;
 - 2 Listening to God's Word: SGC 494. 540. 557; SRM 240-242;
 - 3 Personal prayer: C 83. 88. 93; SC 7. 10. 11. 14. 19.48; DSM 186; SGC 574-579;
 - 4 Eucharist and Divine Office: C 88. 89; SGC 542-544; SC 10. 47-48; LG 11; PO 5. 6;
 - 5 Life and activity as prayer: C 21. 86. 95; SGC532-537. 550. 555f. 677;
 - 6 Sense and use of sacrament of Reconciliation: C 84. 90; RFIS 55; PO 18;
 - 7 Times of renewal: C 91;
 - 8 Salesian devotions: Mary Help of Christians: RG 74; SC 13; SGC 531-545: Viganò E., *Mary renews the Salesian Family* 1978.

²⁸ C 99

priest, the salesian brother lives them as a lay religious, as components in their turn of a community which itself has characteristics so original that it needs their presence in order to be salesian.

And they are lived in a precise historical context. This "special Covenant", sealed by perpetual profession, is made at a specific point in time. It has a date, i.e. it is situated in a historical context which continually provokes and sensitizes man's experience as he continually seeks self-interpretation. To evangelize and to be evangelized means to translate into a credible cultural project the interpretation given by the Lord of human existence, so that it can be lived. 199

Culture must be rethought in the light of revelation, and revelation in the light of human advancement.

Modern man, and today's young people, are more realistic and pragmatic. No one approaching them with the offer of a plan of salvation can ignore the concrete practical aspects of their life, their sensitivities, the factual situations, the relationships that exist in the economic, social and political worlds. They must seek the response that the christian message can offer to these problems which are personal, but at the same time becoming ever more social, public and interpersonal, and ever more concrete and practical. Terrestrial realities, work, peace, development, politics, games and culture have all become more or less fortunate objects of theological reflection and of the theology of the religious life. Such reflection has gradually moved from an interest in the realities considered in themselves to man and his advancement. 200

The change has been prompted by the new way of looking at the relationship between man and the world, as presented in the Introduction to 'Gaudium et spes'. There the world and terrestrial realities are no longer compared with man for the purpose of vindicating their own sense. They are considered rather as in relationship to man as a means for his development. Attention is focussed on man, on his ability to do things and (in this connection) on his social importance. Some problems in fact, e.g. those connected with development, are tackled in the broad perspective of society and the great masses, and from this standpoint become

transformed from problems of individual ethics to those of social ethics.

Whoever has by vocation the gift of predilection for the young will have to live a concrete experience of faith and humanity, and bear witness to and proclaim an absolute God who saves in this context, using to best advantage the typical elements of a religious vocation which, being lay in character, make it easier to understand, more personally acceptable and more easily put into effect.

42.2 The apostolic mission

201 This Covenant, as an unfailing source, automatically gives rise to the *mission*, with a rich complement of actual grace and adaptability.

Dedication to the young, and especially the poorer ones among them, was for Don Bosco the path along which his consecration was realized. He was consecrated by God *for* the young, and offered to God *in* the young. He was dedicated completely to them, reserved exclusively for them, and at the same time realized in them. Loving the young did not mean for him merely arousing their affection, but also feeling their attraction, being held in thrall by them and being aware of their irreplaceable role in his own life.²⁹ In the unity of pastoral charity, the fruit par excellence of religious and human formation, the two poles around which the salesian revolves - God and the young - find sense and unity. He perceives in himself the need for an intense presence to God who sends him, and at the same time to those to whom he is sent.³⁰ Rendering these aspirations concrete as to where and how the mission is to be realized means also giving space and significance to the originality of the salesian brother.

A. *The values and attitudes implied by a "pastoral sense"*

202 The desire to be deeply present to the one who sends him will urge the salesian brother to share the great concern of Jesus for

²⁹ Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della rel. catt.* II, p.473

³⁰ Cf. FSDB 74; DGC 26

the coming of the Kingdom:³¹ to perceive in history God's design working for man's salvation, and the mystery of sin which opposes it. To this end education will be directed to a strong sense of Church, because "evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act: it is one that is deeply ecclesial... An evangelizer cannot be the final arbiter of his own activity".³² He will be able to grow in the eucharistic and marian spirituality which make him God's collaborator: "The most divine of all divine things", Don Bosco used to say, "is to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls".³³ In the spirit of prayer he will discover and esteem the laws known as "apostolic"³⁴ which demand all the fervour of our ability and competence. Finally he will nourish his own life of trust, resourcefulness and joy, even when the going is hard.³⁵

The desire to be closely present to the young to whom he is sent will prompt his practical sense to promote in the community and in himself a certain sensitivity to the extent of their needs. And what are these needs?

They are:

- man's sense of freedom, e.g. to plan his own life and use the world as something set in movement by his own creativity;
- the moral sense which sees the making of history as a task and responsibility;
- the sense of sharing, which leads to the awareness at the present day of human culture as a "socialized culture", in which efforts at building or defending the terrestrial entity will be either communal or else ineffective;
- the sense of future perspective which wants history to be a process of progressive and integral liberation, where salvation and the making of history are both dimensions of the same "freedom".

The community will then appear as a brotherhood come down from heaven, but which operates also on earth because the Son of

³¹ Mt. 6,10

³² EN 60

³³ BM 9, 220; 13, 490

³⁴ Cf. FSDB 77

³⁵ Cf. FSDB 75-77

God in order to save us “stripped off his glory and took on the condition of a servant, becoming like to men”; a community made up of individuals who are signs of other Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: individuals who regard each other as a sign and want to be an example and prompt a response from those around them.

B. *Capacity for action*

203 The “sense of the concrete” and the desire to offer salvation, or to foster it where it is already present in embryo, leads the salesian to acquire the practical skills he needs, i.e. the ability to analyze and critically evaluate particular pastoral situations; to draw up in a creative and realistic way a strategy for intervention with precise objectives, times, workers and roles; to make use of the means of social communication; to be awake to the problems of the working world understood as a productive process, not necessarily industrial, which are automatically part of the life of so many young people in need.

And it leads him to avoid a risk as well! Specializations are unavoidable. Good will alone is not sufficient for evangelization purposes. But specialist activity must always prompt attention to the Spirit and not detract from it. If the Spirit’s inspirations are not in harmony with the organization of what he is doing, it would turn him aside from the perspective of holiness, the “wisdom of the heart” would be lost, fissures would be caused in the visible unity of the mission, and there would be serious motives for fearing the appearance of crises of many kinds.

C. *Functions, ministries and fields of activity*

204 The lay vocational form in its specific pattern is realized in a variety of sectors of activities and different roles filled by brothers, for which they prepare themselves. In more than a hundred years of history lay salesians have carried out a vast range of activities which can be gathered for the most part into three categories:

- *educational, social, formative and pastoral activities*: directive responsibility in various sectors; scholastic and cultural activities, especially in trade and technical schools; evangelizing work in the missions; animation of associations and apostolic circles, and of sporting, musical and dramatic groups; the animation of free time; production and use of the various instruments of social communication; training for entry into the working world, and social formation.
- *so-called tertiary activities*: bursars, accountants, procurators, secretaries, sectional representatives, infirmarians, sacristans, supervisors of domestic workers;
- *domestic services*: collaborators in our houses, ready to take on any work within their abilities: in charge of order and cleanliness, agricultural work, cooks, bakers, electricians, doorkeepers, or invaluable factotums.

Here we are concerned with activities and services which call for different aptitudes and separate preparation.³⁶ These, let it be said again, must not be reduced only to trades or professions. They must be considered and lived as apostolic occupations: they have in fact an educative and pastoral sense within the apostolic community, they constitute a true communal witness, they are deeply linked with each other and are all directed in the last analysis to the realization of the good things of the Kingdom of God.³⁷

In his Apostolic Exhortation dedicated to the subject of evangelization, Paul VI saw a positive value in the fact that in many churches groups of religious and laity were showing themselves open to non-ordained ministries, thus ensuring the provision of special services able to rejuvenate and strengthen the dynamism of evangelization.

As examples he cited various ministries: "catechists, directors of prayer and chant, Christians devoted to the service of God's Word or to assisting their brethren in need, the heads of small

³⁶ Cf. FSDB 58-66. 78

³⁷ Cf. C 21

communities, or other persons charged with the responsibility of apostolic movements".³⁸

He recognized too that "the laity can also feel themselves called to work with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community for its growth and life, by exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charism which the Lord is pleased to give them".³⁹

In the history of our Congregation there have been in fact more than a few brothers who have exercised one or other of the functions listed among the non-ordained ministries. In the period that has followed Vatican II some have practised the ministries of acolyte, lector and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, now expressly recognized by the new Code of Canon Law and by the Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici" as accessible to the lay faithful.⁴⁰

The GC21 accepted the invitation of Paul VI and hoped that "the brother properly prepared will be able to exercise those ministries not linked to sacred orders that the evangelizing action of the salesian community will require".⁴¹ This fact does not seem to smack of a renewed form of "clericalization". It is a matter rather of a lawful reassignment of non-ordained ministries which in the Church's history, and especially in the first millennium, were generally exercised by the lay faithful. It is understood that those exercising such ministries must ensure that they have the necessary aptitudes and the help of competent formation guides, who can help in discernment and provide a suitable theoretical and practical formation over a sufficient period.⁴²

The list of the many traditional functions of the salesian brother and of non-ordained ministries is only indicative and not exhaustive; it is open to integration by other functions and ministries. The need to respond with a new evangelization and pedagogical creativity to the urgent demands of the emerging

³⁸ EN 73

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cf. CIC 230

⁴¹ GC21 182

⁴² CIC 231

cultures may suggest new or renewed functions and ministries.

According to the mind of Don Bosco, expressed again by the GC21, the brother "can qualify for all educational and pastoral assignments proper to a salesian, provided they are not connected with a service that requires priestly ordination".⁴³

The text of the Constitutions takes up the same point: he works in "every field of educational and pastoral activity" with tasks of a cultural, professional, social and economic kind, as well as those of a catechetical, liturgical and missionary nature, to which he brings "the specific qualities of his lay state, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life".⁴⁴

D. *Educator to the faith in the working world*

The "working world", understood as a productive process not necessarily industrial, is one of the preferred fields offered to the competence and responsibility of the brother by tradition and the urgent requirements of the present day.

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From the characteristics of the educational plan he can deduce the content and attitudes which, as an educator, he is called upon to make his own if he is to be fully competent for his task.

The educational plan in fact should be born of a human project that brings together every aspect of individual and collective human experience and takes notice of other projects, with continual reference to the values of christian experience.

But this is not enough. In contact with the environmental conditions of work and of the young people who are preparing to enter and play their part in them, this project must be capable of translation into a culture, the "culture of work". In this way it must become *an educational plan of the work culture*.

It is important therefore to put the question: what are the contents and requirements, positive and negative, of this "work

⁴³ GC21 182

⁴⁴ C 45

culture"? It would seem that on the negative side we might include: the absence or decay of a work ethic worthy of man; the disinclination for work as the effect of a consumerist attitude to life; and the projection into the work sector of strongly selfish attitudes which produce to a greater or lesser degree the tendency to keep on making further claims, absenteeism and lack of interest.

On the positive side we may note: a recovery of the human dignity of work; the need for sharing and control; the effort to revise productive processes in a meaningful way; and the demand for formation.

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These contents must be promoted by intelligent methods. Don Bosco and our tradition have always supposed an awareness of the real needs of the workers, and that any intervention be made with due attention to its educational and evangelizing aspects. This requires the harmonious combination of two aspects: that of *listening* to the formative demands that emerge from the youth condition and the poorer classes; and that of the *comprehensive solution* of their problems, by the offering of bread and of the Word, of work and culture, of guaranteed rights and motivations for doing one's duty.

In this way the *purpose, style* and *objectives* of the plan are also laid down.

It is a case of promoting simultaneously the whole of the worker and the whole of the christian, and returning the task to the ethical sphere:⁴⁵ this is the *purpose*.

The preventive criterion will be applied, programming times and rhythms of growth so that the young worker is ready to meet the risks to which the unprepared are exposed, in the pragmatic and ambivalent atmosphere of the commercial and industrial world. An educational environment will also be adopted in which stimuli abound (family spirit, joy, optimism, creativity and spontaneity, a natural approach to commitment and sacrifice) for an untroubled interior acceptance of the severe ethic of work: this is the educative *style*.

⁴⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem exercens*, 1981

Primacy will be given to the person of the young worker, rather than concern for productive efficiency; efforts will be made through positive suggestions to convince him not to reduce his professional formation to indoctrination or a dangerous pragmatism, but to aim rather at becoming a leader, able to choose and direct his own dedication to work problems as a vocation and service. These are the *objectives*.

And so the work of professional formation becomes an opening for education to the faith, i.e. the experience in which it is expressed and verified. Lay salesians in the working world become "working men" of the ecclesial community and also of our Family (animators of working Cooperators and Past-pupils):⁴⁶ a charism which Don Bosco and salesian tradition of today do not want to lose.⁴⁷

The different forms of presence of the brother, if they are to be significant in respect of his lay identity and contribute efficaciously to the personal realization of this plan, must respect certain conditions which the GC21 describes in the following terms:

- he should never forget that he is always and everywhere a salesian educator. His main objective should be to focus the different elements of that social reality that we call 'work' towards those values, individual and collective, that refer to the person of the worker, so as to open up to him the possibility of finding the full and total fulfilment of his personality in adherence to the faith;
- he should be faithful to his identity as a lay salesian religious.

This implies many obligations:

- He will know how to capitalize on the many positive values present in the working world (such as the spirit of brotherhood, solidarity and community, combined with respect for the personality of the individual), and at the same time he will know how to point out the evils that threaten him (a materialistic concept of life, resistance to spiritual realities, individualism, envy, sentiments of hostility, temptation to violence).

⁴⁶ GC21 185

⁴⁷ Cf. C 42

- He will know how to defend and promote the good of the workingman. As a religious wholly oriented towards Christ, who is the foundation and summit of all human values, he will be able to identify the dangers that beset these values and help people to overcome them.
- By reason of the concern that he shows and the love that he unceasingly gives to others, he will be able to bear witness to a profound and universal brotherhood that dispels all forms of egoism, exploitation and self-interest.
- He will reveal the Kingdom of God already present in the world and in the history of man, and in this way proclaim the Kingdom that is to come.⁴⁸

42.3 Communion in the community

209 The “special Covenant that the Lord has made with us”⁴⁹ refers not only to the mission but, as an unfailing source that never runs dry, automatically brings to birth with rich actual graces communion in the community, a radically evangelical style of life lived in prayer.

Don Bosco, active saint that he was, emphasizes the efficacious character of the commandment of charity. Charity builds unity and communion at deep levels in the community.⁵⁰ In it there is a particular theological density which has practical aspects but which in the last analysis gives preference to a kind of organization which has in view a combination of “being” and “living” rather than of simply “doing”.

Don Bosco called the Congregation the “Society of St Francis de Sales”, thereby emphasizing the double element in our communion: that of “church” and that of “human reality”, knit together by shared ideals lived in brotherhood. An “authentic manner of living together” for an “authentic proclamation”.⁵¹

⁴⁸ GC21 184

⁴⁹ C 195

⁵⁰ Cf. C 49. 50

⁵¹ GC21 37; cf. C 51; 88; 57; 90; 58; 59; cf. FSDB 80. MR 30, CP 106. 177

42.4 A radically evangelical style of life

"By religious profession we mean to live the grace of our baptism radically and more fully".⁵² 210

The evangelical counsels, lived in the spirit of the beatitudes, become the sign of an existence based on hope: "The offering of his own freedom through obedience, the spirit of evangelical poverty and the love which becomes a gift in chastity, makes the salesian a sign of the power of the resurrection. The evangelical counsels, fashioning his heart entirely for the Kingdom, help him to discern and welcome God's action in history; in the simplicity and hard work of daily life they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young new heavens and a new earth, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise".⁵³

The real question at the present day is not, as might be thought, whether it be possible for a radically evangelical life to be lived by men like us in a world like ours; it is rather whether such a project is not, because of an apparent break with the ordinary situation of men (and especially the young), the very condition that will save this world.⁵⁴

To be *obedient* in faith through the Superior to God's plan, as free creatures who invoke and seek his will, raising the eyes to heaven but lowering them to the young who seek salvation, places obedience at one and the same time within the mystery of God and at the same time within the mystery of the world, where it is carried out. It is a sure liberation from the absolutism falsely associated with the "idolatry of power"⁵⁵ and communicates its strength to the young so that they too may realize this freedom.

To be evangelically *poor* is no longer a personal virtue. It is 211 also a refutation of a world organized on principles of production and consumption, and which for this purpose continually creates

⁵² C 60

⁵³ C 63

⁵⁴ Cf. J. THOMAS, *Travail, Amour, Politique*, Paris 1972

⁵⁵ C 62

the domination of man over man and of things over all men, whether dominating or under domination. It is an evangelical virtue because, going beyond the brief extent of our technical knowledge, it shows that by following Christ it is possible to exist in a way other than that dictated by the world, a world emancipated from security of too mundane a nature, a world precisely of poverty.

It will certainly free the salesians, and the young as well, from the absolutism of the "urge to possess",⁵⁶ provided that we set about forming in ourselves a mentality and spirit that is "evangelically poor".

To be evangelically *chaste* opposes a certain kind of psychic fatalism which derides the force of freedom as an abortive effort in a world of irresistible needs, and denies the possibility of growth and self-donation through a break with so-called necessities.

The salesian offers to Christ and the Father his physical and affective forces as a witness of a full love of communion and of availability for the Kingdom.⁵⁷ Consecration in chastity opens the heart to spiritual fatherhood,⁵⁸ it gives freedom and power to the ability to make oneself all things to all men, fosters true friendships and helps to make the community a true family.⁵⁹ It is a love which does not stop at itself but becomes a transparent sign of the love of God for the young, who know they are loved and give back the same love in return.⁶⁰

212 To be *men of prayer!* The GC22, in placing prayer at the end of Chapters IV, V and VI of the Constitutions, almost as a conclusion to them, wanted to make it clear that the consecrated apostolic life of the salesian, with the variety of his commitments among youth, the brotherhood lived in community, and the demands of obedience, chastity and poverty, has a character so supernatural that it is not only impracticable but even impossible

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cf. C 80

⁵⁸ Cf. C 81

⁵⁹ Cf. C 83; ASC 285, p.26-27

⁶⁰ Cf. C 81

without the grace of the Spirit which is continually given through prayer and the sacraments.⁶¹

Our "Covenant" encounter is expressed, celebrated, and finds its force in dialogue with the Lord in prayer. This dialogue involves the whole vocational experience and receives from it, through a process of creative affinity, the specific style and criteria which enable it to create and choose the most congenial forms of prayer.

It is the dialogue of an apostle who, when he prays, responds to the Lord's invitation and revives the awareness of his intimate and vital union with him and his mission of salvation.⁶²

The ways in which salesians live these values, in a lay manner in one case and a priestly manner in the other, are specific and complementary. If we were to stop at the manner and ignore the common content we should have an empty form, a fine thing but with no substance; and if we were to attend only to the content without considering its mode of expression we should fall into abstract generalities and have a community with no original characteristics.

We have thought it well to recall these values, despite the fact that we have deliberately developed the concept of the *mission* at greater length, because the mission itself needs them as an irreplaceable condition for its efficacy and because, by committing themselves to the internal assimilation of the corresponding attitudes and the use of the appropriate means,⁶³ salesians shape their life by them for the education to holiness of the young people who are seeking it.

⁶¹ Cf. *Commentary on Constitutions*, p.662

⁶² Cf. FSDB 64; C 85

⁶³ Community: cf. FSDB 79-80;

Obedience: cf. FSDB 82-84;

Poverty: cf. FSDB 85-90;

Chastity: cf. FSDB 91-93;

Prayer: cf. FSDB 95-111.

42.5 The lay nature of the salesian brother: a way of being and working

213 Institutes of active life, so different one from another, take on in different ways a true secular dimension and in it reflect a part of that historical realism which belongs to the whole Church in her mission as the universal sacrament of salvation. In our Society it is the brother who ensures a lay presence and the playing of roles that manifest this dimension and put it into practice. It forms part of their vocational form, and is not just a simple trade or service.

Our Congregation "cultivates an 'interest in the temporal' in our restless apostolate among men: we live religiously immersed and interested in the day to day vicissitudes of human society".⁶⁴ What John Paul II, in the address already cited, judged to be "opportune" and "necessary in certain particularly serious situations", i.e. commitment in the vast field of human solidarity, has become customary for us and the normal thing if referred to the educational and social sectors.

The very *spirituality of action*, explicitly concerned with temporal values, translates the riches of the contemplative dimension and religious values into forces for education. More particularly the mission to the young and the poor prompts the brother to be a social educator by opening the horizons of human growth to the indispensable ministry of Christ.⁶⁵

The dynamics of his consecration are directed in a special way and inseparably united manner to particular problems of human advancement. For this reason he must know, esteem and make his own the values and attitudes of the consecrated laity.

He proclaims directly in an overall manner as a religious the definitive values of God's Kingdom, the beatitudes. Through his experience and because of their radical witness value, he renounces certain worldly means and structures, e.g. marriage, and creates others which express the sense of his vocation in a visible manner

⁶⁴ Cf. VIGANO E., *Lay component...*, ASC 298, p.31

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.33

and are justified through strength of faith, e.g. the fraternal community.

But as a lay salesian he profits by all the occasions offered him by his lay character⁶⁶ to find in his charism, which has an essential educational projection, space for his own secularity, but in the most ample and comprehensive way possible because in it lie the educational possibilities in view of the evangelization of the young.

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More in detail, he "brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life".⁶⁷

If these values are assimilated, they will give rise in him to a certain number of fundamental dispositions. Some of them express rather his place with reference to the world, others the quality of his interpersonal relationships.

The following are examples of the first kind.

He cultivates the desire and aptitudes needed to make him a useful presence in history, opting courageously for man, for poor youth especially and for their difficult future. He considers the world as the place where he can live out his life of faith and pastoral charity. He refuses to settle for a superficial and abstract christian commitment far removed from situational demands.⁶⁸ He is concerned about the objective reality of things, he wants to know about them even though they be complex and need both study and careful experimentation with a professional approach. He is firm as regards objectives, but flexible in the choice of means and strategies for attaining them. He fosters a knowledge of the working world and of its culture.

Examples of the second kind include the following items.

He develops a sense of what is possible and probable in social and cultural vicissitudes. In consequence he is not dogmatic about what is uncertain and still open to discussion. He respects opinions that differ from his own and is willing to dialogue with all. He

⁶⁶ Cf. GS 36

⁶⁷ C 45

⁶⁸ Cf. VIGANO E., *Lay component...*, ASC 298, p.24

grows in initiatives, in pedagogical ideas and in pastoral creativity. He is generous in giving his collaboration and has a high esteem for organization. Finally he feels that he is participating in a project of life, the salesian plan, that is able to educate needy youth to the faith even in profane circumstances.⁶⁹

215 The lay nature of the salesian brother as gleaned from these rich outlines is, as we have said, a lay character which is complementary. It is expressed in experiences and activities which integrate those of the salesian priest in view of the common life and common mission.

But it should be noted that "in the salesian community there are no zones or activities that are the exclusive preserve either of the brother or the priest, with the sole exception of those ministries and roles that are specifically priestly or lay"⁷⁰ In fact "it is desirable that certain transient daily domestic chores should be increasingly performed together by all members of the community as simple acts of solidarity".⁷¹

In all these cases, the GC21 recalls, the specific contribution of the brother "will consist rather in fulfilling the various salesian assignments or service roles with a style, spirit and dimension that is either lay or priestly".⁷²

42.6 Constant growth in "humanity"

216 The values and trends of activity proper to our apostolic consecration are gifts of God but they do not exist in a vacuum: they are engrafted into the elements of dynamism in the humanity of the brother and are expressed through this same humanity in the witness and exercise of pastoral charity.

The holiness of consecrated life certainly does not depend on the indications of the human and educational sciences; it is the result of the gratuitous action of God. But the virtues and human

⁶⁹ Cf. CNOS, *Per una pastorale giovanile nei CFP*, Turin, p.25

⁷⁰ GC21 182

⁷¹ *Lay component...*, ASC 298, p.10

⁷² GC21 182

aptitudes, by their presence or absence, can dispose an individual to receive God's action more or less favourably and, still further, to work in a more or less efficacious way in educational activity.

These motives, especially if referred to a vocation like our own which is both educational and evangelizing at the same time, explain the importance attributed by the Constitutions to human values and to their relationship with transcendental values: "We try to grow in our human qualities"⁷³ and, at the same time, "to conform ourselves more closely to Christ and to renew our fidelity to Don Bosco so that we can respond to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor".⁷⁴

Good health and physical resistance, intellectual maturity and a progressive ability for reflection and judgement, balance and psychic adaptability are among the values and attitudes most needed in our formation process.⁷⁵

On some but not all of these we shall dwell at greater length,⁷⁶ taking into consideration also the social situation which, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the locality, activates mechanisms which can retard the normal development process.

A. *Good psychic health: integration*

The ever greater and better unification of the person around his own life project is both the cause and effect of good psychic health. To build up a clearly integrated personality, so as to live freely and faithfully one's own apostolic consecration, carry out an efficacious work of education and live a serene community life, is a need felt by Don Bosco himself who is the prime model of a "splendid blending of nature and grace" combined in a "closely-knit life project".⁷⁷

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⁷³ C 118

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cf. FSDB 58-66

⁷⁶ Cf. FSDB 58-66. 78

⁷⁷ C 21

The brother must therefore develop:

- the ability to know and accept reality, and to make objective judgements on persons, things and situations;
- interior stability in convictions, no longer influenced by conformism, superficial enthusiasm or delusions;
- a well adapted social attitude and the ability to be himself, while integrating with the group to which he belongs;
- an emotive and affective disposition revealing a balanced character, dominion over fear and melancholia and over instinctive attraction or repulsion; a mode of conduct able to mortify "any disordered tendencies, especially anger and sensible affections"⁷⁸ and the tendency to laziness or gluttony;⁷⁹
- a sufficient capacity for self-control, for responsibility for his own life, for initiatives and well thought out decisions freely made, for courage in facing obstacles and accepting his limitations and failures, and for persevering in decisions taken.

Society does not help in the acquiring of these dispositions. In fact it frequently puts in their way very difficult obstacles which at first sight may seem insuperable. They freeze the individual in a state of uncertainty and doubt which usually prevents him from facing up to his responsibilities. He looks for points of reference and support, but these too are generally very superficial.

There is no doubt that our young salesian brothers, to ensure their own perseverance and become models for helping the young towards liberation and self-building, must develop a personality still more balanced and mature.

B. *The social virtues*

218 Formation to communication and the social virtues is the other aspect of a humanity which seeks to grow and be efficacious in its

⁷⁸ Old Regulations 260

⁷⁹ Ibid. 292

service. The brother is called upon to acquire a great ability for contact with others, and a style of relationships marked by simplicity, delicacy and composure.

Valid also for him is the statement found in a different context: "he should learn to value those good qualities which are esteemed by men and render him acceptable".⁸⁰ He will also have "to cultivate in depth the ability to make contact with men of different conditions. He should learn especially the art of speaking to others in a tactful manner, of listening patiently and communicating with them, animated by humble love and with the greatest respect for every kind of person"⁸¹

In the face of those so-called "liberal" opinions which dignify outlandish and vulgar modes of behaviour as free and authentic, the salesian brother is able to combine "spontaneity with delicacy", especially in working environments.⁸²

In any case his community is the place where, more than anywhere else, his formation takes place to the salesian style of relationships. The brother is able to evaluate the quality of his daily relationships, and recognizes the importance of contributing, at the cost of courageous renunciation, to the formation of a climate of true brotherhood in which obedience is harmonized with freedom, natural likings and antipathies are overcome, each individual's richness and value are recognized and fostered, and friendship made possible.⁸³

Since society is frequently at variance with the attainment of these objectives, we now refer briefly to the activities and means proposed by our own 'Ratio' for improving the unity of the lay salesian's own life and his formation to the social virtues.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ OT 11

⁸¹ RATIO FIS 51; cf. FSDB 113. 502. 535A. 544

⁸² SGC 669; cf. FSDB 65

⁸³ SGC 669

⁸⁴ Cf. SGC 673. 674. 679a; FSDB 115. 118. 147. 154. 160-162. 173. 306. 502; OT 11; C 70; ASC 285 p.43-44

C. *Intellectual maturity: intelligence, ability for reflection and judgement*

219 The SGC expressed the hope that the Congregation would have "a new type of man, capable of overcoming the uneasiness caused by changes, and of continuing to look for solutions rather than to take refuge in ready-made answers; disposed to learn and to face up to new situations, to enter into dialogue with an open mind, to accept the fact of interdependence and to practise solidarity; capable too of distinguishing what is permanent from what is changeable, without going to extremes".⁸⁵ This is a kind of man who is helped in the attainment of these dispositions also by the maturing of his intelligence, and by reflection and judgement, two important endowments which are much more than a mere collection of ideas.

Intelligence is cultivated by matching *how* to study and *what* should be studied to personal inclinations, personal abilities, the vocational choice, the kind of commitment lived in the mission, and the needs of the provincial community.

The vocational intention, clarified and deepened through the study of salesian disciplines, will motivate the studies done and the attitudes suggested. The vocation with its demands directs the choices, motivates the individuals and their work, unifies the multiplicity of studies, and gives wisdom to reflection and judgement.

We shall see this question better a little later when we deal with intellectual formation in the post-novitiate and immediately after the practical training period, the two newest phases in a certain sense for the initial formation of the salesian brother.

4.3 A METHOD: MOTIVATE ATTITUDES AND TRY THEM OUT

220 Up to this point, as we have looked at the gifts of nature and grace of the lay salesian together with the corresponding values and attitudes or dispositions, we may have formed two impressions: that on the one hand the formation process is rich

⁸⁵ SGC 665

and complex, and in consequence far from easy; and that on the other hand a method must be sought for carrying it out in such a way that these values may motivate the attitudes and dispositions and not merely remain in the mind, adding to the notions already there but doing nothing else.

Any doubt or uneasiness of this kind should be overcome without delay. Once the mind has an overall view of the whole process, work should be begun on some important dimension of the person, perhaps one that is still lacking. The relationship with the rest will gradually involve others as well.

43.1 A preliminary and decisive aspect: the primary motivations

A more important point on the other hand is the effort to grow in the ability to be personally motivated in life by these values. This is the objective of the formation process and it is fundamental, because the brother can do good and achieve self-realization only on this condition. It is an objective that is not spontaneous nor easily attained. It is not sufficient to have an intellectual knowledge of these values, nor to accept them emotionally. They must constitute the primary motivation of every disposition and attitude. But in reality the situation is often far different from this:

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- one can be obedient (this is one of the attitudes) so as to renew in the Church, for the benefit of the young, a full availability to Christ, apostle of the Father and servant of the Kingdom (this is the motivating value); but one can also obey in servile fashion through fear of personal responsibility or negative consequences, or to satisfy a need for security which, if it became the primary motive for personal obedience, would render the latter inconsistent;
- one can be faithful and persevering so as to respond in an ever new way “to the special Covenant that the Lord has made with us”,⁸⁶ but also through fear of facing up to everyone’s life situation;

⁸⁶ C 195

- the liturgy can be celebrated as a mystery embedded in the Passover of Christ,⁸⁷ but also as an expedient for gratifying a need for dependence on the particular reference group;
- the sacrament of Reconciliation⁸⁸ can be lived as a means for passing from selfishness to love,⁸⁹ but also as a means of self-tranquillization and shedding guilt feelings;
- one can enter a community for an authentic experience of genuine and reciprocal opening to individuals and to the group⁹⁰, or else to find a place where everything is hazy, acceptable and safe;
- one can work for the young, moved by charity and the good use of one's own pastoral ability,⁹¹ or one can do it through a desire to be admired and accepted;
- one can strive to reform the life of the community through love of Christ and the Church,⁹² but one can also try to unload personal aggression in a socially acceptable way, or to gratify one's more or less consciously recognized needs for exhibitionism or domination.

222 The difficulty of living these attitudes motivated *primarily* by values is present to some extent in everyone, even in "normal" individuals. It is important therefore to have a clear understanding of what we mean by 'primarily' in this context. It means that the values must be the primary motives for living, thinking, loving and acting. They may be so in themselves, but they may be so also through using the psychic energy of some need consistent with the vocational values and thus help the experience. But this energy and its reference to need must never be the first reason for what is done.

As the individual grows and matures, the influence of motivations of an affective and perceptible kind is reduced, and

⁸⁷ Cf. SRM 194

⁸⁸ Cf. FSDB 106

⁸⁹ Cf. C 90

⁹⁰ Cf. FSDB 79-80

⁹¹ Cf. FSDB 74-78

⁹² Cf. FSDB 72; C 13

the vocational motives increase in strength until the subject, without abandoning his affective richness, builds his life on the solid basis of the "right intention".⁹³

When on the other hand this does not happen and the primary motivations arise through negligence or interests from needs and prevail over motivations, from values, normally the needs:

- prevent the attainment of a sufficient vocational maturity: on the one side there are the values and on the other the needs, more or less consistent with the vocational values but without ever integrating them in the unity of the individual;⁹⁴
- foster an arbitrary interpretation of objective values, to such an extent that they become twisted to justify the subject's behaviour;
- contribute to the formation of non-realistic expectations, of a world of utopian hopes and ideals which it is thought will be eventually realized through various roles and functions of the subject, with great and continual disillusionment;
- render it impossible, finally, to read the "signs of the times": the real problems are no longer perceived and refuge is taken in situations as though these were sufficient in themselves to change man and realize his plans.

This matter of true and authentic primary motivations is a preliminary and decisive condition for all formation, and so also for that of the salesian brother. He will feel himself fulfilled as a consecrated person if he lives faithfully the evangelical values that form the primary motivation for his life; and he will feel fulfilled as a man if he gives a consistent and harmonious direction to the force of his needs in view of the education and evangelization of the young.

⁹³ Cf. CHAMPOUX R., *Nuove prospettive nella formazione religiosa: un'integrazione della spiritualit e della psicologia del profondo*, in "Civilt Cattolica", n.3026, 1976

⁹⁴ Cf. L.RULLA - F.IMODA - J.RIDICK, *Elementos de predicci n y criterios de perseverancia vocacional*, CONFER 74 (1981), p.316-318.

43.2 "Trying them out"

223 Once the vocational "inconsistencies" have been eliminated or have been brought to the surface and overcome, or (if that is not completely possible) when they have been accepted but with the necessary care that they be not given decisive weight in life and its options, the possibility arises of trying out the vocational values. This is an important fact because it is through experience, under certain conditions,⁹⁵ that the same values become internally assimilated.

What is meant by 'experience' here?

Experience means living the vocational values with one's whole being, in thought, will and feelings. It is the result of active construction by the subject of the conditions, and of the gift he receives - the vocational values. It is the living unity, the meeting of both components, "a force, an energy, a value which is prior to any interpretation".⁹⁶

A. A methodological principle

224 Experience is therefore a fact of life, but it is also the criterion that guides the whole of the formation process and unifies its multiple components. The Constitutions of 1972 were already speaking of "experience of life and work".⁹⁷ The first edition of the FSDB specified at greater length: "Such a transformation can take place only by means of an inner experience which may bring one to understand and vitally absorb the values and ideals which are distinctive of the choice of salesian religious life".⁹⁸ Finally art.97 of the 1972 Constitutions, concluding and giving authority to these indications, says that formation means "gaining experience of the values of the salesian vocation", and art.98 added: "by living and working for the common mission".

⁹⁵ We mention only some of them, referring the reader to FSDB c.4 for a fuller list.

⁹⁶ GIUSSANI L., *Decisione per l'esistenza*, Ed. Jaca Book, Milan, p.20-23

⁹⁷ C (1972) 102

⁹⁸ FSDB (1981) 155

B. *The objective*

This then is the way to become an “educator and pastor of the young” or, as stated elsewhere, “an apostle of the young”⁹⁹ in the lay form proper to the salesian brother. ¹⁰⁰ 225

An ‘apostle’ is a witness to Christ’s resurrection¹⁰¹ (“a sign of the power of the resurrection”, as the Constitutions put it).¹⁰²

And a ‘witness’ is one who lives the experience of the presence and revelation of the Lord and is capable of announcing it, telling its story,¹⁰³ proclaiming to the young “new heavens and a new earth, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise”.¹⁰⁴

C. *Some conditions*

We have described the general purpose and fundamental characteristic of the method: our vocation “calls for a kind of formative action which promotes a true experience of life”.¹⁰⁵ But under what conditions can all this be realized? 226

Our Constitutions provide us with some practical indications:

a) *In “activities”*

The salesian is formed in ‘activities’, “as he lives and works for the common mission”.¹⁰⁶

The term ‘activity’ has a whole variety of meanings. For us it is a certain event or facts, or relationships with facts and persons, that generate an active process, i.e. set free the energies of the individual and prompt a response. We have in mind relationships

⁹⁹ Cf. C 97

¹⁰⁰ C 6. 95

¹⁰¹ Acts 3, 1-10

¹⁰² C 63; cf. C 34. 61

¹⁰³ Cf. C 61. 62

¹⁰⁴ C 63

¹⁰⁵ FSDB (1981) 3

¹⁰⁶ C 99

with God, with Mary and Don Bosco; those to whom our apostolic work takes us (in the Congregation, the local Church, the community, with confreres, with the young); and even what happens in an environment and, on a still wider scale, in a culture.

They are factors and relationships which provoke a reaction and demand a decision.

All this is activity.

b) Activities "motivated" by true and authentic motives

227 Not every activity is formative, but only those based on true and authentic motives.¹⁰⁷

The "true" motives belong to the salesian charismatic patrimony¹⁰⁸ or are taken from history through attention to the presence of the Spirit.¹⁰⁹ "The salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord manifests his will also through the demands of time and place... Timely response to these needs requires him to keep abreast of new trends and meet them with the well-balanced creativity of the Founder; periodically he evaluates his work".¹¹⁰

There is a functional perception of things which considers things precisely as things; but there is also a deeper vision, a sacramental perception, which discerns the action of God in history, and so experiences a continual and progressive expansion of the sense of faith within the cocoon of the historical sense.¹¹¹

The true motives become "authentic" when the individual makes them his own and wants them to constitute the primary driving force behind his options, diminishing the influence of the needs. "A right intention means doing what pleases God", as Don Bosco would say.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 101. 103-104. 112; R 85. 88. 89. 94. 98. 100-103

¹⁰⁸ Cf. C 96; FSDB 134-136

¹⁰⁹ C 12

¹¹⁰ C 19; cf. C 62. 63. 85. 86. 94. 117

¹¹¹ Cf. EN 21

¹¹² MB 9, 986

c) *Experience, awareness, communication*

Formation takes place to the extent that the person is aware of his own experience and communicates it: "ongoing formation requires that each confrere develop his capacity for communication and dialogue; he should form in himself an open and discerning mentality".¹¹³

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To express in words one's own experience is the fruit of the effort to re-examine it carefully, so as to symbolize what has been lived through and so render it clear and perceptible and insert it in a coherent framework of values. Men develop in silence, but also through words. Experience requires to be known, but also to be communicated. Awareness makes communication possible, and communication intensifies awareness. When an individual has a proper awareness of his own experience and this awareness is expressed in communication, then there is real authenticity and the values are assimilated.

A speaker may easily feel that what he is communicating and others are receiving is not really what he wants to say. And so he is tempted to remain silent. And yet when an individual does not manifest, at an appropriate time and place, the important dimensions of his life, his world becomes restricted, his vitality dries up, his possibilities for maturing are extinguished, his language becomes impersonal and technical, and sometimes even commonplace and trivial. When on the other hand he talks about what has happened to him, he makes available for himself and for others a particular formative energy. His account of his experiences realizes around him the signs of the love of God and of his salvation. The experience of life becomes a message, and the one detailing it knows that he is competent to do so because he has already been saved by the event he is narrating. His is a sign which not only informs but is evocative of a response and prompts a decision affecting life. It as though by his account the force and truth which it encloses are set free.

¹¹³ R 99

This kind of thing happened not infrequently to Don Bosco: "Even during recreation time", notes his biographer, "if the conversation turned to the subject of the Holy Eucharist, he would beam with holy ardour ... and his words made the boys more convinced than ever of the truth of the real presence of Jesus Christ".¹¹⁴

The most common difficulty at the level of formation lies in the inability to find words and expressions that coincide with the facts experienced and with the awareness the subject has of it, so as to be able to communicate it.

The lack of this narrating ability sometimes gives rise to a personal crisis and inadequate apostolic activity: "the crisis in young people stems from the fact that they have had imposed on them symbolic worlds foreign to their lived existence, and so lacking in meaning that they cannot be used for narrating their own life story".¹¹⁵

This needs to be kept in mind when educating young people for the working world. It is well known what factory-language is like: paucity of words, no abstract terms, and with immediately applicable meanings which make difficult any reference to more "remote" values. What is important to such people is the immediate value of the facts in which they are involved. Every thought is directed to what has just been done or is about to be done for some personal interest. The connection between thought, action and self-interest is unbreakable except through a life, that of an educator, which is wholly a freely given service, and in which the person concerned finds words and expressions to make himself understood.

For these reasons everything that brings about growth in communication must be considered important:

- the systematic practice of reading and studying in the sciences related to the mission, availability for prayer and

¹¹⁴ Cf. BM 4, 317

¹¹⁵ MOLARI C., *Per una comunicazione che faccia spazio alla narrazione*, in "Note di Pastorale Giovanile" 10 (1981), p.35.

meditation;¹¹⁶ periodic requalification when necessary;¹¹⁷ periods of suitable length for the renewal of salesian religious life from a pastoral and professional point of view;¹¹⁸

- the frequent talk with the Superior, a brotherly chat, a particular moment for “speaking with confidence of his life and work” for his own good and the well-being of the community;¹¹⁹
- personal and communal spiritual direction, especially in the initial phases of formation.¹²⁰

d) The community, the place of communion

This is another of the fundamental conditions. When such items as assemblies, revision of life, colloquies and spiritual direction, each according to its own nature bestowed by the Constitutions or by free choice, are encounters in which experiences are expressed or received; one has “a family of brothers around their father”¹²¹ and “the very life of the community is itself a factor in formation”.¹²² The community becomes an environment which “fosters his growth to maturity”,¹²³ socializes values and spreads models and approaches.

It becomes a family environment in which each one, able to be himself, willingly accepts the risk of being open; an environment where there is a willingness to listen, where there is a rich empathy, i.e. where each one tries to reproduce in himself the feelings of others. It becomes a setting in which one can check whether others have understood what one has said. When a speaker hears his own story coming back to him because someone who was really listening refers to it in some way, he feels that he has been

¹¹⁶ R 99

¹¹⁷ R 100

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ C 70; R 49

¹²⁰ Cf. C 105, 109, 112, 113; R 78-79, 175

¹²¹ BM 8, 356

¹²² C 99

¹²³ C 52

really accepted and understood. In turn he accepts himself and gradually realizes a sure and vital communion with that person and with all he represents.¹²⁴

The community becomes an environment which helps in the vocational discernment of the experience itself. The experience narrated must be recognized and verified in its relationship with the vocational ideal: "Life in the Holy Spirit and the grace of Christ is a vital dynamism, shaped always by contemporary and competent people who carry out a sacramental function of mediation".¹²⁵ The community of life becomes a community of faith which compares itself through these mediations with that "Covenant" from which stems the first and last sense of itself and the truth of its lived experience. The community of life fosters the community of faith, and the community of faith consolidates the community of life, always provided that the latter be a community rich in models.

e) *A community rich in "models"*

231 The first salesians found their model in Don Bosco. "We too find in him our model".¹²⁶ This is how the chapter on formation begins in our Constitutions. And they go on to exploit this aspect: the formation guides in formation communities have to be "capable of a living communication of the salesian ideal".¹²⁷ "As mediators of the Lord's action", "they have a serene knowledge of their own salesian identity and a deep enthusiasm for the vocation, whose values they live in such a way as to bear witness to them and communicate them in a vital way".¹²⁸ Finally, every salesian through prayer and personal witness contributes to the sustaining and renewal of the vocation of his confreres.¹²⁹

The vocational ideal and his experience are normally perceived by interaction with models that embody them and which,

¹²⁴ VAN KAAM A., *Existential foundations of psychology*, New York 1969, p.336-337

¹²⁵ VIGANO E., *Commentary on Strenna* 1983

¹²⁶ C 21. 97

¹²⁷ C 104

¹²⁸ FSDB 142; cf. GC21 245

¹²⁹ C 101

considered as a response, make easier his original self-identification.

They continually move us in fact from the sense of being at ease with them to the challenge they offer to our abilities, and to the free and original acceptance of the values they propose to us by their lives.¹³⁰

4.4 SOME PHASES OF THE INITIAL FORMATION

These are phases each of which, against the background of the vocation of the salesian brother (considered always in its overall physiognomy) emphasize a particular and specific objective to be attained. They accentuate various aspects therefore from the standpoint of both the contents and the corresponding intellectual preparation.

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The interventions are progressive and in line with a double criterion: that of the basic equality between brother and priest salesians, and that of their specific difference.

44.1 The post-novitiate

For the lay salesian, as for others, it is a matter of maturing his own faith through a progressive integration of faith and life and faith and culture; the developing of the salesian vocation through an adequate preparation in catechesis and pedagogy; and the extension of his intellectual formation, so as to develop a "pedagogical mentality" in line with his own culture.¹³¹

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But it is also a matter of what is specific to the brothers which must be given special attention in the obligations associated with this phase. Among the objectives in fact are:

- to better ensure the sense and value of their consecrated lay character;

¹³⁰ Cf. SRM 97

¹³¹ Cf. FSDB 288-289. 332

- to devote greater attention to the formation of the educator through a suitable pedagogical, humanistic and salesian preparation; and of the educator to the faith through a catechetical and theological initiation which leads to a better understanding of the vocation of the lay salesian in its relationship with God's presence in the world;
- to promote gradually from this point their professional competence and their social and political education, so that by making good use of the social teaching of the Church they may become properly equipped to become educators and evangelizers of the working world.¹³²

234 Accepting these general objectives, both common and specific, and referring more particularly to the study programme, we may ask:

- how can we follow them in the progressive development of their apostolic consecration, and educate them also to a social and political sensitivity and prepare them for educational activity in the working world?
- how can we avoid the risk, greater in the case of brothers, of a devaluation of the reflexive aspect in the face of a more urgent call for action? What kind of balance can we create between intellectual activity and manual work?
- what criteria should be adopted concerning matters to be studied in view of the attainment of these objectives?
- are separate communities and study-plans preferable, or is it better to have the experience of common life with a unified programme of studies and with the necessary differences and integration?

A. *The objectives*

235 The FSDB draws attention to the obligation assumed in temporary profession, which "must be translated into an authentic living out of vocational values in a daily adherence to them, a

¹³² Cf. FSDB 338. 408-410

deeper understanding of them, and the discovery of their purity, harmony and organic nature".¹³³

a) *Integration of faith, life and culture*

In this perspective, in addition to the corresponding formation to motivated attitudes and dispositions, the study programme should contain in due proportion some contents proper to the disciplines of theology, e.g.:

- An introduction to salvation history and the mystery of Christ;
- An introduction to the Old and New Testaments;
- Questions of Church history;
- Questions of systematic theology;
- Moral questions;
- The social teaching of the Church;
- Hagiography;
- Theology of the religious life;
- Liturgy;
- Catechesis.

b) *Maturing of the salesian vocation*

Alongside the specifically salesian disciplines (which in this phase will give great importance to the preventive system and its realization in practice) the need will be emphasized to bring the following together in harmony from a pedagogical standpoint and as an immediate preparation for the practical training period:

- Philosophy of education;
- General pedagogy;
- Psychology of evolving age;
- Sociology of youth;
- Preventive system;
- Youth pastoral work.

¹³³ FSDB 333

c) *More direct and specific intellectual formation*

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The study programme foresees a particular attention to disciplines in the sectors of philosophy, humanities and languages in an anthropologically unified perspective, with the object of overcoming any break between real life and reflection. Study must be motivated and stimulated by real life, and practice must be enlightened and guided by reflection.¹³⁴

Every downgrading of reflection and study in favour of experience and life compromises an adequate recognition of the values of the individual, of the lay dimension of life, and does nothing to help the formation of a true "spirituality of work".

For a person who has previously followed a regular course of studies and has sufficient ability, the normal arrangement of studies in a common community structure is recommended. The experience of common life between candidates for the priesthood and lay salesians highlights the two ways of living the one salesian vocation: this "is desirable", says the FSDB.¹³⁵

But more frequently it happens that, given "the many different possibilities grouped together under the denomination of lay salesian",¹³⁶ philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation will have to be proportioned to the different situations.

B. *Study guidelines*

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a) Knowledge needs to be unified from an anthropological standpoint. The unifying perspective of the mystery of Christ is absolute, but it is nevertheless essential within this framework to emphasize the unifying perspective of man, with the intention of rediscovering and founding on a cultural basis the primacy and centrality of the person and the obligation of human maturing and development. This will follow from a study programme that links the human and philosophical disciplines with the human

¹³⁴ Cf. FSDB 230

¹³⁵ FSDB 397; GC21 303

¹³⁶ FSDB 410; GC21 301

sciences, and contributes to the development of an opening to pedagogical problems.¹³⁷

b) The human sciences are considered indispensable for an immediate and phenomenological reference to reality.¹³⁸

A possible selection, which takes account of the rich indications suggested by the Ratio, could be:

- General Pedagogy;
- General and dynamic psychology;
- Psychology of the evolving age;
- General sociology;
- Sociology of youth;
- Introduction to economics;
- Elements of finance and administration;
- History of religions;
- Introduction to social communication.

Sociology and Psychology serve to throw light on age ranges of particular interest for our mission: pre-adolescence, adolescence and early manhood, and prompt attention to the experience and demands to which they give rise.

c) Philosophical disciplines, with their "global" and "radical" character as regards values, lead salesian brothers towards the acquisition of a personal vision of the world, of man and of God, and towards a more certain maturity of judgement. Those without an adequate cultural basis who find difficulty in following all the courses in their entirety, could follow a few of the fundamental ones such as:

- Introduction to philosophy;
- Human philosophy;
- Social and political philosophy;
- Philosophy of education;
- Seminar on atheism;
- Methodology of scientific work.

¹³⁷ Cf. FSDB 340

¹³⁸ Cf. FSDB 224

d) *"Harmony with the prevailing historical context"* is a requirement that accompanies man throughout his entire life, and hence also in the realization of his intellectual formation.¹³⁹

The lay salesian's social and political education meets this requirement. Wide and deep use will be made of the social teaching of the Church, in view especially of an educational service in the working world.¹⁴⁰

Attention will also be given to achieving a wise balance between manual work and intellectual activity. The presence and significance of manual work must be rethought with a view to its harmonization with intellectual activity in the development and realization of personality.

240 The emphasis on manual work as compared with professionalism and intellectual activity is justified also by the need to avoid imposing a heavy burden on those brothers who have not completed a full programme of secondary studies, and are consequently without any specific title or professional qualification.

In conclusion, the arrangement of studies in the post-novitiate phase considers as "essential, original and having priority" the nucleus of humanist and philosophical disciplines, linked with the educational sciences but organized and directed in the manner indicated. Consequently a regular course of technical, scientific or professional studies in view of a qualification can be begun or continued only when the development of this main nucleus has been substantially assured.¹⁴¹

44.2 The period following practical training

241 The Acts of the General Council, analyzing what the Provincial Chapters and Provincial Directories had decided in connection with the formation of the lay salesian, concluded with these observations: The period following practical training is still almost

¹³⁹ Cf. FSDB 229

¹⁴⁰ Cf. FSDB 338; GC21 302

¹⁴¹ Cf. FSDB 403

entirely at an experimental stage; the duration, the kind of formation community, the content of this phase of specific formation, all vary a great deal from place to place and also from one person to another, but it must ensure as a primary requirement in every case the development of the pastoral dimension and capacity in the young confrere.¹⁴²

A. *Principles and criteria*

In view of the variability of the situation and to help the experiments now in progress and give them a certain security, it should be noted that the main principles and criteria which govern this phase of formation and the characteristics of the associated studies are two in number: the particular *vocational form* of the lay salesian, and the wide flexibility of the curriculum to meet the real possibilities of the candidate, the diversity of starting situations, and the spiritual process so far followed.

While keeping in mind art.106 of the Constitutions, there is in fact a whole variety of possibilities open to lay salesians, and this diversity calls for special consideration. Thought must therefore be given at provincial and interprovincial level to a "serious formation programme, but one that is flexible and adjustable, recognizing both the special nature of the various responsibilities and the actual possibilities of the candidate".¹⁴³

B. *The objectives*

The objectives require those responsible:

a) to give due weight, even in the area of intellectual formation, to the presence of a *theology* which of its nature permeates the culture of the brother, while leaving space for the area of technical and professional formation;

b) to enrich by motives and values the complementary nature of the two vocational forms, both in fraternal life and apostolic

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¹⁴² AGC 323, NATALI P., *Formation of the salesian brother*

¹⁴³ FSDB 410; GC21 301

activity; to give greater certainty and truth to the particular sensitivity of the lay salesian to the worlds of work, technical development, art, finance, social communication and human relations; to help him to live the "liturgy of life" so as to exploit pedagogical and pastoral experiences through the richness of his lay characteristics;¹⁴⁴

c) to guide him to draw greater profit from the non-ordained ministries, instituted by the Church for the laity as a service to the community, and which reveal their usefulness in the setting of liturgical celebrations, the organization of activities for the purpose of evangelization and catechesis, and in the much broader area of the practice of charity in general.¹⁴⁵

C. Aspects of the formation curriculum

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"The specific formation of lay salesians, referred to in art.116 of the Constitutions and art.98 of the Regulations, must be programmed in concrete fashion by the provincial with his council. In some cases it may be possible to avail of already existing structures at interprovincial or world level",¹⁴⁶ or new ones can be created.

The manner in which the provinces concerned are involved must be clearly expressed. It will form an index of the provinces' understanding of their formative responsibilities, and of their participation.

There are two fundamental aspects to the formation curriculum: that of pastoral formation, and the technical and professional aspect. The structure of the communities is based on what the FSDB calls "formational" criteria, because of the conditions involved.¹⁴⁷ But it will be subject to those modifications in personnel and initiatives that will enable a certain priority to be given to theological and catechetical formation "in line with the consecrated lay character".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Cf. FSDB 454

¹⁴⁵ Cf. FSDB 455; CIC 230,1

¹⁴⁶ FSDB 475

¹⁴⁷ FSDB 160-163

¹⁴⁸ C 116

When it comes to specialization and suitable environments for carrying it out, timely thought will have to be given to the preparation of lay salesians capable of insertion among the formation personnel. "Whenever possible the lay salesian should be present in formation structures with his particular witness, and when necessary also as a teacher in the cultural and technical sectors".¹⁴⁹

The content of the intellectual and professional formation will be open to the requirements of the pastoral and professional role of each one, with due attention to the possible choices offered by the way this phase is arranged with regard to persons, courses, and local situations and experiences.

They can be distributed normally over four semesters for an overall duration of two years calculated as the number of hours or credits required, but with the possibility of an extension when personal conditions are such as to allow of the frequenting of courses at university or pre-university level. In such a case the distribution of the various disciplines, made under the responsibility of the provincial, or of the "curatorium" in the case of an interprovincial structure, must be such as to permit the attainment of the objectives indicated.

In the light of the criteria set out above, and after previous consultation with the formation communities in which the candidates had lived previously, so as to harmonize the post-novitiate programme with that proposed for this present phase following the practical training period, and to avoid duplication or overlapping, it would seem that the following contents could be adopted, in line with the five areas proposed by the FSDB:¹⁵⁰

1. *Salesian formation*

- A deeper knowledge of the life of Don Bosco and the first Salesians;
- A critical study of some of its aspects;
- The history of the salesian brother;

¹⁴⁹ FSDB 181

¹⁵⁰ FSDB 338

- Salesian spirituality in the consecrated lay state;
- Community life and human relationships;
- Elements of didactics and pedagogy;
- Elements of catechetics and of pastoral work for the young and for vocations.

2. *Theological and catechetical formation*

- An updated and deeper knowledge of the theology of the religious life;
- A deeper awareness of the biblical background to certain themes;
- Introduction to the liturgy and the divine office;
- A course in catechesis.

3. *Social and political formation*

- Social teaching of the Church;
- Economics, sociology and politics of work;
- A knowledge of other aspects of the working world: anthropology and theology of work;
- History of political doctrines.

4. *Perfecting of professional formation*

- Information technology;
- Other topics according to the personal competence of the candidates.

5. *New requirements*

- Social communication;
- Music;
- Techniques of animation.

5. CONCLUSION

In discovering the figure of the salesian brother, we have followed to a great extent the same path as that taken by Don Bosco in his own time, and have continued it down to the present day.

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Historians think that Don Bosco's first intuitions, formed under the pressure of circumstances and God's enlightenment, have been gradually made more specific and precise. It is not only a question of discerning and fixing the characteristic elements of the figure of the lay salesian; nor is it a matter of merely bringing it up to date to the point at which by the competent filling of certain roles it would respond to the real and nearly always urgent needs that the youth condition and the unique configuration of salesian communities and the Congregation demand. It is a question above all of understanding and accepting in its authenticity the gift of a vocation which has gradually been manifested, and which has gained assent and adherence because of its novelty and utility.

The development of this idea was neither easy nor uncomplicated, as we have seen.

It is certain however that in all this field of interests, perspectives and significance, the figure of the salesian brother has always been well loved throughout our history, in times of success and in times of crisis. This is true in the first place of Don Bosco, and to a greater degree than anyone else.

It is this same love, we believe, that has led to the compiling of the present volume. Our purpose was to retrace the historical figure of the lay salesian, so as to give him his proper place with all his rich qualities in the life of the Congregation and the Church, in the hope that others, even through the witness and vocational care we are asked for, may feel called to live the same vocation, to foster its growth in themselves, and to persevere in it.

Even in the saddest moments the problem was never that of talking too much, but of soldiering on, of persevering, convinced

of what one believed in and living it consistently, without distrust or feeling it a burden, and with a faith that overcomes the world.

The poet Giulio Superville, contemplating the donkey that carried Mary so swiftly, comments: "Mary weighed very little, because all her thoughts were on the future she bore within her".

We are emerging from a past that has had its high points and its crises. Let us shake off the latter and retrieve the former, regaining especially our hope and trust.

May Mary, whom our Constitutions invoke as "She who gives us courage" help us today in the commitments asked of us, and nourish our hopes for the future.

Especially may she bring about through her intercession that Don Bosco's desire may be realized: "I have such great need for many of you to come and help me in this way".

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(The numbers refer to paragraphs, not pages)

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