



**XXI GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY**

CHAPTER DOCUMENTS

ROME, 12 FEBRUARY 1978



XXI General Chapter
of the Salesian Society

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of the Salesian Society



CHAPTER DOCUMENTS

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NOTE

The 5 Documents of the GC21 have been arranged in logical order which differs to some extent from the practical order in which they were prepared and presented in the assembly by the respective Capitular Commissions.

PRESENTATION

My dear confreres,

I am pleased that the first letter in which the new Rector Major greets you and meets you fraternally, even though briefly, should be the *promulgation* of the Documents of the 21st General Chapter. In choosing the official presentation of our chapter work for this first encounter we enhance and enrich our fraternal solidarity.

We feel immediately at home and at our ease because we are dealing with something directly linked with the heart and wishes of our Father Don Bosco, something both vital and intimate at the highest level. Such a meeting immediately creates an air of friendship; we are talking about the reason for our existence, the present-day meaning of our common vocation; we are touching the most delicate point of the fundamental choice that each one of us deliberately made at his religious profession.

We feel a proper appreciation of each other's significance and importance, because the General Chapter relies on the capabilities and responsibility of each confrere; in effect it outlines a future of which we are to be the architects and builders, and exhorts us to be calm but none the less resourceful in our task. And so this first meeting reflects the joy of our vocation and opens up a vision of hope.

We are in the period immediately after the GC21. We know very well that with the passage of time we become tired; but the present is a moment of youth in which it is lawful, and in our case even natural, for us to do a little dreaming. Even though somewhat laboriously and with the inevitable defects of any human enterprise, the chapter assembly has been a "moment of grace"; it must not pass unobserved ("timeo Deum transeuntem")!

We must let ourselves be stirred up and rejuvenated by the breath of the Holy Spirit; we must go back with Don Bosco to our origins, a time of 'dreams', when there was more emphasis on grace than on human calculations, when vitality was more evident than crisis, when there was more concern about future planning than brooding

over past failure. *Let us reawaken in ourselves the psychology of those times*, confident in the intervention of the Lord who periodically renews our youth. Even those who are older, even the sick, even those who are tired and in the evening of life, let all feel at this time a deep gratitude to the Lord who renews us.

With the GC21 he is making a new appeal to us: our vocation is not in fact a dialog of the past, now closed; it is always open in an attitude of conversion and hope to new invitations from the Spirit of God.

With this letter I present and officially consign to you the new chapter documents. The Constitutions tell us that "*all members will readily accept the deliberations (of the GC) which become of obligation for all as soon as they have been promulgated by the Rector Major*" (Art. 152). Let us therefore receive these documents with gratitude and loyalty.

I invite you to read attentively my concluding discourse to the members of the Chapter (n. 552-592), and to look upon it as a presentation; it will enable you to see at once in synthetic form the main lines of the Chapter's work. There are three principal objectives to which our duty of conversion must be directed:

- *we must become specialists in taking the gospel to the young;*
- *we must live as authentic religious with a mission to fulfil;*
- *we must take care of the process of on-going formation through renewed salesian animation.*

You will find in the text the launching sites from which our re-launching must take place: the Word of God, the Constitutions, the Preventive System, the spiritualization of the role of the Rector, correlative and complementary aspects in the figure of the confres.

I want to draw your attention here to what I would call a strategic element: *the reactivation of the Marian aspect of our vocation*; she will ensure a climate which will render our efforts efficacious. A doctrinal and cultural revival of devotion to Mary Help of Christians, designed to insert the salesian family actively into the Marian movement of the present day, will enable us (even 'miraculously', as Don Bosco assures us) to realize a new flourishing of vocations, and the courage and clear thinking that we need so much today in the fight for the faith.

The Help of Christians will lead us, as in Don Bosco's dream at the age of nine and as always in the history of salvation, to Jesus Christ; she will help us to become, with and like Don Bosco, his faithful disciples; she will prompt us to make of our life an explicit testimony

to his paschal victory by which he saved the world, and with which we enthusiastically join all our energies — the fruits of intelligence and the initiatives of love — for the salvation of today's youth.

Dear confreres, let us look on these chapter documents as a message of grace for our life and work: *let us study them personally, make them the object of serious reflection in community, and draw up concrete programs for their practical application.*

I greet each one of you with affection and hope, and I ask each of you personally for your continual prayers and daily sacrifices for the new Rector Major: they will redound to the good of the Congregation. I thank you all for your work and fidelity, and I assure you of my personal dedication to all of you, through the daily celebration of the Eucharist.

May the love of the Father — rich in initiative, the zeal of Christ — generous in obedience, and the joy of their Spirit, enliven the heart of every confrere and refine the atmosphere of every salesian house.

Let us be one in faith and hope, united in heart and soul in the strength of mutual love.

And now the watch-word is: "To work!"

Affectionately,

FR EGIPIO VIGANO
Rector Major

Rome, 24 February 1978

AA	Apostolicam Actuositatem
AD	Admonitiones
CD	Christus Dominus
CP	Communio et Progressio (PAS)
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
ES	Ecclesiae Sanctae
ET	Evangelicae Testimonium
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
GS	Gaudium et Spes
IG	Interlocutiones
OT	Optatum Totius
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
PP	Populorum Progressio
RC	Renovatiois Caritas
RdC	Rinnovamento della Chiesa (Catechetical Renewal)
SC	Scola Cattolica (The Catholic School)
SDV	Summi Dei Verbum
SVn77	Messaggio del Sinodo on Catechesis
SCRIS	Statuti (Statutes) of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
Oss. Rom.	Osservatore Romano
Op. Sist. Prev.	Opuscolo sul ministero
Op. Ed.	Opere Edite (Edited works)
PAS	Pontificio Istituto Apologetico
Reg	General Regulations
RF, RFIS	Ratio Fundamentalis
RI	Ratio Institutionis
RM	Rector Major
RRM	Report of Rector Major
Sch. Precap.	Precapitular schemes
SB	Salesian Brother
SDB	Salesians of Don Bosco
SGC	General Synod
SGUPS	General Synod of the University of Turin
Stat. Conf.	Statutes of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
Syn	Synod
YA	Youth Apostolate

SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

art.	article
c., chap.	chapter
cf	compare
doc.	document
ibid.	ibidem
p., pp.	page, pages

1. Acts of the Magisterium

AA	Apostolicam Actuositatem
CD	Christus Dominus
CP	Communio et Progressio
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
ES	Ecclesiae Sanctae
ET	Evangelica Testificatio
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
GS	Gaudium et Spes
LG	Lumen Gentium
OT	Optatam Totius
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
PO	Presbiterorum Ordinis
PP	Populorum Progressio
RC	Renovationis Causam
RdC	Rinnovamento della Catechesi (Catechetical Renewal)
SC	Scuola Cattolica (The Catholic School)
SDV	Summi Dei Verbum
Syn.77	Message of the Synod on Catechesis
SCRIS	Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
Oss. Rom.	Osservatore Romano

2. *Salesian abbreviations*

ASC	Acts of the Superior Council
ASGC	Acts of the Special General Chapter
AWCSB	Acts of World Congress of Salesian Brothers
BM	Biographical Memoirs
CC	Salesian Cooperators
Const	Constitutions
DB	Don Bosco
DBV	Don Bosco Volunteers (Volunteers of Don Bosco)
EE	Past Pupils, (USA Alumni)
Ep., Epist.	Epistolary of Don Bosco
FMA	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
FP	Ongoing Formation
FS	Salesian Family
FSE	Faculty of Education Sciences (UPS)
GC	General Chapter
LAS	Libreria dell'Ateneo Salesiano
LGC	Letter of Grand Chancellor
MB	Memorie Biografiche
MHC	Mary Help of Christians
MM	Mass media
Op. Sist. Prev.	Opuscolo sul Sistema Preventivo di Don Bosco
Op. Ed.	Opere Edite (Edited works)
PAS	Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano
RCS	Report of Superior Council (on restructuring of Opera PAS)
RDF	Report of Formation Department
Reg	General Regulations
RF, RFIS	Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis
RI	Ratio Institutionis
RM	Rector Major
RRM	Report of Rector Major on State of Congregation
Sch Precap.	Precapitular schemes, GC21
SB	Salesian Brother
SDB	Salesians of Don Bosco
SGC	Special General Chapter
SGUPS	General Statutes of UPS
SP	Salesian Priest
Stat. Conf.	Statutes of Past Pupils Confederation
Syn	Synod
UPS	Salesian Pontifical University
VDB	Volunteers of Don Bosco (Don Bosco Volunteers)
YA	Youth Apostolate

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SALESIANS, EVANGELIZERS OF THE YOUNG

The GC21 consigns this document to the confreres with the fraternal hope that in it they may find light and helpful encouragement in their task of witnessing the gospel and taking it to the young. "There are millions of them in the world," the Pope told us,¹ "often confused and bewildered by a multiplicity of discordant voices, who are waiting for your saving word; they are looking for the friendly hand of a brother, who will guide them with quiet certainty towards the Absolute."

To meet and reply to their expectations, this document was born.

1. It is a *practical document*, in the sense that it begins from the evaluation of the present *situation* and its problems, and leads to conclusions which it invites us to adopt to render our work more faithful and efficaciously apostolic.

2. It is a *family document*. The *conclusions are motivated* by reference to a framework of common values shared by all the salesian family. It is not a question of ideas divorced from actual salesian life, but of those found concretely in it. They become fully the constitutive elements of that life when efficacious evangelization is a consequence of fidelity on the part of the confreres; and when the latter find themselves in difficulties, that life suffers; it becomes impoverished and begins to fade away and asks to be revitalized.

For this reason the term "*frame of reference*" has been adopted; it is a picture to which that life can compare itself as to an exemplar, to which it can aspire as to a saving ideal. The document begins and ends with concrete facts. It is not in any sense a complete treatise; it is much less than that, but it may well be the more precious on that account because of its particular point of view and those to whom it is addressed.

¹ Paul VI to the GC21 (n. 477).

The document's very *composition or structure* bears this out. Each part deals with a practical problem, which it evaluates in the light especially of the Constitutions, and for which is then indicated the line of solution, followed by the practical directives which seem most urgent for a concrete conclusion.

- 4 3. It is a *meaningful document* for the present day. The Church is calling for our services at a moment in history when the emphasis is on evangelization. The originality and creativeness proper to our charism leads us to try to interpret and live this moment in a salesian way, because "no one can be unaware of the connection between our argument and the problems of education in the present day."²

Our charism must be one of the "designs" for meeting the needs of "modern youth, so thirsty for truth and far-reaching designs."³ The idea therefore that links the various parts of the document and gives them unity is our vocation as evangelizers, which becomes real when it is lived out in our pastoral and educative projects, restudied and put into practice.

- 5 4. This commitment is urged upon us by the letter which Cardinal Villot, in the name of the Holy Father, sent to Fr. Ricceri, and by the address which the Pope himself gave to the General Chapter in private audience. The points on which he dwelt and in connection with which the sons of Don Bosco "are filially submissive and at his disposal for the good of the universal Church"⁴ are interrelated with each other and give a soul and vitality to our document.

- 6 5. The Pope, after praising the choice of the general study theme of the GC21, spoke of Don Bosco, a sustaining and restraining presence who goes ever before us with youthful and dynamic tread. He recalled the reference in his Memoirs to Don Bosco's "priestly thirst" which made him want to "launch out among the young so as to know them intimately and so be able to help them keep away from evil."⁵

The thirst of his vocation, and young people and their condition, form the two dimensions of the life of Don Bosco. And "at a time which was so complex and calamitous" he lived them out as "a true champion of the history of Italy and of the Church."⁵

² Message of the Synod of Bishops on catechesis, no. 1.

³ From the text of the address of homage read to the Holy Father by Fr. Egidio Viganò (n. 464).

⁴ Constitutions art. 128.

⁵ Paul VI to the GC21.

6. This heavy responsibility arising from the charism which we also share lays on us obligations in the same direction:

a) We put to ourselves emphatically the problem of our fidelity in "following Christ in a total and unconditional way... by means of a generous, joyous and faithful practice of the evangelical counsels" in Don Bosco's spirit, to show to young men and boys "a face that is not just a mask but the clear manifestation of a brotherly love reflecting that of God himself which is 'greater than our own heart'" (1 Jn 3, 20).⁶ "Give first place to the religious spirit," says the letter of Card. Villot.

b) "We maintain the special character of salesian work and pedagogy and this more especially because the requirements both in the Church and in civil society today appear to correspond more than ever to the particular apostolate of the sons of St. John Bosco, whose first interest and preference has always led them to dedicate themselves to the male section of young people."⁷

c) We live this vocation and charism, following Don Bosco who was a "true champion," as men of faith and dedication who through their acquired skill are able to reawaken the creative inventiveness of the gift of God.

7. The directing and correcting figure of Don Bosco and that of the Pope, who "points out the determining factors of our identity at a moment of change when it is not easy to see clearly"⁸ compel us to reflect on these decisive sectors, and lead us to make an objective evaluation with a consideration not only of the values and principles to be retained and developed but also of the urgent need to find suitable means for defending them.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Letter of Card. Villot to Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, 29 Oct. 1977 (n. 448).

⁸ Intervention of Fr. Egidio Viganò in the Chapter assembly.

INTRODUCTION

- 9 "Preaching the gospel and catechizing are fundamental to our mission. As salesians we are all and at all times educators in the faith."¹

This service which "demands from our communities ability to announce, and courage to bear witness to the gospel," was proposed to us also in the message of the Bishops, meeting in the Fourth Synod. They are of the opinion that "in the next ten years catechetics will be throughout the world the natural and most fruitful terrain for the renewal of the entire ecclesial community."³ And they thank those religious communities who provide renewed hope "in the great spiritual fecundity for a world lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes."⁴ The Pope himself refers to the "immense contribution" made by those religious who are witnesses to sanctity, and dedicate themselves to making Christ known "with an inventive originality that excites admiration."⁵

- 10 This inventiveness and originality for us salesians arises from and is continually nourished by a double source: from Christ and his gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit,⁶ and from the young who "are said to abhor all that is false and fictitious and to look only for the transparently true."⁷

We wonder whether we really believe what we proclaim whether we live what we believe, whether we truly preach what we live, attentive to the appeals coming from the young; whether we really bear witness to an effective solidarity with them and at the same time a solidarity with the Absolute which is God.⁸

¹ Const. 20.

² Ibid.

³ Message of Synod 1977, n. 4.

⁴ Message of Synod 1977, n. 18.

⁵ EN 69.

⁶ cf Const. 101.

⁷ EN 76.

⁸ cf EN 76.

"Following closely... *Jesus Christ*, we choose a deeply christian way of loving God and our brethren with undivided heart."⁹ For this we point in the first place to the *Constitutions*, faithfully put into practice, as a privileged criterion of our identity as individuals and as a community. And we affirm the necessity to know them, accept them and live them, so as to be able to present once again the riches of the apostolic heart and intentions of Don Bosco, "a man of God and God's man for the young."¹⁰

11

In this sense we reaffirm also the enduring value of *Tradition* which the Rector Major and General Chapter, in the light of the life of the confreres, interpret with authority and propose afresh in a new way. At present the ASGC have a special importance for us; although they bear "the imprint of our weakness,"¹¹ they are a valid attempt to bring Don Bosco close to the youth of our time, and they contain "the motivation of the Constitutions themselves and the principles from which they spring."¹²

Secondly we recognize in *youth itself* the other source of our inspiration in spreading the gospel. We salesians are sent to the young, and especially to the poorest of them, and we collaborate in the creation of a new society grounding to the full their life in faith.

12

We meet these young people in different countries of the world, and they present a great diversity with different standards of conscience and freedom; sometimes fixed and closed in on themselves because of the emargination caused by their poverty, sometimes a prey to contradictions and conflicts even of a violent nature, and occasionally following Christ and already at work on the building of a more human society.

In each and every one of these young people one can detect the need for truth, for freedom and human growth, and the desire (often no more than implicit) of a deeper knowledge of the mystery of God.¹³

They go through this experience as living parts of a setting called "*the youth situation.*" It is made up of tendencies and reigning

13

⁹ Const. 75.

¹⁰ ASGC 769.

¹¹ ASGC 769.

¹² ASGC Introduction p. ix.

¹³ Message of Synod 1977 n. 1.

values which make easier the growth in faith of their humanity, or make it more difficult.¹⁴

The *harmonious relationship* which is so necessary to educate them, liking what they like but without abandoning our adult role of salesian educators, becomes in this way both difficult and complex.

And yet the gift of God which is our vocation is a source of hope; we must update our skills, but even more must we believe in the force of the Spirit and the special gift he has given us to enable us to conquer every fear and not desert the difficult field of our youth commitment.

The GC21 therefore looks on the one hand at the young and perceives a happy coincidence between their expectations, the appeal they make to us, and our own mission;¹⁵ and on the other it looks at the new engagement of the Church to evangelization and discovers in our mission of taking the gospel to youth the fundamental characteristic of our identity.

- 14 But how do we set about this work of evangelization? As sharers in the evangelizing activity of the Church we believe in Don Bosco's charism and hence in our own particular way of evangelizing the young. This we do in a realistic way by means of the *salesian educational project*, the "Preventive System", rethought and reactivated with its operatives, content, aim, style and means in the various settings in which we work.

We are well aware that education and evangelization are specifically distinct activities of their class, but nevertheless there is a strict connection between them on the practical plane of existence. In Don Bosco and his preventive system salvation refers to the whole of the young person. It is freedom from sin and growth in Christ even to the level of sanctity, but it is also freedom from the many conditions of poverty and dereliction, of social and cultural subjection, so that the young may become "upright citizens."¹⁶

Today *Evangelii Nuntiandi* confirms this notion. The various elements in the process of evangelization ("presence, sharing the lives and fortunes of fellowmen, renewal of mankind, witness, open proclamation, commitment of the heart, entry into the community,

¹⁴ cf EN 19.

¹⁵ Address of Pope Paul to GC21 (n. 467-478).

¹⁶ cf EN 31.

reception of the signs, apostolic action"),¹⁷ far from being in conflict and even mutually exclusive in fact complement and enrich one another.¹⁸

We salesians, evangelizers of the young, accompany our work by accepting as a necessary preliminary the *evangelization of ourselves*. 15

As individuals and as a community of believers we have a specific charism in virtue of which we dedicate ourselves to education.¹⁹ Set in the midst of the world we are often tempted by idols²⁰ and we know that we have an incessant need to listen to the word of God and be converted to it to nourish the heart by fidelity to the commandments in his love and with motives of hope and trust.

We need to conform ourselves to Christ in Don Bosco's spirit so that like him we may be enabled to evangelize by educating.

To this end each of us, in the religious and educative *community*, builds and cultivates, as far as lies in his power and with the help of his brethren, his own humanity and talents so that the community may be renewed. It becomes the place where God is present and communicates with us. 16

To this end we joyfully accept his initiative to consecrate us with the love of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, and we reply with the joy and alacrity of our collaboration.

To this end, when we come to recognize his presence and the gift he has given us, we love him, we give him praise and thanksgiving. But precisely because we are sent by him to the young, we feel that our prayer becomes also light and strength. We are enabled to discern in the world the action of God in the events and life of youth, the significance of our consecration for their salvation, and we feel the urgent need for our collaboration.

The community develops this progressive self-evangelization through the *ministries which animate it*, especially that of the rector. And in turn the community itself becomes an *animator* by inserting itself into the complexity of the social and ecclesial context of its neighborhood and promoting collaboration, so as to make a full and

17

¹⁷ cf EN 21.

¹⁸ cf EN 24.

¹⁹ cf SC 89.

²⁰ cf EN 15.

timely response to God who sends it, and to the young who await it. To the extent in which this conversion is accepted, there will live in the community the soul of the "preventive system," which in addition to being a method of education is above all a spirituality; it is a love freely given, inspired by the love of God which forestalls every creature by his divine providence, accompanies him by his constant presence and saves him by giving his life for him.

- 18 The GC21 intends to draw attention to some problems existing in the life of the Congregation, as evidenced by the authoritative indication of the Holy Father, the data and urgent requests sent in by provincial chapters and individual confreres and felt by the Chapter members, or arising from the Rector Major's report. As far as possible it desires to evaluate their positive and negative aspects and give guidelines concerning points which seem to be of fundamental and practical importance.

It refers back to the picture of common and accepted values (Constitutions and ASGC) for the justification of certain attitudes it adopts, and to give meaning to the commitment it calls for from the confreres if they are to bear witness to the gospel and announce it to the young.

19 Practical directives

- a) Let the provinces decide on ways for promoting the knowledge and assimilation of the revised Constitutions. Let them be accepted as the concrete criterion of our identity and the basis for revision of life and future planning at both personal and community level. Let them be made the object of days of retreat, of formation workshops, and times of prayer. (cf "*Formation to salesian life*" n. 240-342).
- b) As a sign of unity and as an authoritative interpretation of our identity, let particular esteem be shown for the ASGC, the Acts of the GC21, the ASC, and the guidelines and directives provided by the Superiors. The best ways of doing this shall be decided at provincial level.
- c) Let a knowledge of salesian history and spirit be fostered through the researches and publications of the Center of Salesian Studies, by the publication of a critical edition of the Constitutions of our Society, by a greater diffusion of salesian literature (translated and in popular form), with the richest possible exchange of news and initiatives (Salesian Bulletin, ANS, Provincial Newsletters). (cf "*Formation to salesian life*" n. 342; cf also practical directive n. 105c of this document).