

## THE EDUCATIONAL PLAN AND VOCATIONAL FRUITFULNESS

### 1. THE SALESIAN EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL PLAN

- 80 The evangelizing activity of the salesian is not characterized solely in terms of his charges and by the typical community manner in which it is carried out, but also by the particular organization of its *contents* and objectives and by the *style* of his work among youth.

Therefore the Salesians of Don Bosco cannot adequately grasp the meaning of their mission without sincerely reflecting on that educational and pastoral system which Don Bosco has left as a precious legacy.

It is like a "central aspect in the salesian youth apostolate," something that belongs to the very essence of our mission, "our style of expressing pastoral charity."<sup>1</sup> Actually we may consider it a sort of synthesis of what Don Bosco wanted to be, the nucleus of the pedagogic-pastoral program or plan worked out by him and entrusted particularly to the salesian family, the necessary focal point of the forms and characteristics of our pastoral action.

This call to the "preventive system" becomes all the more urgent today, when the members of the Congregation, scattered throughout the world, confront very diverse cultural situations in which to witness and proclaim the Good News and yet wish to preserve through the community effectiveness of their vocation, the vital bond with their Founder and a unity of spirit.

We must remember, first of all, that the system does not indicate only a set of contents to be transmitted or a series of methods or procedures for communicating them. It is not pure pedagogy nor is it solely catechesis. The "preventive system" as it has been lived by Don Bosco and by his followers is always like a rich synthesis of contents and of methods; of processes of human development and

<sup>1</sup> RRM 183.

also of evangelical proclaiming and of deepening of the christian life. In its goals, in its contents, and in its actual implementation it brings to mind at once the three words by which Don Bosco defined it: *reason, religion, kindness*.

Therefore, in the work of verification the GC21 felt the need to consider its degree of presence or effectiveness, and in some way it wanted to test its vitality, pointing up two fundamental features, vitally linked to each other in concrete everyday action:

- *The contents*
- *The style*.

## 1.1 The contents of the salesian educational and pastoral plan

### 1.1.1 *The problem: a uniform and differentiated proposal*

According to the insights of Don Bosco and the Congregation, confirmed also by Vatican Council II and by more recent papal teaching, particularly in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, genuine evangelization takes place within a plan that aims at the total development of man, at the integral growth of the individual and of groups.

This plan is also radically open and positively oriented toward full maturity in Christ: "As witnesses of Christ, the salesians cultivate the christian integral development of youth and adults of the working class."<sup>2</sup>

Between evangelization, liberation and education therefore there is a profound unity and solidarity. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*<sup>3</sup> proceeds along this line. The 19th General Chapter had already spoken of "integral salesian humanism."<sup>4</sup> Also the SGC took up this expression and spoke of "christian integral development" and of "christian liberating education."<sup>5</sup> It is the very language of Don Bosco, who was fond of summarizing the program of life proposed to boys in simple but meaningful formulas. He speaks of "good christians and respectable citizens";<sup>6</sup> he set his sights on the "health, wisdom and holiness"

81

<sup>2</sup> ASGC 59-61.

<sup>3</sup> EN 29-33.

<sup>4</sup> GC XIX, pp. 182-183.

<sup>5</sup> ASGC 61.

<sup>6</sup> MB 13, 618.

of his boys,<sup>7</sup> and proposed a lifestyle consisting of “cheerfulness, study, piety.”<sup>8</sup>

- 82** The GC21 does not close its eyes to the difficulties involved in carrying out this plan.

It realizes first of all the extreme cultural heterogeneity in which the Congregation is performing its mission: countries with long-standing christian tradition and territories on the threshold of dechristianization; regions in which the first proclaiming of the Good News has need of consistent efforts at deepening the christian experience and the faith; immense subcontinents where educational and pastoral action confronts deeply rooted non-christian religions, let alone the extremely differentiated levels of economic development, of social stratifications, of political regimes, of traditions.

Rendering even more difficult the christian educational commitment is the resistance put up by the boys themselves and the charges in general, who live in environments that greatly condition them and create in them attitudes of suspicion and hostility in the face of any proposal of values, especially if these values are linked to religion and to religious institutions. Often it is a question of attitudes which are found among the baptized, which are no less hard to overcome than are the attitudes of boys who have been brought up in other ideologies or religious systems, with rooted biases and hardened prejudices.

These difficulties on the other hand cannot make us forget or overlook the “new signs of restlessness for the Divine in the heart of man.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, our educational proposal will be able to start from the signs of renewal and from the profound drives that seem to permeate the world of youth, especially “from their aspirations for creativity, for justice, for freedom and for truth, as also from their desire for shared ecclesial and civil responsibility, from their inclination toward the love of God and their neighbor.”<sup>10</sup>

- 83** All this must stimulate us even more to a vital reflection that will give added vigor to salesian educational and evangelizing action.

Attention to and respect for the diversity of situations and persons

<sup>7</sup> Epist. 2, 465.

<sup>8</sup> *Il pastorello delle Alpi in Opere edite (The Little Shepherd of the Alps in Edited Works)*, Vol. XV, pp. 332-333.

<sup>9</sup> Syn. 77, No. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Syn. 77, No. 3.

must not betray the plan of our Founder. It must remain an ideal point of common reference for a full, christian and salesian service rendered to the total man; with moderation and sound judgment, but also with courage and candor; without pushing the natural forces but without allowing the times of grace and salvation to pass by in vain.

Starting from a basic uniform plan will make it easier to engage in genuine salesian creativity which, by means of the provincial and local communities and personal responsibility, will be able to find the proper criteria for programs of education, of human development, and of undiluted and integral christian formation in *historic* fidelity to diverse situations and cultures.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.1.2 *The situation*

It is not easy to make a verification of the educational and evangelizing commitment of the salesians over the past six years, owing to the complexity of the actual conditions in which the Congregation carries on its activity and the varieties of the institutions that have to be examined.

We can however bring out some general points.

The SGC has had a *positive* influence on the Congregation as regards educational and evangelizing activity. Not entirely and not everywhere has this developed with equal diligence; many elements of renewal are still at the early stage and are getting under way with great difficulty, or they are still at the painful stage of research and wishful thinking. But we have the impression of having set out on the way to regrowth and of being at a more serene time of reflection and of action.

In particular, we point to some trends that appear to be rich in hope: the rediscovery of the value and relevance of Don Bosco's pedagogical insights and of the salesian tradition; the increased sensitivity to and greater interest in boys of the working classes and the cause of justice in the world; a more pronounced commitment to evangelization and catechesis.

All this has led, if not everywhere and to an equal degree:

- to the creation of centers, organizations, teams, journals, aids for investigating and carrying out the salesian educational and pastoral program;

<sup>11</sup> EN 20, 38-39.

- to the felt need for a more serious and precise programming of our salesian involvement, also through the drafting of educational ("model") plans around which to unify the educational action not only of the salesians but also of the members of the salesian family and of the laity engaged with us in the mission (parents, teachers, animators, catechists...);
- to more lively and functional involvements especially in the area of catechesis;
- to the creation of new agencies of spiritual activity such as departments for education in the Faith, which have been set up in some countries.

We can also note:

- a more intense and responsible taking part in the environmental and cultural context;
- a closer participation in the local Church apostolate;
- a broader cooperation with the salesian family and the development of the movement of Young Cooperators;
- growth in the understanding of prayer and the liturgical life;
- a more concerned attention to some sectors of evangelization such as the mass media and christian activity in things temporal;
- a marked, effective and fully recognized contribution in the sector of catechetical and liturgical activity.

85 In addition to an undeniable process of growth and to elements of renewal, the provincial chapters note the presence of *aspects still missing*, of resistance to change desired by the SGC, and the persistence of superficial and negative attitudes.

In more than one case they report the absence of a concrete educational and pastoral plan based on community reflection open to the changed situations of the time, compared with the lines of our tradition. They note a certain neglect and ignorance of the basic elements of the preventive system of Don Bosco and an unbalanced interpretation of the same. They note at times a falling off in the force of witness and the lack of meaningful salesian experiences, capable of arousing the interest of boys and their enthusiasm.

In some cases there is uncertainty over the exact purpose of our pastoral action, so that some confreres are reluctant or hesitant to come to grips with an explicit christian proposal, even in respect of the rhythms and themes of growth. Consequently there are not always clear and precise ideas and judgments regarding certain

main points of Don Bosco's educational method: reception of the sacraments (particularly regarding the sacrament of reconciliation), Marian devotion, the simple piety of the people, the systematic and integral teaching of religion applied to all ages, according to the indications of the local Church.

Also noted is a poor understanding of the problems that the condition of youth and the working classes brings to the christian experience; as for example the broad-gauged pluralism of cultural models, difficulty with the language of youth and lower-class subcultures, yearnings for participation and shared responsibility at all levels, the thirst for equality and justice.

### 1.1.3 *The causes*

We are not considering here the causes linked to socio-political conditions which hamper the full implementing of the salesian pastoral educational plan: evangelization cannot take place everywhere with full liberty of forms and expressions.

But even where we find great areas for action, there are causes which limit and distort educational and evangelizing action. They can be reduced to the following: an insufficient "mental awareness" of and a halting openness to the needs of pedagogic and pastoral action which have been indicated by the renewal; a certain narrowness in cultural horizons and basic formation which makes it hard to perceive the changes in society, the appeals sent up by the world of youth and the working classes, the directions given by the Magisterium. At the root of certain deficiencies and limitations in our action it is not uncommon to find the prevailing presence of lay collaborators, at times inadequately trained and made aware of our plan, while the few salesians present are involved primarily in organizational and administrative tasks.

### 1.1.4 *Frame of reference*

An assessment of the current reality has a point of reference of the highest authority in art. 2 of the Constitutions, which outlines the mission of the salesians: "to realize through our religious consecration the apostolic design of our Founder: then in our own salesian way we try to become the signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are the poorest and most in need."<sup>12</sup> It is a "total" and "creative service," which "invests all *the*

86

87

<sup>12</sup> Also: Const. 7, 17-33, 40. Reg. 1-2; ASGC 88-89.

true necessities and real needs of the boy in his body, in his mind, in his heart." It is an "integral formation" which entails a generous response to his manifold needs: "for culture, for lodging, for activities and living with others in his free time, for educational environments full of vitality."<sup>13</sup>

At the peak we find "evangelizing and catechetical activity," which "is the basic dimension of our mission. As salesians, we are all and at all times teachers of the Faith."<sup>14</sup> "The salesian civilizes by evangelizing and he evangelizes by civilizing."<sup>15</sup> Fundamental in this regard are the texts of the SGC and especially the already mentioned documents 3 and 4, *Evangelization and Catechesis*<sup>16</sup> and *Pastoral Renewal of Salesian Action among Youth*,<sup>17</sup> which manifestly harmonize with the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, with the Second, Third and Fourth Synods of Bishops (respectively on *justice in the world, evangelization and human development, catechesis in our time*), and the recent document on *The Catholic Schools* of the Congregation for Catholic Education.

- 88 We recall at this point some objectives and elements essential to a salesian pastoral educational action faithful to the plan of our Founder and in dialog with the needs of our charges.

It will be the task of the provinces and of the local communities to take these elements and apply them with proper adaptations to the makeup of their own educational plans or projects at the level of the Oratories, Youth Centers, Schools, and other salesian involvements among the youth of the working classes.

The summarizing indication calls for a continual effort at rereading and reinterpreting, in the light of Don Bosco's thinking, the wealth of documents of the Sacred Congregation of the Church, where all the points indicated are found.

- 89 It might be well to attempt a classification by adopting as a criterion what Don Bosco affirms: "This system is based above all on *reason, religion* and on *kindness*."<sup>18</sup> But more than just a basis for syste-

<sup>13</sup> ASGC 353; more analytically ASGC 354, 178-182, 256-258.

<sup>14</sup> Const. 20.

<sup>15</sup> ASGC 134, 61.

<sup>16</sup> ASGC 274-341.

<sup>17</sup> ASGC 342-399.

<sup>18</sup> Op. sul Sist. Prev., 1887, in *Opere Edite* (Booklet on the Prev. Syst., 1887, in *Edited Works*), Vol. XXVIII, p. 424.

mizing the contents, this basic principle indicates a triple joint inspiration that penetrates and enlivens each and every aspect of the educational and pastoral system of Don Bosco.

In fact, reason, religion and kindness should be the ingredients of the entire rich legacy of human and religious values which guarantee the genuine human, religious and christian development of individuals, according to the true theology of incarnation.

In terms of *personal growth*, we want to help the boy in particular to build a sound and balanced humanity, fostering and promoting:

90

- a gradual maturing in freedom, in the assuming of his own personal and social responsibilities, in the clear perception of values;
- a carefree and positive relationship with persons and things that will nurture and stimulate his creativity and reduce conflict and tension;
- the capacity to maintain a dynamic-critical attitude in the face of events, to be faithful to the values of tradition and be open to the needs of history, so as to become capable of making consistent personal decisions;
- a prudently given education in sex and in love that will help him to understand their dynamics of growth, of giving and of encounter, within a plan of life;
- the quest and planning of his future in order to liberate and direct toward a precise vocational choice the immense potential hidden in the destiny of every boy, even in one less endowed as a human being.

In terms of *social growth*, we want to help our charges have a heart and mind open to the world and to the needs of others. To this end, we are educating youth:

- to be available, to have a sense of solidarity, to dialog, to participate, to share responsibility;
- to become part of the community through the life and experience of the group;
- to become involved in justice and the building of a more just and human society.

### 1.1.5 *A plan positively oriented toward Christ*

A similar plan in its contents, in its goals, in its style, may also be proposed and offered to those who do not share our vision of the world and who do not share our faith. On the other hand, there are

91

quite a few salesians who are active in environments that are extremely secular or have not as yet been touched by the message of the gospel.

Even in these cases, the educational system of Don Bosco proves itself ingenious in its insights and endowed with the most diversified possibilities. Applied with flexibility, gradualness and a sincere respect for the human and religious values of the cultures and religions of our charges,<sup>19</sup> it can yield abundant fruits on the educational level, it can create friendship and promote affection from pupils and past pupils, it unleashes great energies of good, and in more than a few cases lays the foundations for an open path of conversion to the christian faith.

All this however does not preclude the salesian from finding for each educational endeavor his inspiration and motivations in the gospel, the light that illumines him and the goal which ultimately leads him to Christ. The ultimate goal of every salesian educational action is to make people aware of God as Father, to find his will at all times, and cooperate with Jesus Christ for the coming of his Kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

The salesian plan therefore aims at another growth: the growth in Christ within the Church. In our educational plan, "Christ is the foundation: he reveals and promotes the new meaning of existence and transforms it, empowering man to live in a divine manner, that is to say, to think, to wish and to act according to the Gospel, making the Beatitudes his way of life."<sup>21</sup>

A truly religious and christian course of action is developed in salesian educational and pastoral action, in continuity with the commitment to develop and promote the more specifically human values.

The two lines of action do not, in themselves, follow one another chronologically, and still less are they divergent; they bear on two essential aspects of man's unique vocation as outlined in God's plan.

- 92 On the *christian religious* level, salesian action strives to teach an aware and active faith,<sup>22</sup> to revive hope, optimism (serving the Lord in gladness),<sup>23</sup> and the life of grace. It stimulates charity in a full

<sup>19</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Cf Const. 21.

<sup>21</sup> *Scuola Cattolica (The Catholic School)*, Nos. 34, 35.

<sup>22</sup> ASGC 63, 64, 307-311.

<sup>23</sup> Cf Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*.

experience of life sustained by a lively catechesis and by concrete and relevant preaching. It teaches one to discover and love the Church as an efficient sign of communion and service to God and to our brothers, and to see in the Pope the bond of unity and charity in the Church. It permits one to live the experience of joyful and youthful liturgical celebrations with an intense participation in the Eucharist. It promotes a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother, the Help of Christians, the Mother of grace, true model of a successfully faithful life and of serene and victorious purity.<sup>24</sup> It teaches and stimulates a true life of prayer with particular care to use those forms which are most accessible and closest to *youthful and popular piety*.<sup>25</sup> Finally, we find always present as an objective, almost as a synthesis and crowning of a progressive human and christian maturity, the vocational orientation with all its possible choices: lay, religious, priestly. It is the most precious fruit of an accomplished evangelizing and educational process (Cf *Vocational fruitfulness of our pastoral activity* n. 106-119).

In discussing the salesian educational plan, we must briefly reflect on what Don Bosco considered "the columns of his educational edifice": the sacraments of reconciliation and the eucharist, and devotion to the Blessed Mother.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.1.6 Sacramental and liturgical life

In rereading the three biographies of boys written by Don Bosco, and considering the sacramental practice in the Oratory in the light of present-day sensitivity and of the doctrine of Vatican Council II, it is easy to grasp the wealth and topicality of some aspects and insistent points of salesian pedagogy.

For the *pedagogy of penance*, the continuity between the style to bring the boy closer to the educational process and that which he succeeds in establishing at the sacramental moment is characteristic of Don Bosco. It is the same paternity, friendship and trust which awaken in the youth an awareness of the movements of grace and a commitment to overcome sin.

93

<sup>24</sup> Const. 65; cf *Marialis Cultus*.

<sup>25</sup> EN 48.

<sup>26</sup> Stella P., *Don Bosco nella religiosità...* (*Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religion*), Zurich 1969, 1<sup>o</sup>, p. 319.

The sacramental encounter usually requires a prior educational understanding.<sup>27</sup>

Don Bosco used to rightly say that confession was the "key to education," because by personally involving the boy it invited him to surpass himself. The regular frequency of the penitential encounter, the frank and serene dialogue, the resolution which promotes constancy provide an opportunity of exceptional educational value.

We must not forget the different opportunities shown in the liturgy or found in popular devotion or suggested by educational wisdom, to offer to youth moments and community celebrations of penance within a climate of joy and delight, as is befitting when remembering one's own salvation.

A second aspect which it is important to recall is the educational value of the *liturgical year*. The full and conscious sharing in the work of redemption is organized, in Don Bosco's thought, around the celebration of the liturgical year, that sets the pace for the life of the youthful community, showing the road to spiritual growth and the gradual commitment which one assumes in answering God's call. It is a concrete way of structuring an educational plan on the mystery of Christ. At the center we always find the meeting with Christ in the Eucharist.

All this within the framework of an efficient catechesis, that helps the boys to consider liturgical celebrations as a "sacramental expression of the life of Christians and of their history and therefore teaches them a continuity between the eucharist and the community commitment, between the Mass and the liturgy of life, between deliverance from evil petitioned in prayer and liberation practised in society, between the liturgical peace gesture and true peace brought to where one lives."<sup>28</sup>

"To encourage," "to provide the opportunity to profit from the sacraments," "to emphasize the beauty, the greatness, the sanctity of religion," "never to compel," but to act in such a way as to ensure that the youths "remain spontaneously attached to the sacraments, draw near to them voluntarily, with pleasure and with profit": these are clear expressions of the preventive system that tell us of the educational sensitivity and of the sacramental pedagogy of Don Bosco.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Bosco, G., *Scritti Spirituali* a cura di J. Aubry (*Spiritual Writings* edited by J. Aubry), p. 176, notes 5 and 6.

<sup>28</sup> ASGC 324.

<sup>29</sup> ASGC 326.

### 1.1.7 Marian devotion

Mary was particularly present in the evangelizing work of Don Bosco, who saw in devotion to the Blessed Virgin an essential element of christian growth for his boys and his youths. He promoted devotion to her and celebrated her feasts with solemnity, creating around them a climate of serenity and joy and at the same time of strong spiritual power. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians is at the root of our origins and therefore also of our renewal.

The GC21, in a spirit of loyalty to Don Bosco and in the light of Vatican Council II and of the *Marialis Cultus* of Paul VI, invites all salesians to rediscover and to give full value to the presence of Mary in their own lives and in educational action among youth.

The Blessed Mother fulfills above all the function of an *educator*. Our Constitutions remind us that "the Blessed Virgin Mary plays her part in the education of these children of God."<sup>30</sup> In the life of our boys, she is not only the Mother that receives and understands them but is also a sign of victory against sin and a help in their daily life-struggle. "We make her known and loved as the one who believed, and who is ever ready to help the christians on their pilgrimage."<sup>31</sup>

A salesian is not satisfied with fostering for Mary "a strong filial devotion,"<sup>32</sup> but like Don Bosco sees Mary as the *inspiration* of his educational work. Starting from his dream at nine years of age and during his entire life, Don Bosco learned from her the fundamental aspects of his system: a demeanor of gentleness and patience, of serene and shining purity, of work and temperance.

In their work of educating youth in faith, the salesians, starting from the holy scriptures and from the celebrations of the liturgical year, will know how to reveal "Mary as a *model of spiritual behavior* with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries," especially in the celebration of the Eucharist; in other words the Blessed Virgin hearing and receiving the Word of God with faith; the Blessed Virgin in private and community prayer; the Virgin who for her faith and obedience gives us the gift of Christ; the Virgin offering Christ to the Father...<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Const. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Const. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Const. 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, 16-20.

Starting from the insistent pleas and needs of the boys, like Don Bosco they will know how to present Mary as the *model of christian life*, because "she totally and responsibly obeyed the will of God; because she received the word and put it into practice; because her action was inspired by charity and by a spirit of service; because she devoted her life to the worship of God, and made such worship her way of life; because she was the first and most perfect follower of Christ."<sup>34</sup> This also in view of a mature ecclesial awareness that Mary promoted in God's people.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.1.8 *The priority commitment to catechesis*

- 95 No solid sacramental practice and no devotion can replace in the Church the processes of conversion and of itineraries of growth in faith. There is an unbreakable bond between evangelization and the sacraments: evangelization, as a catechesis, prepares one for the sacrament and, as a liturgical preaching, accompanies its celebration.<sup>36</sup>

The primacy of evangelization and especially of catechesis was strongly reemphasized by the official documents of the Church after Vatican Council II, both at the universal Church level<sup>37</sup> and at local Church level,<sup>38</sup> as well as in the SGC.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, in accordance with what was stated in the 1977 Synod of Bishops, the salesians will intensify their catechetical commitment in all their works and activities, "so as to give it priority in their pastoral action... being willing to devote all their efforts to the same catechetical activity together with that of evangelization."<sup>40</sup>

Catechesis of course presupposes an initial announcement-testimony of the salvific event of God in Christ and that first fundamental faith option which constitutes the process of conversion. In this context, the salesians, through catechesis and not only occasionally but organically and systematically, intend to guide the educational and pastoral communities to a more profound knowledge and a complete experience of the message of salvation. It will be pre-

<sup>34</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, 35, 21.

<sup>35</sup> LG 52-69.

<sup>36</sup> EN 44, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Cf, e.g., *General Catechetical Directory*, 1971.

<sup>38</sup> Cf National Directories.

<sup>39</sup> ASGC 274-341.

<sup>40</sup> Syn. 77, No. 18 (Conclusion).

sented as a joyful message to contemporary man, as a guiding light for his life, as a solution to his problems through the numerous mediations of christian wisdom.

Within this field of activity the salesians, following in the footsteps of Don Bosco who was vividly aware of the "needs of the times," will bear carefully in mind the situations of environments which have been either only slightly or not at all evangelized, even if already initiated to the sacramental life, and will give to catechesis that missionary dimension which goes back to the principles and bases of every true conversion. And they will, on the other hand, pay particular attention to all those forms which gradually lead to the promotion of a full christian maturity and increasingly greater commitments in the civil and church community.

## 1.2 The style and the spirit of the salesian educational and pastoral plan

### *The problem*

Like Don Bosco, the salesian sees his educational and evangelizing mission not only *among* and *for* youth and the working classes, but *with them* and *through* them. This attentive and kindly presence opens for us the world of young people and of the working classes and leads us to become one with it in all the legitimate aspects of its dynamic make-up.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore natural that the most profound requirements of evangelization and human development demand the entire preventive system, not only in its contents but also in its *style*. It should be understood in a broad and comprehensive manner, and not only with a pedagogic and technical outlook. In fact in the mind of Don Bosco and in the salesian tradition, the "preventive system" tends to identify itself increasingly more with the "salesian spirit": pedagogy, apostolate, spirituality which brings together in a single dynamic experience both educators (as individuals and community) and pupils, contents and methods, with clearly characterized attitudes and behaviors.<sup>42</sup>

96

<sup>41</sup> Const. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Cf Don Bosco's letter to Bishop G. Cagliero, Aug. 6, 1886; and to Fr. G. Costamagna, Aug. 10, 1886, Epist. IV, 327-329 und 332-336.

### 1.2.1 *The verification*

- 97 On this style therefore and on the close bond between it and the salesian educational mission, the GC21 calls for an evaluation. This is a condition of evangelizing authenticity and of real conformity to Don Bosco. To lose sight of this style would mean to lose a fundamental feature of our salesian identity; "Let the preventive system be our way of life"; "This must apply to the salesians among themselves, among the pupils and others, day students and boarders."<sup>43</sup>

Various provincial chapters and the Report of the Rector Major<sup>44</sup> invite us to this responsible reflection.

Some *positive signs*, which should be remembered, emerge from the evaluation.

We note a certain revival of salesian studies on the preventive system and of experiences which directly draw us to it.

In the varied and sometimes confusing succession of new ideologies and educational practices, we note, within as well as outside the salesian family, a considerable demand for salesian pedagogy, which finds fruitful application also within the family, the public schools, youth movements, and the various formative and pastoral institutions of the Church.

The interest of the salesians for the preventive system has translated itself not only into an increased number of meetings, conventions, "dialogs," of great ideal and practical usefulness,<sup>45</sup> but also into the birth of new youth movements and into a renewed and more incisive presence in the educational enrichment of free time, of education, of teaching, of catechesis, of the apostolate, with organizational and active undertakings at both the national and international levels.

- 98 Nevertheless the obscuring, if not the total loss (at least in some areas), of typical experiences of the preventive system, is also reported: animating presence-assistance, living together with the young people, family atmosphere and style. Less time is spent among boys and plain ordinary people, less preoccupation is felt for them. The profound meaning of active salesian assistance appears to be less deeply understood, partly because of a misconception of youth's independence and of non-directive guidance; less family

<sup>43</sup> Cf Letters quoted above, Epist. IV, 332 and 328.

<sup>44</sup> Sch Precap. 253-258; RRM 183-185, 196.

<sup>45</sup> RRM 185.

spirit is created, at the very time when youth groups and movements favor primary and interpersonal relations; fewer undertakings are being promoted to create the characteristic salesian educational environment. Thus, in many circles many activities are either devalued or completely neglected, because they are wrongly considered unrelated to the substance of the actual educational and evangelical commitment: e.g. recreative or expressive activities such as the theater, singing, music, etc. Add to this: a widespread ignorance of the historical and scientific meaning of the system; an unsuccessful adaptation to the variety of situations; an insufficient updating in the light of the most reliable contributions of mankind's modern sciences; a dogmatic compliance with educational and apostolic methods which are not compatible with the scope and features of salesian apostolic service.<sup>46</sup>

### 1.2.2 *The causes*

They may sometimes be remote as, for example, the experience of unilateral and mechanical practices of the preventive system which identify "preventive" with "negative-protective," "educational assistance" with "disciplinary supervision," "paternity" with "paternalism," "freedom" with "permissiveness," etc.

An explanation may also be found in the insufficient availability of documentation and specific literature in the vernacular. A more radical cause perhaps is the decline of salesian religious identity and vitality, which could not fail to involve the preventive system, if it is true that in it Don Bosco "condensed all the spirituality of apostolic action for his sons."<sup>47</sup>

### 1.2.3 *Frame of reference*

A specific point of reference is provided by arts. 25 and 40 of the Constitutions,<sup>48</sup> which are an echo of stimulating chapter guidelines.<sup>49</sup> But for a more precise evaluation of the situation and of the possibility of a full operational recovery, it seems appropriate to summarize the "qualifying" elements of the system.

From *all leaders* in the field of educational and pastoral activity, an

<sup>46</sup> RRM 184.

<sup>47</sup> RRM 183.

<sup>48</sup> Cf Const. 16 and Reg. 3.

<sup>49</sup> ASGC 349, 188 and 88-105; especially 360-365.

attitude of research, meeting, presence, understanding, and dialog is required;<sup>50</sup> commitment to an ongoing education in adults, and cordial readiness for development in the young.

**101** In *all* educators, whether individuals or communities, some dispositions and attitudes acquire fundamental importance:

- attention to the young as they really are, to their real needs, to their current interests and to the life tasks that await them; a liking for their world, the ability to welcome and to carry on a dialog with them;
- a respect and fair consideration for the values of the young and attention to the dynamic nature of their growth;
- the reasonableness of demands and rules, the creativity and flexibility of proposals;<sup>51</sup>
- the determination to elicit prompt compliance to values, not by a forced imposition but through ways of persuasion and love;
- the conviction, humanly and christianly encouraging, “that even in the most wretched youth, there is some point accessible to good; the first duty of the educator is to look for this good point, this sensitive chord and to profit from it”;<sup>52</sup>
- the frankness of an integral christian proposal, even if adapted to differences in age, in cultural and spiritual level, in ability to listen and to accept.

**102** The preventive system further requires *an intense and bright environment* of participation and of sincere friendly and brotherly relations; a family spirit of simplicity and frankness, in a climate of optimism and joy “as a reflection of the grace of God and of inner peace”;<sup>53</sup> a community means of human and christian growth, enlivened by the loving and sympathetic, animating and activating presence of the educators (“assistance”);<sup>54</sup> a wise pedagogy of free time. It therefore favors all the constructive forms of activity and of associative living (the sodalities in Don Bosco’s mind were supposed to be the “work of the boys”), and this also as a concrete initiation to the community, civil and ecclesial commitment.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> ASGC 360-365.

<sup>51</sup> ASGC 362.

<sup>52</sup> MB 5, 367.

<sup>53</sup> Paul VI to the GC21 (n. 474).

<sup>54</sup> ASGC 57, 363, 188; Const. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Const. 46; ASGC 94, 321, 368.

The apostolic commitment requires that the young become evangelizers of their own companions and friends. This enters here with complete spontaneity and compliance and constitutes one of the most successful insights of Don Bosco, a great inspirer of boy apostles and a genial inventor of religious sodalities. In associative living, boys find simultaneously an occasion to be leaders, a stimulus to creativity and inventiveness, and the ground for truly missionary action.

Finally the system will really act as "preventive"; we intend in fact to educate youth for the future, to anticipate the deeper needs of later years, through the gradual exercise and maturing of freedom. As far as possible, we want to be "present" among the youth even following the first period of formation.<sup>56</sup> For this purpose the educators "speak as loving fathers, serving as a guide at every occasion; they give advice and corrections with kindness,"<sup>57</sup> promoting the cooperation of the boys themselves, of the families and of all the available constructive forces.<sup>58</sup>

These characteristic notes of our pastoral pedagogical legacy, wisely administered and appropriately integrated in an explicit message, from an indispensable and highly fruitful moment in the process of bringing the young and the working classes closer to the ways of faith.

In this atmosphere the compliance with and communication of the faith occurs not only through word and teaching but also through the environment; through the actions, attitudes and moments that set the pace of existence. Not only the salesian who educates and teaches catechism is an educator and a catechist, but also the confere who shares his life with youth in moments of relaxation and entertainment as well as of prayer and liturgical celebration. The salesian evangelizes more by what he does than by what he says. He gives witness both by his openness and availability to God and by the example of his sound, balanced, successful humanity.<sup>59</sup> In this too the salesian is faithful to the style of Don Bosco in whom the human qualities, the gifts of nature and the efforts of the will blend harmoniously with the gifts of grace and the extraordinary charism of a special vocation.

<sup>56</sup> Op. sul Sist. Prev. in *Opere Edite* (Booklet on the Prev. Syst. in *Edited Works*), Vol. XXVIII, p. 428.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>58</sup> ASGC 321, 361-367.

<sup>59</sup> EN 30 ff.

### 1.2.4 *Lines of renewal*

- 103** A general and definite rebirth of the educational and pastoral style of Don Bosco is tied to a vast two-level commitment: practical-vital and theoretical-reflective.

Every salesian, be he a teacher or a leader of youth groups, conscious of the need of his presence in the group for educational purposes, will accept the sacrifices connected with the commitment of *active salesian assistance*.

This entails:

- paying particular attention to periodic personal contact with the individual boys so as to promote in each of them the need and the search for values;
- stimulating community cooperation among the boys at the more strictly religious moments of their encounters, in a way similar to what is done for the organization of the group's specific activity (teaching, sports, social activities, etc.);
- taking every care to promote within the group expressions of living faith: moments of prayer, readings and confrontation with the Word of God, preparation for liturgical and sacramental celebrations...

In educational and pastoral practice, all salesians will commit themselves to ensure that these elements of the preventive system which seem to have undergone a more noticeable decline will be urgently reactivated, with a watchful innovative sensitivity: presence-assistance, family atmosphere, education to faith and to the sense of prayer, the meaning of sacramental life, devotion to the sense of prayer, the meaning of sacramental life, devotion to the Blessed Mother, and love and loyalty to the Church and to the Pope.

In the individual local activities, based on the principle of the educative community, suitable undertakings should be initiated to stimulate and increase in their work the responsible cooperation of the educators, of the teachers, of the parents, of the youths, and of the technical and administrative staff: the council of the educative and pastoral community, conferences, meetings.<sup>60</sup>

- 104** Hence the need for each community to prepare and update every year an educational and pastoral program, especially of an evangelizing nature, with particular regard to the concrete exigencies that

<sup>60</sup> See Assembly of the Confreres in Reg. 168 and in ASGC 710.

have arisen from the social environment. This program should be prepared together with the boys, with the others for whom we work and with the members of the salesian family. The program should clearly indicate the plan for the year, the goal that is to be reached, the main points around which will be placed the intermediate objectives with the contents; it should also contain a concrete distribution of assignments and responsibilities among the salesians and lay collaborators. Thus we will avoid individualisms and improvisations and facilitate the lively participation of the entire community and the availability of all sectors for the work of evangelization.

In these plans, besides the essential contents, which have been summarily indicated in the frame of reference<sup>61</sup> there should also be some of the dimensions pointed out by many provincial chapters as particularly required by the "needs of the times": forming boys for a dynamic introduction into a pluralistic society; educating them to work for justice and peace;<sup>62</sup> forming them to assume civic, social and political responsibilities; initiation to a progressive commitment of concrete service;<sup>63</sup> imparting to them the information and know-how necessary to make a critical and constructive confrontation with respect to the more important contemporary ideologies.

### 1.3 Practical directives

a) *Every province* (or group of provinces) will draw up an educational plan suited to local conditions as a basis for programming and evaluating its various works in line with the basic options made by the Congregation: oratories, youth centers, day and boarding schools, residences for students and artisans, parishes, missions, etc.

To foster unity within decentralization, the Department for the Youth Apostolate, in the light of salesian experience and self-evaluation, will draw up the broad outlines of this master plan (objectives, content, method, characteristics...) with due regard to the diversity of geographical and cultural situations.

<sup>61</sup> See Nos. 87-94.

<sup>62</sup> Const. 19.

<sup>63</sup> ASGC 68; cf 54, 61.

b) The provincial, the provincial conferences and the regional Councillor, will promote meetings, study days or weeks, discussions, exchanges of educational and pastoral experiences, which will eventually be open also to teachers and educators who do not belong to the salesian family, for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of Don Bosco's preventive system, encouraging research into it, and furthering its updated implementations, taking carefully into account the conditions of youth and working-class people in the local environment, as well as the valid contributions of modern anthropological and pedagogical sciences.

c) In the spirit of *Perfectae Caritatis* (n. 2), and in the conviction that it is extremely important for our worldwide Congregation to constantly find its unity and authenticity in the spirit of our Founder and in our common striving to evangelize and promote the welfare of youth and working-class people, the GC21 makes the following DECISION:

The Superior Council will establish as soon as possible a *Salesian Historical Institute* which, by means of methods that are most effective, both ideally and technically, will make available to the salesian family, the Church and the world of culture and social action, the documents of the rich spiritual heritage bequeathed to us by Don Bosco and developed by his followers, and will promote at all levels a deeper understanding, elucidation and diffusion of that heritage. The whole Congregation will cooperate in implementing and continually strengthening this important initiative by providing personnel and available means.

## 2. VOCATIONAL FRUITFULNESS OF OUR PASTORAL ACTIVITY

In the salesian perspective all educational and pastoral activity contains as an essential objective a vocational dimension. As a matter of fact, the discovery of one's calling, the well-thought-out free choice of a program of life, constitutes the crowning goal of any process of human and christian growth.

106

The gospel message which unites God's people<sup>1</sup> is a calling to community; and for every believer to welcome the Good News is to accept a personal calling to take on the very mission of the Church according to one's particular vocation.<sup>2</sup>

The vocation apostolate will therefore be a ministry of evangelization with a special stress on the help and assistance to be given all the faithful to enable them to enter into God's plan with their entire being and personal free choice.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 The fundamental problem and its aspects

The progressive decrease in the whole Church of the number of priestly and religious vocations has awakened in the last decades an ever deeper reflection which has contributed to a better focusing on the true nature and importance of the problem.

107

In recent years the Salesian Congregation too has undergone the same crisis, and the findings of the provincial chapters bear witness to the fact that it cannot be considered as yet overcome. But for us too the self-study already begun by the SGC has shed a new light on the problem. We are indeed sadly aware of the scarcity of new recruits, which at times might cause concern for the future of our mission. But the light that comes to us from the reflection of the whole Church<sup>4</sup> helps us to see this scarcity and numerical crisis as one of the signs through which God makes us aware of the essentials, for only a Church totally given to service, mobilized in each of its members according to the gift and vocation which the Spirit has

<sup>1</sup> Cf EN 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf PO 6; EN 18; SGC 661-662.

<sup>3</sup> Cf Rdc 41, 43, 131.

<sup>4</sup> Cf RFIS; SDV; *Ministeria quaedam*.

given to everyone, is capable of a serious dedication to evangelization. The personal vocation of each christian is therefore a vital problem for the Church, the problem of formation in faith, the problem of making oneself totally available for Christ. God is calling today as yesterday, and he who has an open heart will know whether God calls him to share more fully in his mission.

Hence it is not primarily a problem of numerical scarcity, but rather a fundamental problem of evangelization itself which will endure, no matter what the numerical situation of religious and priestly vocations may be in the future.

## 2.2 The situation

108 To avoid a misguided appraisal of the state of the Congregation we must note that, over the past fifty years, there have never been so many studies, researches, workshops on the vocation apostolate as in these last years. *We must acknowledge likewise that there has been a growth of consciousness and dedication in this regard.*

Therefore we must not look unilaterally or too pessimistically at the actual situation of scarcity, so as not to attribute to a lack of theoretical principles or goodwill situations which are due to other factors as well.

It is evident from the Report of the Rector Major on the general state of the Congregation<sup>5</sup> and from the findings of the provincial chapters that the vocation apostolate has made considerable progress: a greater clarity of ideas, a more perceptive sensibility to the problem and a greater dedication in the provinces (if not in all the confreres) have been noted by almost all the provincial chapters.

Nevertheless some *weak points* undoubtedly remain and render our action at the present historic moment still insufficient:

- some signs of loss of direction as regards our salesian identity in the evangelization of youth;
- a missing or not so evident witness of evangelical life;
- lack of clarity vis-à-vis youth, in what concerns our mission (persons to be benefited by our apostolate, the salesian educational perspective, types of work, etc.);
- lack of pastoral skills which often renders us incapable of reaching out to youth in their personal differences (lack of a true

<sup>5</sup> Cf RRM 205 ff.

pedagogy, of vocational ministry, and of assimilation of guiding principles, insufficient organization at the provincial level, etc.); — absenteeism, weariness, discouragement, disappointment of many confreres who perhaps look too exclusively at the human side of the situation.

The situation of today's youth: immersed in a changing culture, confused and exploited by interested parties, facing a Church of which they are unable to understand many aspects, they are asking us for a fuller and updated dedication that can respond to their need for a direction in life, for truth and for Christ.

### 2.3 Frame of reference

Basing itself on the Second Vatican Council<sup>6</sup> and later documents of the Church,<sup>7</sup> the SGC gave us in its documents and in the Constitutions a framework of principles and directives within which the Congregation can find a renewed course of action in the vocational ministry.<sup>8</sup>

109

In one of his subsequent letters,<sup>9</sup> the Rector Major encouraged the Congregation to work more intensely along the lines traced out by the SGC. On the same line of thought, a paper from our Department for the Youth Apostolate—"Guide to the Care of Vocations"—helped spur on reflection in the provinces.

The GC21 wishes to offer now to the confreres some guidelines for renewal in this important aspect of our mission to youth, pointing out goals which it considers key points of fundamental value in facing the present situation. It will at the same time give directives for the attainment of these goals.

Fundamental goals are:

a) *To pledge the Congregation*, the provinces, the local communities and each confrere to carry out their evangelizing mission by endeavoring to bring out the personal calling, which God addresses to every youth, *to become a mediator of a gospel message* that will reach

110

<sup>6</sup> Cf especially OT 2; PO 6, 11; PC 4.

<sup>7</sup> Cf SDV, RC, RFIS.

<sup>8</sup> Cf ASGC 50, 99, 250, 374, 382, 397, 576, 661-665; 692; Const. 12, 22, 107; Reg 72, 73.

<sup>9</sup> Cf ASC No. 273.

all persons in their individuality<sup>10</sup> and help them “to develop their own baptismal vocation in a daily life progressively inspired by and attuned to the gospel.”<sup>11</sup>

b) To revitalize concretely (in our attitudes and apostolic initiatives) one of the components of our salesian vocation: to offer our active services to the Church in *cultivating the vocation of those young people* whom the Lord calls to a priestly or religious vocation, to the various ecclesial ministries and to a commitment as lay leaders.<sup>12</sup>

c) Since as a community and as individuals we are one of God’s gifts to his Church, we must be aware of our responsibility *to keep alive in the Church the salesian charism* in its many forms, actively cooperating with the Holy Spirit in fostering salesian vocations, whether religious or lay.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.4 Lines of renewal

111 As a basis for a concrete methodology to reach the objectives listed above, the GC21 believes we should introduce some options as guidelines for our endeavors to promote vocations:

1. To begin with those for whom our vocational guidance is intended.
2. To determine our fundamental pastoral choices.
3. To aim at a heightened vocation awareness without overlooking organizational needs.

### 2.4.1 *To begin with those for whom our vocational guidance is intended*

*All young people, whom the Lord in one way or another places in our path, are looking to us for help in forming their personality and life “according to the gospel.”*

We must help them *at every age* in their efforts to discover and develop their vocation: in boyhood, preadolescence, adolescence and beyond, because each of these stages of life has its own phase of growth and entails proportionate decisions which every young man must learn and carry out in a responsible manner.

<sup>10</sup> Cf EN 18.

<sup>11</sup> Const. 22; Cf ASGC 374; EN 24, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Cf Const. 12; MB XII, 87; ASGC 50, 374, 397; Const. (1966) 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cf Const. 107; ASGC 169.

In fidelity to our salesian vocation<sup>14</sup> it is imperative that we dedicate ourselves seriously, through activities and adequate structures, to follow up in their vocational development *all young people who show signs of a divine calling* to a life of consecration, either priestly or religious, and to a christian lay commitment.

- Following the present course of the Church, we must take practical steps to foster vocations to the various *ecclesial lay ministries*.<sup>15</sup>
- We will take special care of vocations to our Congregation and to the entire Salesian Family (Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco Volunteers, Cooperators, etc.).
- We must stress today the necessity of a special concern for the vocations of *brothers*. This effort will help us to understand better and express the true meaning of the *salesian* religious vocation.<sup>16</sup>
- *Missionary* vocations have a privileged position in the salesian vocation apostolate.

#### 2.4.2 To determine our fundamental pastoral choices

a) *To base our evangelizing, vocational endeavors on a deep prayer-conversion*<sup>17</sup> which makes it possible to rekindle the many spiritual resources that each community possesses as a gift of the Spirit. This should not be an occasional occurrence but the habitual attitude of an ecclesial community ever in search of the will of God and constantly purifying itself in order to be faithful to its calling, a living witness first and foremost to the words of the Lord: "Ask the harvest-master to send workers to his harvest."<sup>18</sup>

b) *To face the problem, beginning with the person of the salesian, his community life* and the evangelizing quality of his witness. The authenticity of our christian and salesian life is fundamental, and so is the image of a Congregation which presents a "clear" salesian identity (unambiguous in its evangelical motivations, in the persons for whom it is intended and in its educational outlook), truly sensitive to the needs and aspirations of youth, and expressing itself in

<sup>14</sup> Cf Const. 22; ASGC 50.

<sup>15</sup> Cf EN 73.

<sup>16</sup> Cf ASGC 692 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Cf ASGC 540; ASC No. 273, pp. 32-39.

<sup>18</sup> Lk. 10:2; Cf OT 2; SDV 12; RFIS 8, 9a.

joyful self-giving.<sup>19</sup> 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.

c) *To know and respect the spiritual nature of vocations.* The ministry offered to preadolescents, adolescents, young adults and adults in the formation of their christian identity ought to show the highest respect for the spiritual component of vocations (which we should know first of all from personal experience). It is God's calling, it is the action of the Holy Spirit which reveals itself throughout one's life, within the unique situations of one's personal and social history.<sup>20</sup>

113 d) *To commit ourselves in all pastoral activities, especially those on behalf of youth, to include vocational guidance "explicitly" and "systematically" as an essential dimension of all our apostolate.* In this regard, we should not remain simply on the level of abstract principles but should truly rethink the planning, programming and educational methodology of our schools, activities, groups... Let this be a privileged vantage point in our catechesis and spiritual direction.<sup>21</sup>

It is a crossroads that should be given all due prominence for a true renewal of our vocational ministry.

e) *To have the courage to expose young people also to the most challenging vocations.* To respect God's plan for each person entails 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 be open, in generous availability, to all vocations in the Church: lay commitment in the human situation, service in the various lay ministries of the Church, diaconal service, consecrated life, the ministerial priesthood.<sup>22</sup>

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 liberty. Don Bosco possessed the masterly art of highlighting the great needs of the Church, spreading enthusiasm for the missionary ideal and, as Jesus

<sup>19</sup> Cf PC 24.

<sup>20</sup> Cf PO 11; *Sedes Sapientiae* II-III; RFIS 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Cf ASGC 374, 382, 419 e-f.

<sup>22</sup> Cf RFIS 7.

did with the apostles, personally inviting young people to follow God's calling.

f) *To act with an open ecclesial perspective.* Every vocation is related to the mission of Christ and of the Church to build the Kingdom of God in the world of men through the ecclesial community. As salesians and as christians we work for the Church without any narrow-minded exclusivism: we aim at the general good of the Church. When dealing with vocations, this corresponds to one of our definitive goals.<sup>23</sup>

The ecclesial dimension recalls also another important pastoral guideline: "The duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole christian community."<sup>24</sup> We work within christian communities from which the Lord raises vocations for the various tasks needed for building the community itself. In these communities we must be "animators" and sensitize people to this problem. Parishes, families, educative communities, groups and movements must provide the environment where vocations can blossom. This particular aspect should be revitalized among all the members of the *salesian family* by involving them effectively in this apostolate.

#### 2.4.3 *To aim at a heightened vocation awareness without overlooking organizational needs*

In the provinces and in the local communities, a systematic *plan of sensitization* for the work of christian guidance of youth will be directed first of all to the confreres and component groups of the salesian family and the educative community, so that it will truly be a community activity.

114

This requires, on both the provincial and local level, *serious planning* (with appropriate follow-up) for a vocational guidance work clearly articulated with the general program so as to make each of our activities a true work of guidance.

In every province there must be someone *responsible for vocation promotion*. It could be either one person or a group of persons who, because of their salesian witness, preparation, and esteem among the confreres, are in a position to be "animators" of the provincial and local communities. More than persons "delegated to perform

<sup>23</sup> Cf Const. 12; Cf RFIS 7.

<sup>24</sup> OT 2; RFIS 8.

certain actions," they should be channels of communication with ecclesial bodies, supplying new ideas and information to the various communities. The team that will eventually be formed should include members from all the branches of the salesian family (salesian priests and brothers, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco Volunteers, cooperators).

An important function of those responsible for vocation promotion is that of helping the provincial community develop and maintain an attitude of prayer and availability.

Because of his position as community leader, *the rector is the first one responsible for vocation promotion on the local level*: in a climate of faith and prayer let him periodically make a thorough study of the vocation apostolate.

Let there be also one or more confreres who will keep the christian guidance dimension ever present in our activities and programming.

- 115 a) *Some permanent elements* that we must always and everywhere bear in mind in our work:
- The family spirit, an atmosphere of liberty, friendliness, joy and faith, so characteristic of Don Bosco's pedagogy, ideally embodied in a salesian community which is cordial and open, especially to the young (Cf *Salesian educational and pastoral plan*).
  - Personal rapport, whether primarily as a careful spiritual direction or at the general level of community living.<sup>25</sup> "No vocation can blossom without the kindly interest of a priest" (Paul VI).<sup>26</sup>
  - Vitalization of groups, the care of salesian youth movements and associations as indispensable situations for the experience of living together and for a vocational search.<sup>27</sup>
  - Spiritual formation, at the very center of the whole personal development, with special attention given to formation in personal prayer, liturgical and sacramental participation, Marian devotion.
  - The unmistakably christian-apostolic lived experience of ecclesial responsibility (catechists, animators); knowledge and concern for the problems and needs of the Church and the world, especially the world of youth.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Cf Const. 12.

<sup>26</sup> From Pope Paul's discourse to the World Congress for Vocations.

<sup>27</sup> Cf ASGC 692.

<sup>28</sup> Cf EN 72.

— The possibility of an experiential knowledge of the salesian charism and apostolate: on the level of lived experience, always and in all aspects of growth: on the more reflexive and systematic level, and at the more advanced stages of vocational development. Let formation “aids” be prepared for this purpose, making use of Don Bosco’s life, boys’ biographies written by him, lives of missionaries and outstanding salesians, etc.

b) *Some ‘moments’ of spiritual “concentration” necessary to keep alive the “vocational sense” in a person’s development.* 116

Our understanding support should be constant but diversified and in accordance with the interior experience of the young man’s vocational development. He passes from an initial phase of availability and search to one in which, after discarding many of life’s options, he concentrates on one of them and tries to test it.

On this “continuum” some moments of particular intensity are indispensable for serious reflection. The following stand out as more significant and useful:

- spiritual retreats focused on the search for the will of God in one’s life;
- prayer and reflection workshops, especially for an initiation to the liturgy and meditation;
- “program of life” encounters for specific help in examining the various options of the christian vocation;
- Camps for guidance (search, quest, etc.) in diverse forms;
- moments of sharing with the salesian community (to be fostered especially in the case of mature young men) in prayer, apostolic work, meals, etc.

c) *Some settings for our vocation apostolate.*

- Our works are the privileged environment for these guidance activities which represent a right for the youth directly confided to us in schools, oratories, parishes, youth centers, etc. For us they are therefore a duty and a commitment called for by our mission. 117
- Vocation promotion should take place also *outside our environments* as long as it is truly a work of educational guidance over and above the simple chance encounter. Vocations are expressions of the christian community which must be helped to recognize itself as the Church.

- 118 — For those young people in whom we have discovered the existence of greater sensitivity, availability and spiritual richness, a differentiated and specialized care is indispensable.<sup>29</sup>
- a) The methodological form of the “aspirantate” (which today is wisely divided into two phases, one of guidance and general search, the other more clearly centered on the hypothesis of a salesian vocation) is always valid and in certain situations even necessary. But it is imperative that this, more than any other school, be a true salesian environment in which Don Bosco’s educational inspiration be fully lived; that its educational objectives and goals be clear and periodically evaluated; that it can count on a personnel which gives to the young the witness of an authentic salesian life.<sup>30</sup>
- b) The timely care of these youths *can be undertaken also in other ways*: communities of vocational referral, vocation clubs, periodic local and regional meetings, letting the young men live in some of our communities, etc. The main thing is that the process of vocational growth, reflection and verification be truly assured and guided.<sup>31</sup>
- c) Today more than ever it is necessary to think, as Don Bosco did, of environments in which we can foster the vocation of *those who feel the call to the priesthood or religious life at a more advanced age* (workers, university students, graduates, etc.).<sup>32</sup>
- d) *The aspirantate and other forms are not mutually exclusive.* Let every province carefully consider which form or forms are best suited to its situation and then act accordingly. Let all be firm as to what is the responsibility of the provincial community, and should therefore not be left to the mercy of decisions made by single communities or individual persons.
- In all the above-mentioned environments, it is of capital importance *to involve the young men’s families*, in this work of christian orientation to life, and to collaborate closely with them in order to create an environment favorable to the development of vocations.
- A unique role as a place of vocational guidance must be played by our *retreat centers and houses of prayer*. Let them not be simply

<sup>29</sup> Cf OT 3; RFIS 11, 13; Const 12; Rég 73; SDV 14.

<sup>30</sup> Cf ASC No. 273, pp. 40 ff; 28-29; RFIS 12-17.

<sup>31</sup> Cf OT 3; RFIS 18; ASC No. 273, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> Cf Const (1966) 6; RFIS 19; ASGC 692 b.

places where we give hospitality to groups that come to pray; rather let them have if possible a team that works systematically to impart spiritual guidance.

### Practical directives

1. Let provinces prepare as soon as possible their detailed plan of action in close association with the local Church and in accordance with the respective guidance plan they have drawn up. An integral part of this plan should be to cultivate in the confreres an increased awareness of what they should do to foster vocations. Let this plan be forwarded to the Department for the Youth Apostolate, so as to ensure an exchange of experiences among all provinces.
2. On the level of provincial conferences or groups of provinces, let professional training be given, with appropriate aids, to confreres who have the responsibility of teaching religion. Their preparation should enable them to make the necessary vocational dimension dynamically meaningful in our catechesis.
3. During the next six years, let those provinces which have the necessary means plan some concrete initiatives of vocational service to the local Churches.<sup>33</sup>
4. To facilitate what is stated in Art. 72 of the Regulations and in (a) of these practical directives let the Department for the Youth Apostolate compile and send to the provinces an outline of what is required for drawing up a provincial plan of vocational apostolate.

119

<sup>33</sup> Cf Const 12.

## EVANGELIZATION: SETTINGS AND METHODS

### Introduction

120 The GC21 has reflected upon *Evangelization: witness and preaching* from the viewpoint of an on-going evaluation, concerning itself with what has been achieved and what still remains to be done in our effort to implement the SGC. This now brings us to concrete pastoral activity.

These constitute both the means and the areas of real life in which we are to carry out our evangelizing activity; they express this particular dimension of our salesian mission in its widely diversified ambients.

First we should recall the SGC's fresh approach to this subject:

It clearly demands that we focus our main attention upon persons<sup>1</sup> and upon a pastoral orientation in our task of education;<sup>2</sup> we are to view activities and structures as means of reaching those to whom we have been sent and of helping them assume the task of their own integrated development.

Timely still is the SGC's statement:

"But these activities do not in fact always serve their overall purpose sufficiently well... To remedy this we need to realize effectively that our every activity, in community or personal, is justified only if it is aimed, organized and carried out in view of the evangelization of the young."<sup>3</sup>

This GC21 therefore concentrates on *several settings* of our mission, not in order to repeat by rote the SGC's extensive teaching, but to seek solutions, to find an orientation, an added thrust towards renewal.

<sup>1</sup> Cf Const 26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Const 27.

<sup>3</sup> ASGC 344.

In those *settings which vary* in different regions of the world and which foster human development as well as evangelization, e.g. boarding institutions, hostels for students, workers, college men, the GC21 re-affirms the directives given by the SGC and asks those confreres who are involved in such areas, daily facing fresh and trying problems, to direct their educational and pastoral efforts towards an evangelization which will accord with Don Bosco's style as presented in this document.

## **1. THE ORATORY AND YOUTH CENTER: settings for evangelization**

As the Congregation's "first and typical work" the Oratory has come under repeated scrutiny and time and again has been proposed by General Chapters<sup>1</sup> and other authoritative documents of the Congregation. The 19th and 20th General Chapters have specifically reflected upon those factors, internal and external, which today affect the pastoral efficacy of the Oratory; they have encouraged salesians to re-emphasize a renewal of existing oratories and the creation of new ones, even if other kinds of work must be left aside. **121**

After evaluating the evangelizing efficacy of the Oratory and Youth Center from statistics compiled over the past six years, the GC21 would like to offer some directives towards finding methods better suited to their function of evangelizing and advancing young people's growth in faith.

### **1.1 Reality, terminology, pastoral planning**

Like every other life activity, the Oratory changes and adapts itself, taking on new forms. **122**

As evidenced by a quick glance at the pastoral realities of the Congregation, the terms "Oratory" and "Youth Center" have different meanings in different regions, meanings which arise from one and the same educational viewpoint and spirit but vary as regards the persons they reach, their immediate objectives, and the methods they use.

Both terms are vaguely defined in official texts,<sup>2</sup> so that ambiguities

<sup>1</sup> ASGC 192-272; 376-379 and references there indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Const 28; Reg 5, 7, 24.

arise, with the danger that when we speak of so varied and flexible a pastoral work, words written or spoken take on opposing meanings, expressive as they are of personal experience rather than objective criteria.

Not everything said of the Youth Center is applicable to the Oratory either in matters of membership, group rapport or educational methods. Salesian action in this field has so many names. The so-called Oratory or Youth Center cannot be implemented in the same way everywhere.

To bring some kind of clarity and make dialog and exchange of ideas feasible, we will use the following terminology:

- by *Oratory* we mean a setting created for boys, with membership open to all having its own objectives and suitable means;
- *Youth Center* is a setting meant for young men, to meet their needs; the emphasis is on group-relations; personal contacts are fostered; our task, both human and christian, embraces other activities, such as athletics and games;
- *Oratory-Youth Center* is a complex setting adapted to both boys and young men, in which methods and directions vary with the age of the persons concerned.

## 1.2 The present situation

- 123 The SGC has indicated the following objective for Oratories and Youth Centers: they are to aim at evangelizing and catechizing boys and young men of a particular locality, mainly through an open-ended organization of their leisure time.<sup>2\*</sup>

This objective demands adequate and trained personnel as well as an ordering of activities which will safeguard the objective itself. Doubtless this calls for continuous adjustment and adaptation. The past six years' evaluation cautions us that whenever salesians have not kept in touch with young people, they have not initiated changes to meet their requests and interests, and so they have failed to show an effective presence.

Wherever we have lessened our efforts to help young people strive for christian ideals, those efforts have had to yield to a firm takeover, brought on by real-life situations, by programs made up entirely of sports, games, and social activities, with no clear christian orientation.

<sup>2\*</sup> Cf ASGC 376.

These limitations arise neither solely nor mainly from personnel assignments. Our approach to youth has been complicated today by a broadening variety of appeals to their leisure time which scatter their attention into varied activities and circles. Probably we too at a time when our personnel has shrunk, have not taken a firm pastoral stand in choosing personnel for this work so particularly salesian. And matters have not been helped by the crisis of catholic organizations<sup>3</sup> and by the lack of an effective plan of action in many provinces.<sup>4</sup>

But regardless of these drawbacks, wherever Oratories and Youth Centers have strengthened or recovered their integrity, wherever they have devised means to reach the so-called "masses" or large numbers, groups and individuals, with formative programs for young people; wherever they have honestly presented the gospel message with plans of education in the faith involving prayer and an intense sacramental life—in all these instances the distinguishing marks of salesian pastoral work have stood out with extraordinary clarity, and the gospel has then become a vivid presence.

### 1.3 Setting, program, style

The basic traits which identify these pastoral works and bind them tightly to Don Bosco's original intuitions are: personal rapport of "friend" between salesian and youngster and the brotherly "presence" of the educator among the boys: the creating of an environment to facilitate such a meeting; varied activities to fill leisure time; a missionary "open-door" attitude to all lads who want to come in; a welcome for everyone, but with a proper attention to individuals and groups; a gradual education of the youth community for festal celebration; a striving for firm group-life and unity—all these elements are meant to concur in forming a wholesome human and christian personality.

Some of these traits, such as the open-door policy for everyone, or varied sport activities and trips, require that the educator be alert lest they become the dominant features, with consequent harm to the young people themselves.

<sup>3</sup> RRM 203.

<sup>4</sup> RRM 201.

## 1.4 The presence of girls

- 125 Our evaluation has shown a notable presence of girls in our Oratories and Youth Centers in some regions of the world.<sup>5</sup> This presence is doubtless rooted in accepted cultures and social customs, and this must be kept in mind.

In occasional instances we have noted shaky educational principles, meagre grasp of the local church's pastoral program and lack of dialog with pastoral workers or religious institutions which have educational traditions of their own, and work in the same areas.

The concept of a *mixed Oratory* is not contemplated by the texts and norms of the SGC,<sup>6</sup> both because of the age of those who come to the Oratory and because an open-door policy would admit groups for which indiscriminate mixing of the sexes would be unacceptable, and which would normally require separation and diversified activities.

In regard to *Youth Centers* we cite the Regulations<sup>7</sup> and the SGC;<sup>8</sup> social exigencies and the need for an integrated education suggest that "in some places and circumstances we should take on mixed groups and activities, with all the reserve and responsibility they entail."<sup>9</sup> "This will be a reply to an educational need which requires us to accept the complete young person, immersed in his own world, and raise him up in every respect."<sup>10</sup> Specifically, "the activities of truly educative mixed groups must tend to develop formative and social interests."<sup>11</sup> "Provision must be made for the training and maturing of the confreres, the collaboration of qualified lay people, and for premises suitable for this kind of activity."<sup>12</sup>

These directives maintain all their force.<sup>13</sup> In particular cases, it is at present required that the matter be brought up to the community and to the local Church and that it be in accord with provincial directives.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics of the Works of the Congn. Rome 1977, p. 54; cf also RRM 171b, 172b, 197.

<sup>6</sup> Cf ASGC 51d; Reg 7.

<sup>7</sup> Reg 7.

<sup>8</sup> Cf ASGC 51, 355, 356, 378.

<sup>9</sup> ASGC 355.

<sup>10</sup> ASGC 355.

<sup>11</sup> ASGC 355.

<sup>12</sup> ASGC 355.

<sup>13</sup> Cf also the indication given to the GC21 in the letter of Cardinal Villot (n. 000).

<sup>14</sup> ASGC 356.

## 1.5 Guidelines

1.5.1 Reaffirmation of the validity of the Oratory and the Youth Center demands corresponding decisions to ensure needed personnel, trained and *united* with the *community*, receiving from it support, wholesome environment, and required means. The community should guarantee a measure of stability so that the confrere in charge may elicit from both youngsters and adults a response to pastoral concern in a diversity of roles. This will obviate those endless "emergency operations" which mean repeated fresh starts in programs of education and catechesis. Most of all, we recognize the need of salesian animators who can present our young people with a real challenge. The risk we run is that our Oratories and Youth Centers, which were begun to promote evangelization, will fail to open new christian horizons to our young people for lack of deeply religious incentives.

1.5.2 We foresee the need on a provincial level of programming and regularly evaluating the Oratory's and the Youth Center's work, especially in educational projects, in organized religious activities, and in adherence to the policies of the local Church.

1.5.3 If the Youth Center is to be valid, as a *setting* for promoting the overall christian growth of the *young*, it must be organized along certain well defined lines, such as:

- division into groups, with an eye to the possibilities for formation and apostolic action, in which an explicit education in the faith can be developed;
- the formation of an educative community with the active and responsible participation of the young people, lay collaborators (especially parents) and salesians as animators;
- a proper organization of different activities so as to meet the need for spontaneity, and the demands of creativity and leisure time, so that the young people, inspired by christian ideals, may be able to take up apostolic and social work in the Center itself and in the neighborhood;
- an earnest effort in a missionary spirit so to arrange matters as to make effective contact with all the young people, especially those who tend to remain at a distance.

1.5.4 But the prime mover in all these matters is the salesian himself. The salesian in the Oratory and Youth Center is the good shepherd, the evangelizer of youth; he belongs not to himself but to them; he stays with them willingly and is the sign of God's love in their midst.

## 1.6 Practical directives

- 127 a) Every community should maintain its involvement with both the neighborhood and the local Church, preserving, strengthening, and fostering even new types of Oratories and Youth Centers as a typically salesian way of promoting human and evangelical values. Salesian parishes ought to see the Oratory and Youth Center as a distinctive element of their very own and fully incorporate them in their apostolate.
- b) Each Oratory and Youth Center should study and draw up its own plan of education, eliciting the interest of all concerned and beginning with a good, hard look at the local scene. This plan should be in harmony with the overall scheme of the province.
- c) Youth Centers must heed the norms of the SGC and confirmed by the present GC21 regarding coeducational groups and activities. Those who are in charge, as well as the community itself, must follow up on these activities and evaluate the results; the provincial council should give further directives if they are needed.

## 2. THE SCHOOL: a setting for evangelization

- 128 By evangelization in and through the school we mean not merely courses in certain scholastic and catechetical matters but in addition an in-depth study of ecclesial and cultural problems, such as the relation of evangelization to culture, culture to society, society to the school. Furthermore, for us salesians it means a renewed look into those traits which distinctly mark our presence on the school scene. The GC21 does not intend to analyze or probe the above problems at great depth but to ponder them a little so as to reach some practical proposals and recommendations. An enlightened response to these problems can help us to decide how we can meet them at a practical level.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf CS 2, 12-15, 24-31.

## 2.1 The situation

During these past six years, as some of our schools have gone into experimental programs, we have seen a noteworthy effort to direct pastoral action towards the distinctive features of each school and of modern youth. Numerous salesians have been involved in this renewal; in many educative communities there have been concerted and positive efforts to bring parents, lay teachers, and students into closer collaboration. The salesian school is seen as a valid response in education, sought by many families; in not a few places the school has become a center of social development, unifying entire neighborhoods to reach common goals.

On the other hand, schools now feel new pressures; ever more complex structures, reliance on systems which sometimes preclude evangelical values, decreasing salesian personnel willing to work in schools, salesians being shunted into posts of planning administration, and organizing; increasing enrollments, demands for co-educational schools, growing numbers of lay teachers who have little notion of the preventive system; strained relations between culture and evangelization, problems created by new attitudes and pluralism. All these factors have caused confreres to think again about schools, and in not a few cases they remain confused.

Some feel that the school gives salesians little scope for evangelization, either because many social structures, dominated by unfavorable civil laws, bar them from serving poor boys who are their priority, or because the salesian pastoral image, especially that of the priest, is marred by the disciplinarian and classroom image, or because a certain proportion of our students seem impervious to any gospel message or values.

## 2.2 The Congregation reasserts the validity of its school-presence

The GC21 realizes that the root of these problems is to be found in the rapid and profound changes which have affected modern society and that this requires of those working in this field a new approach in order to make of the school an agent of change in society. We also realize we cannot give too detailed directives, since the school scene varies so much in its pastoral dimension from one culture to another,<sup>2</sup> and equally varied are the possibilities of evangelization.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 2.

However, in the face of this complex situation the GC21, basing itself on salesian traditions confirmed by the SGC and of the recent declaration of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, sees the school as a valid and unrestricted apostolate.

It will be well to correct some misconceptions which have arisen in various circles, even in the local Churches; the Catholic school is not something ancillary, to be shut down once an alternative is found.<sup>3</sup> The Catholic school "is a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man."<sup>4</sup> It gives a very definite view of the world, of man, and of history; in evangelization it has a distinct efficacy not found in other methods. Its aim is to assimilate culture into a christian vision of reality in an orderly and critical manner.<sup>5</sup> It is a factor in the transformation of society, a force in the total liberation of the person. "Complete education necessarily includes a religious dimension. Religion is an effective contribution to the development of other aspects of a personality in the measure in which it is integrated into general education."<sup>6</sup>

The school offers countless opportunities to meet young people and establish a personal rapport with them; it makes for a community whose cultural traits are enlightened and permeated by faith-values. Our pastoral efforts extend to parents and lay co-workers, thus particularizing the gospel message in a single program of personal development. It asserts the right to alternative education in a society whose cultural leaders and whose monolithic school system preclude this right of parents in the education of their children.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the GC21 urges confreres who serve youth in schools, boarding institutions, and hostels to continue perseveringly in their work.

This message is meant also for those confreres who, in accordance with a properly received mission, are now engaged in education and evangelization in non-salesian school environments.

### **2.3 Specific salesian presence in the school**

#### **131 Don Bosco's pastoral style and his system of education have im-**

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 38-43.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 8.

printed definite features upon the schools he founded and those which the Congregation subsequently has offered to youth. These features depend primarily on the type of student and are marked by a teacher-pupil rapport intended to foster closeness and trust, by a climate of calm creativity, by an openness to its neighborhood which promotes unity, and especially by its objectives in which the christian ideal of holiness is inseparably linked with human and social development in both student and community. Throughout the history of the Congregation, these characteristics have produced very different kinds of schools and made them valuable: schools with courses in the humanities and technologies, agricultural schools, adult evening classes, remedial classes, etc.

Regardless of shifting social and scholastic situations, this educational style must continue to form Don Bosco's presence among youth. Therefore the salesian school of today must maintain certain permanent characteristics.

2.3.1 It caters to the *common people*: this as regards students, locality, persons it deals with, its tone and style, its special concerns, its loving care for those who have nowhere else to go.

2.3.2 It fosters *freedom and openness*. The salesian school was born free and keeps itself free even when asking help of others. It asserts the rights of family and Church, especially if these rights have been curtailed or trodden underfoot. It welcomes those who choose to go the way of total liberation; it teaches universal principles of freedom; it is an efficacious agent in the transformation of the local environment.

2.3.3 The *education project is centered on the student*. The salesian school takes a student as he is and where he is educationally. It fosters his growth. In varied professional ways it gets to know his needs for physical development; it helps him face his problems and take responsibility for the decisions he makes. It does not restrict itself to the classroom, but combines study with training in art, sports, cultural, religious, and social activities.

2.3.4 *It aims at creating a youth community*. It strives to form a "family," as Don Bosco expressed it, in order to foster and strengthen personal relationships, esprit-de-corps, and friendship. It favors creativity, an atmosphere of study, joy, and trust. Parents and teachers share in this family too. In it students can *group together* for goals which are formative and helpful.

The salesian school becomes a setting of evangelization in the measure in which it succeeds in maintaining these standards.

2.3.5 *Teachers are to be found with their students*, in whose interests they take active part. They not only teach but "assist," i.e. they recreate, work, study, and pray with their students. They are glad to stay with young people and are able to share their problems. "Teachers in the classrooms, brothers in the playground." (Don Bosco)

2.3.6 *Connection with the world of work*, because the school teaches pupils a spiritual dimension of work, and maintains a cordial bond with the working classes. In many places it teaches the illiterate, provides evening classes for working people, offers professional training, and prepares young apprentices to enter the labor market with qualified skills.

2.3.7 *It possesses and teaches gospel values*: personal growth is fostered with real respect; religion has its proper role, and a youngster can approach God with joy; he can come to know and love Jesus Christ, and advance along the path of faith to holiness.

2.3.8 *It is vocation-conscious*. It assists each student to grow in God's plan. It helps him mature in his vocation as layman, religious, or priest, according as God sows the seed of a vocation in young hearts.

The salesian school becomes a setting for evangelization to the extent in which it succeeds in realizing these characteristics.

## 2.4 Lines of action

132 The SGC<sup>8</sup> has pointed out some criteria and directives that are still valid, and which the present Chapter endorses. The wealth of experience of these past six years and the evaluation of the present school scene suggest the following lines of action which the provinces and the individual schools are invited to adopt and follow:

- Form an *educative community*, with salesians as animators and with lay collaborators, parents, and students as members. How it will function, at what level, and to what degree will depend on the individual situation. It belongs to the salesians to guide the process, so that the community may be evangelized itself and also bring its gospel values to others.
- Draw up a mutually agreed in-service program in christian formation for lay teachers and other collaborators in each school.

<sup>8</sup> Cf ASGC 381-385.

- Expand and activate, with the entire educative community, a program of education which stems from the gospel and the teachings of Don Bosco.
- Put into effect the personal relationships characteristic of the preventive system. Helpful aids are: pedagogical guidance, informal teacher get-togethers, individual instruction, group activities, etc.
- Draw up a plan of education explicitly faith-oriented, abounding in ideas, to be offered to the students in a climate of freedom and wholesome pedagogy: catechesis, youth liturgies, sacramental encounters, prayer groups and action groups, spiritual retreats, exposure to apostolic initiative.
- As educators, salesian or lay, take an active share in educational movements now at work in every society for other projects in education; join forces with those who peacefully strive for free and equal schooling for all before the law.
- Insert our schools into the local Church's pastoral action by following its directives, uniting with groups involved in school pastoral work, and by supporting organizations which campaign for freedom in education.
- In our schools give clear preference to needy youth, and make honest efforts to relocate ourselves in areas of special poverty.

## 2.5 Implementation

The above indications will be meaningful only if the salesians at both local and provincial level are clear about the objectives of this pastoral action and frequently review them, always with the concrete goal of christian education in view.

133

### 2.5.1 *On the local level* we must begin with essentials:

- The salesian staff must reserve for itself those key positions in school administration and departments which will allow them to instil a christian spirit into the educative community.
- More study must be centered on the role of Rector, Principal, and those in charge of pastoral work in the school, so as to define them within the provincial structure and thus facilitate changes from one school to another.
- Every school should draw up handbooks for teachers, parents, and students, containing policies which are to be followed; such handbooks simplify the making of periodic evaluations.

- Every school community should annually draw up a calendar of events and meetings, designed to overcome purely bureaucratic organization and create a “community environment permeated by the gospel spirit of freedom and love.”

2.5.2 *On the provincial level* goals should be set, even though they may be of a long range kind:

- Prepare personnel for the school apostolate. This is specialized work which demands competence and talents that can be developed only by lengthy training in education and pastoral skills.
- Coordinate at the level of the whole province our lay collaborators and the parents of our students to make them aware of their coresponsibility in education. Each school should have a salesian charged with promoting the christian formation of parents. The one in charge of schools at provincial level has also the task of promoting parent organizations. Wherever such a provincial organization has been set up it has strengthened the sense of belonging, opened the way to a professional christian formation, and clarified the specific character of the salesian school in the eyes of the laity.
- The section of the provincial office concerned with schools should help the latter to draw up their educational plans and should study pastoral programs for the in-service formation of lay teachers.
- The GC21 calls the attention of provincial councils to Regulation 12 and requests them not to consent to the opening of our schools to girls without serious reasons. These reasons are to be sent to the Superior Council.

## 2.6 Practical directives

- 134
- a) Each province or provincial conference should make the Holy See's declaration on the Catholic School and the documents of the local Church the subject of study and reflection.
  - b) With the cooperation and the proposals of each community, the province should develop a basic plan of salesian education to which each school of the province can conform. Thus while each school maintains and develops its own identity, unity will be promoted amongst them.
  - c) The Department for the Youth Apostolate, by means of a program of study and meetings, should make known the Congregation's best experiences in the scholastic field so as to promote apostolic initiatives amongst the salesians.

### 3. THE PARISH: Particular aspects of the salesian evangelizing presence

"In the spirit of our Founder's apostolic charity,"<sup>1</sup> salesians bring the gospel to youth also through the work of the parish, seen as a setting and a way of evangelization; within the categories of our "action and work,"<sup>2</sup> it has a specific place of its own, delineated at length in the SGC's 5th Document and synthetically expressed in art. 31 of the Constitutions.

Repeated reference to this document of the SGC is indispensable; it still retains all its force.

There are two main problems in this field: that of the number of parishes which our confreres administer, and their salesian quality.

#### 3.1 The problem of the number of our parishes

The first problem is the numerical growth of our parishes.<sup>3</sup> The Chapter has studied the statistics in making its evaluation of the situation and to draw up necessary guidelines for the future.

135

Salesians are called to work in widely varying situations:

In *mission areas* the parish is the end-point of our work because even

<sup>1</sup> Const 31.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Chap IV Const.

<sup>3</sup> The following figures are taken from the records of the CENTRAL OFFICE FOR PARISHES, at the Generalate:

At the death of Don Bosco (1888) there were 7 parishes; during Don Rua's period of office (1888-1910) 31 were added; during Don Albera's period (1910-1922) they increased by 33; during that of Don Rinaldi (1922-1931) they went up by 54; in the period 1932-38 (GC15) the increase was 40; from GC15 to GC16 (1947), an increase of 99; by the GC17 (1952) a further rise of 100; by the GC18 (1958) a further rise of 75; by the GC19 (1965) they had gone up by 152; by the SGC (1971) by another 150; and from the SGC to the GC21 there was a further rise of 141.

The total now reaches 882.

To these some other figures have to be added, e.g. the missionary parishes (65), the number of parishes of uncertain status (41), the parishes administered by individual salesians not in the name of the Congregation (87), or administered temporarily (18). Poland alone has 125 parishes; another 136 are in Central Europe: the reasons are obviously connected with the socio-political situation.

A final observation from the Central Office for Parishes: "It should be remembered that the concept of 'parish' is not the same everywhere." Examples are given of differences between Europe, India, and missionary territories in general. This may explain the apparently excessive number of salesian parishes.

if the Congregation expresses its presence by specialized works for youth (Oratories, trade schools), it is clear that the ultimate aim, as expressed also in our Constitutions, is "to plant the Church among the people."

We may at times find ourselves in *countries wholly destitute of clergy*, where christianity has so deteriorated that to involve salesians, especially priests, with a limited group, such as the young, would make no sense unless they concerned themselves with the christian life of the people and their environment by taking over their missionary and pastoral care. Such places are in a certain sense mission territory.<sup>3\*</sup>

*In some countries*, because of particular concrete circumstances beyond our control, the only pastoral action open to us is the parish. This situation must be viewed realistically because through the parish we can try to bring to life our other salesian works, making the parish a center of service to the people of the area, and using the entire salesian community to animate it.

*In those regions which are pastorally well organized and thriving* we can set up an Oratory-Youth Center only by accepting a parish.

We look upon the parish with interest because it helps us to reach young people in their natural environment, and to follow them through all the phases of their development; it is easier to involve parents and adults in the education of the young; it facilitates a natural participation in the local Church and the neighborhood; and it makes for a more direct pastoral contact than is possible in any other apostolate.

- 136** The SGC, recognizing the situation as an accepted fact, and going deeper into the concept of the salesian commitment in the parish, ruled out the exceptional element of the parish apostolate, but at the same time it underscored the priority which is to be observed in every new project and in every province: "Top priority is to be given to the apostolate immediately directed towards youth."<sup>4</sup>

So clear a practical directive of the SGC cannot be ignored.

Today the GC21 asks further questions. It addresses itself to confreres who labor in the parish apostolate<sup>5</sup> and seek clarification of the

<sup>3\*</sup> Cf CD 35.

<sup>4</sup> ASGC 402.

<sup>5</sup> Confreres engaged full-time in parish work in 1977 were 2199, and part-time about 1400. It is difficult to define what exactly is meant by "part-time". Cf Sarti, *Statistical Data*, pp. 73-74.

salesian authenticity of their pastoral efforts. It considers the demands at present posed by local Churches and circumstances, and those which will be posed in the near future.

Before taking on new obligations in the area of parishes, the criteria of acceptance which provincial communities must adhere to must be determined. These criteria require expression as "characteristics" which a parish must realistically guarantee.

### 3.2 The salesian dimension of the parish

In its evaluation, the GC21, responding to the query of several provincial chapters and confreres and keeping the Rector Major's report<sup>6</sup> in mind, intends to clarify the meaning of "*acting in a salesian style*" in the parish apostolate. It addresses itself therefore to that complex of decisions and attitudes which form the sign of the authentic "salesian" presence and make up the typical salesian image, what we know as the salesian identity.

137

The SGC had indicated one line of clarification: we live the parish ministry "as a true salesian apostolate in the measure in which we are faithful to our mission and actualize our Founder's charism in serving youth and the poor classes."<sup>7</sup>

The GC21 cites some characteristics of this spirit:

3.2.1 The *responsible agent of the salesian parish*, that which gives it life, is *the religious community*. The apostolic goal is to be realized together. The entire salesian community is the sign and bearer of our mission: "Our mission is entrusted in the first place to the community."<sup>8</sup>

138

"The chief characteristic of a salesian parish is that it be administered by a religious community which wants to live its specific mission in the Church. We are characterized by what we are."<sup>9</sup>

This calls for a religious life which, with its rhythm of prayer,<sup>10</sup> its

<sup>6</sup> RRM 171, 214-219.

<sup>7</sup> ASGC 400.

<sup>8</sup> Const 34.

<sup>9</sup> ASGC 406.

<sup>10</sup> In the first Regulations for the parishes contained in the deliberations of the GC3 and GC4 and presented by Don Bosco in 1887, one reads for example: "Let the parish priest be solicitous in fixing a suitable time for the daily meditation and spiritual reading, and be sure that he is present regularly with his assistants. If possible let it be done in church so that the parishioners may be edified" (Don Bosco, Opere Edite XXXVI, p. 259).

brotherly communion, its shared responsibility of pastoral work, is truly a "sign and witness, in the district in which they work, of the spiritual values based on the evangelical counsels"<sup>11</sup> and the spirit of the Beatitudes.

This community spirit gives rise to a vision of a unified and co-responsible service of evangelization; it produces that salesian style of apostolic work and pastoral rapport which leads to the building up of the parish into a community, a "family of God."<sup>12</sup> From this spirit flows the parish community's program of action, its choice of ways and means to respond best to local needs. Every salesian thus feels he is part of a witness which is both his own and his community's.

- 139 3.2.2 *The salesian parish exercises its priority of choice for boys and young men, especially the most needy.* Keeping in view the complete community, adults and young people who depend upon each other for human and christian growth, it is a question of granting privileged status within the salesian mission especially as regards those to whom we have been sent and the service we are to render.

a) In connection with those for whom we work, the SGC's practical directives concerning the orientation of our mission apply also to our parish apostolate: "This absolute priority of youth work will mean on the one hand that our activity on behalf of youth will take up the greater part of our time, efforts and personnel; and on the other, that even in our work for adults, according to their needs, we shall still maintain our primary preoccupation for the young."<sup>13</sup>

This means that the salesian *concerns himself primarily with boys and especially the most needy*, and through them he reaches the parents.

Furthermore, he brings boys into various parish activities, so that they may be an inducement to adults to play a courageous and responsible part in the work of the parish community, with the same preference for the young and poor.

b) The salesian parish builds up parish community with special emphasis on youth. The local Church has of course unifying pastoral dimensions which the parish accepts, but the salesian charism values the youth dimension as an element of renewal, growth, and vitality for the whole parish community.

<sup>11</sup> ASGC 407.

<sup>12</sup> Cf ASGC 417-518.

<sup>13</sup> ASGC 180.

Within the centralized pastoral effort of the diocese with which we must always be in harmony and which we must support<sup>14</sup> we offer our specialized skills and humble witness by inserting the young into the life of the local Church and thus broadening the scope of their activities.

This document of the GC21 has already reflected more particularly on the Oratory-Youth Center and deepened a characteristic concept of salesian action in the parish.<sup>15</sup>

Here we re-affirm that the Oratory Youth Ministry is for us salesians "a necessary and irreplaceable element" of our presence in the parish<sup>16</sup> and that "special concern for the care of youth and the teaching of christian doctrine are our first concerns."<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2.3 *The salesian parish evangelizes in the spirit and style of our educational and pastoral project.* 140

At its beginning our Congregation was "a simple catechism lesson." Preaching the gospel and catechizing are fundamental to our mission.<sup>18</sup> Such a pastoral commitment obliges us to overcome past habits and fatigue; it keeps us in an attitude of openness, not restricted to the care of the élite but reaching to all.

Under this aspect, the salesian parish:

a) *implements a systematic catechesis*, beginning with that of baptism, which introduces families to the christian education of their children, and provides an opportunity to reach adults and bring its influence to bear on both family and parish. It involves not only parents but shares its responsibility with the laity. As it prepares the faithful for the sacraments it aims at creating an atmosphere in which faith can grow and so helps the entire community to mature through devout and serene attention to the word of God, through community feastdays and through common prayer marked by joy and simplicity. It links everything with the phases of the liturgical year, with constant reference and application to the youth of the parish at every stage of their growth.

b) *does not separate evangelization from human development.*

<sup>14</sup> ASGC 416.

<sup>15</sup> Cf ASGC 432.

<sup>16</sup> AGC19 130.

<sup>17</sup> Reg 24.

<sup>18</sup> Const 20.

Along the lines traced by Don Bosco it reaches out to all to serve all<sup>19</sup> in union and sympathy<sup>20</sup> living out its evangelization and promotion of human values in a single movement of love.

The unique mission to which we have been called tends realistically "to blend the heavenly with the earthly city," and requires us as salesians "to communicate divine life while we render mankind's family and its history more human."<sup>21</sup>

c) *promotes the development of individual vocations*, assessing the gifts of individuals and directing them for the benefit of the whole Church. In so doing the salesian community acts out one characteristic of Don Bosco's life: the way he relied on people's individual talents for help and his confidence in their personal gifts and charisms. The community in fact fully accepts conciliar teaching on the laity's role in the Church's mission, as it entrusts them with various ministries.

"Within the inner Church community, the laity's action is so necessary that the Bishop's own apostolate cannot be fully achieved without it."<sup>22</sup> This attitude is most helpful for the growth of the salesian family and of new groups of salesian cooperators. Don Bosco wrote: "It shall be one of the concerns of the parish priest to favor Catholic associations, especially that of the salesian cooperators."<sup>23</sup>

Such clear insistence certainly does help the spiritual gifts of each one's vocation to blossom. Young people can more easily develop their choice of a life which is apostolic, religious, and priestly.<sup>24</sup>

**141** 3.2.4 The *salesian parish is for the common people*. The reasons are:

- its location: preferably in populous urban areas;
- its style of operation: its closeness to people, its care not to become a ghetto community, closed to all but a few; its stress on liturgy and feasts in which parishioners can feel at home with naturalness and simplicity; its sensitive regard for popular devotions which it respectfully directs with the teaching of the gospel;<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf Const 7.

<sup>20</sup> Cf Const 16.

<sup>21</sup> ASGC 60, which quotes GC 40.

<sup>22</sup> AA 10.

<sup>23</sup> Don Bosco, Op Ed. XXVI, p. 263.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Const 12 and Part 3B (Vocational Fruitfulness) (000).

<sup>25</sup> Cf EN 48.

- its openness to its neighborhood: with partiality to none, it shares the ordinary people's concerns, their joys and sorrow, their disappointments and hopes.

### Conclusion

We suggest a re-reading of the Acts of the Third and Fourth General Chapters, presented by Don Bosco himself in 1887: "The sick, the young, the children are to be the parish priest's special concern. The best loved parish priest is the one whom children and the poor can approach."<sup>26</sup> And he goes on: "To preserve the Congregation's spirit, the salesian parish priest will not fail to be an apostle among the people entrusted to his care by God, by sanctifying himself he will gain many souls for Heaven."<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3 Practical directives

- a) Let each parish promote and verify its particular salesian features, along the lines indicated (in this document), within the context of the local Church and in harmony with provincial organizations.
- b) Let each province, in its plan of redimensioning, consider the possibility of giving back to the diocese any parish which, on account of changed conditions, no longer offers opportunity for a typical salesian apostolate: either because it is not attached to a salesian community, or because it does not allow for priority to youth, or because it is not located in a populous area.
- c) No new parishes are to be accepted unless they meet the requirements set out in this document.
- d) The *confreres* destined for parish work should be given specific training which should emphasize and develop the values of our salesian style of living and working. Not only are they to be individually concerned with their continuing education, but they must periodically be given a chance to update their theological and pastoral studies.

142

<sup>26</sup> Don Bosco, *Op. Ed.* XXVI, p. 263.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 265.

#### 4. THE MISSIONS

- 143 The overall theme of the GC21, the ecclesial thrust generated over the past few years especially by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and the enthusiastic interest aroused throughout the Congregation in the centenary year of the salesian missions have given us cause for reflection and self-examination on the topic of the missions.

Such a reflection must necessarily refer back to the SGC, which drew up a document on "salesian missionary action,"<sup>1</sup> wrote into the Constitutions and Regulations some important articles on our missionary activity<sup>2</sup> and set up a corresponding Department for the Missions.<sup>3</sup>

The present document has specific objectives, determined and defined by the general study theme and by the GC21 itself, which is a Chapter of verification. Our purpose is to highlight the more significant points of the past six years and to probe certain elements at greater depth so as to come up with effective approaches which will guide our missionary endeavors for the next few years.

It is not the intention therefore to deal with the many aspects of our salesian presence in the missions, nor to trace, even from a salesian perspective, any general sketch of missionary pastoral action.

This General Chapter, which for the first time since the centenary of the missions, sees the meeting of representatives from the entire Salesian Congregation, feels the needful duty of giving praise and thanks to God for the wonders he has achieved through the sons of Don Bosco, sustained at every moment by Mary Help of Christians.

It wishes also to express lively and sincere admiration and thanks to the thousands of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who in these one hundred years have written many a glorious page in the history of both our Congregations and have left us a heritage of courage, apostolic boldness, pastoral creativeness, untiring work, suffering, and even martyrdom. This is a priceless heirloom, a force which drives us on to new achievements.

<sup>1</sup> ASGC 472-480.

<sup>2</sup> Const 15, 24, 142; Reg 15-20.

<sup>3</sup> Const 142.

#### 4.1 The situation

It is not easy to compress such a complex of varied issues into a few lines, but it may help to highlight some particularly significant features.<sup>4</sup>

First among them are those which bespeak vitality and the efficacious desire for an energetic renewal.

The centenary celebrations have touched off a variety of activities at world-wide, provincial and local levels, which have interested and often involved the whole salesian family: congresses, assemblies and symposia, specific projects, etc. Within this context, even though it goes beyond it, the publication of studies and works on the salesian missions deserves special mention, particularly the publications of the Study Center for Salesian Missionary History, and the documentary films on salesian missionary life and action.

Organizationally the period has seen the progressive structural development of the Department for the Missions.

But the most consoling and prominent achievements have been in the area of solidarity and of personnel: a solidarity and vitality reflected in the very significant number of confreres (about 270) who have gone to the missions over these past five years, and of those who, having volunteered their services for five years since 1965, have for the most part elected to remain on. This solidarity is highlighted in a special way by the contribution of personnel from some missionary provinces to others, a fact of rich ecclesial dimensions which opens new vistas for the future. The twinning of provinces should also be remembered in this connection.

These efforts are additional to the apostolic zeal and pastoral creativity of confreres and communities in mission lands. Another positive element which promises well for the entire Congregation, is the notable increase of vocations in some mission territories, e.g. in some countries of Asia, where the percentage of native personnel is now predominant (77%).

Significant too, though they are not numerous, is the presence of young laymen who are working as active missionaries in some continents.

Noteworthy efforts are being made at the Center and at local levels

<sup>4</sup> Sources of this verification: RRM 248-277; Report of Department for Missions 1972-1977, 42 p.

to train missionaries, to have some confreres obtain degrees in mission studies, and to organize teams which will be ready to face seriously the actual challenge of the mission apostolate.

Many other concrete examples of solidarity must not be forgotten, e.g. financial support afforded by mission procurers by special foundations, or by sporadic efforts of other kinds.

These features become all the more significant when we remember that they coincide with a period in history when the Congregation has been undergoing a crisis as grave as it was painful. That our missionary endeavor has kept alive is a sign of vitality and of hope which make their impact felt throughout the work of the Congregation.

- 145** Briefly but objectively we must now look back at *negative aspects which slow down* our mission action. In some parts of the Congregation mission concern leaves much to be desired and is a long way from arousing a real interest in the young people with whom we work.

We do not have enough qualified salesians who can give our reflection and our mission action a scholarly orientation.

Because many missionaries are either isolated or engaged in work which is either personal or too heavy, they do not have the chance of an ongoing formation, and all too few are the privileged moments of prayer and reflection which they can enjoy.

In some cases, certainly not due to any bad will, the mission work is organized in a way which reveals a lack of cultural preparation and an inadequate acquaintance with pastoral programs and missionary procedures.

There is little or no "salesian movement for lay missionaries": the Congregation has not made any great effort in this direction. To make matters worse, in not a few countries complications have arisen from outside the Congregation which block or gravely impede freedom of action and initiative.

#### **4.2 Frame of reference**

- 146** The results of the evaluation and reflection at the level of the whole Congregation, with our Missions' Centenary as a point of departure, bring to light certain elements which are closely allied to a new missionary consciousness and go in part beyond our salesian environment.

#### 4.2.1 Missions: situations and missionary style

It is a fact today that in countries traditionally christian vast sections of the populace, and especially young people, live in a dechristianized environment and badly need an initial or at least a renewed evangelization. A situation of this kind calls for a changed notion of "mission geography." All countries can today be considered "mission territory." Hence evangelization of any sort takes on a missionary significance.

This wider view of "mission," this broadening of evangelization to include the entire action of the Church must not lessen the proper meaning of that *specific missionary presence* which the Church from its very origins has always seen as a pressing vocation.

A half-hearted openness to new peoples may one day be judged by historians as insensitivity. By keeping to itself christianity only lessens its own internal fruitfulness.

"At a time when there are not lacking those who think and even say that... the time of the missions is now past," writes Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive and even wishes to intensify it," because "she feels responsible before entire peoples. She has no rest so long as she has not done her best to proclaim the good news of Jesus the Savior."<sup>6</sup>

In the light of these affirmations, our reflections will be restricted to missionary action in its specific sense.

#### 4.2.2 Missions and our salesian mission

The place of missionary action in salesian life has been clearly stated by the SGC and cited by the Rector Major on the occasion of the centenary.<sup>7</sup> Briefly, they remind us that this specific meaning of missionary action constitutes "*an essential element, indispensable to and characteristic of our Congregation.*"<sup>8</sup> "The missions *are not a work... to be listed with our other works... Neither are they an area of activity which comprise a certain number of works... In salesian tradition the missions are to be rated... as a privileged setting for the fulfilment of the salesian mission, and the associated spirit.*"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> EN 51, 53.

<sup>6</sup> EN 53, 51-52.

<sup>7</sup> ASC 267.

<sup>8</sup> ASC 267, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> ASC 267, p. 20.

#### 4.2.3 *Missionary work and salesian style*

Salesian service and style seem to fit perfectly the demands of the mission apostolate.

Experience has shown some *points of contact* which deserve our deeper consideration; among them: an intimate bond between evangelization and human development; preference for poor youth and the common people; ability to adapt and create; catechetical concern and simple, direct piety; a living presence especially attuned to human and religious values of local cultures; an easy human approach, marked by evangelical optimism, which arouses a sympathetic response and draws people to our own ideas.

#### 4.2.4 *Important aspects of missionary work today*

To put their mission work into a contemporary framework salesians will have to take a new look at the meaning of "mission," and what it involves. Among other things this requires:

- an integration of human values with evangelization of local cultures with pastoral action;
- greater insistence on the reality of the local Church, and hence more energetic support and a great unity and coresponsibility with it;
- a determined effort to put mission action on a valid scientific basis so as to integrate its various components;
- the channelling of mission action towards more needy areas and those which are in a more sensitive and critical position for the world's future;
- the involvement of the laity in either direct missionary activity or in supporting roles so that in the mission regions themselves the evangelized become evangelizers.

#### 4.2.5 *Missionary animation*

A revival of missionary spirit and mission action at the level of the entire Church, and for us at the level of the Congregation, requires that we face up to the basic problem of sensitizing and animating local and provincial communities to a more deliberate missionary consciousness, to renewing our service in content and method, to a missionary commitment which, to preserve credibility, must at one and the same time be directed to the community itself and beyond it.

Art. 16 of the Regulations entrusts the prime responsibility in this regard to the provincial and his council.

The GC21, reaffirming what was said by the SGC, calls attention to the multiple services which can be rendered by advisory boards, mission procures, or missionary centers, set up on a provincial or inter-provincial level: they keep interest high among confreres and all members of the salesian family; to arouse missionary vocations; to maintain contact with confreres who have left the province for the missions; to cooperate with the Central Mission Office, with dioceses, and other religious Institutes; they promote projects and solicit funds from government, church, and private agencies, etc.

### 4.3 Practical directives

The GC21 endorses the validity of what was laid down by the SGC, especially in what concerns animating mission action and the ongoing formation of mission personnel. It establishes the following lines of action for the orientation and renewal of our missionary activity for the next few years:

147

a) The launching of missionary activity calls for concrete objectives and demands the adoption of strategy which is directed to those countries where missionary activity is most urgent. Therefore as we enter the second century of our missionary presence, recalling Don Bosco's prophetic wish,<sup>11</sup> without excluding the possibility of developing mission action in other needy and promising regions, the salesians will apply themselves to an appreciable stepping up of their presence in Africa.

b) Let every province commit itself to the stressing of lay participation, especially within the salesian family, in direct missionary work. To this end let them willingly prepare adequate, helpful aids, using also the technical services of other organizations, and keep themselves posted on similar projects of other missionary Institutes. The Department for the Missions, in cooperation with the Department for the Salesian Family and that of the Youth Apostolate will collaborate in the same sense on a world-wide level.

c) The present status of our missionary apostolate, the importance and extent of our commitment demand that we face up to the mission problem on the basis of serious scientific studies. For this purpose let a chair of missiology be set up at the UPS; let arrangements be made so that every missionary province may have some confrere qualified in this field.

<sup>10</sup> Const 142; Reg 15-20; ASGC 480; Cf also doc on "Formation to salesian life".

<sup>11</sup> MB XVI, p. 254.

d) A missionary evangelizes before all else by his witness. To make this witness all the more telling, each missionary will try to be faithful to his duties within his religious community. By willingly taking part in workshops and updating courses, he will derive benefit for his spiritual growth, improve in brotherly intercourse, and gain in pastoral experience. Let it be the task of both province and local communities to afford confreres time and opportunity for this kind of reflection and updating, especially for privileged moments of prayer, which will help them to renew their understanding of their mission in the light of God's word.

## **5. MASS MEDIA: Means of evangelization**

### **5.1 Relevance of the Mass Media**

- 148 The SGC has expressed some views on the relevance of the mass media in ASGC, 443-445. It must be added that the mass media, because of the impact produced by the union of highly refined technology with sophisticated imagery, has taken on and actually plays a decisive role in shaping culture, social life, and mores.

Rather than just a vehicle or multiple means of communication, it is a dynamic and complex reality which has a vast and disproportionate power to convince, a power which enhances its message for good or for ill.

The mass media become over more a massive educating influence, shaping and begetting cultures. They elaborate and broadcast accumulated evidence which underlie new life styles and new criteria of judgment. The incisive force and ever growing penetration of the mass media have turned them into a real, authentic alternative educational process for entire sections of peoples of the globe, especially for the young and the poor.

### **5.2 The mass media and evangelization**

- 149 "Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means... The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops' the message of

which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes."<sup>1</sup>

### 5.3 Don Bosco's views

In his own day Don Bosco considered the press, the publication of good books and magazines, stage plays for youth, music and song not only as means for the service of educational pastoral works, such as oratories, hostels, schools, missions, but also as "original apostolic endeavors" directed of their very nature to the mission Divine Providence gave him for youth.<sup>2</sup>

Even at that time he was convinced that the young and the masses would be the most eager consumers and the first victims of a mass communication which could be manipulated at the will and service of others. This is what he meant by asserting that the good press was one of the Congregation's principal aims.<sup>3</sup>

### 5.4 The situation

The Rector Major's Report, that of the Department for the Adult Apostolate, and the pre-capitular documents of the GC21, on the basis of actual experiences, have singled out some elements of growth and renewed commitment in this field.

150

The Congregation's efforts in this regard have taken two directions:

5.4.1 A more mature, effective use of the mass media as a multiple means of salesian "communication." There has been an undeniable growth in the following sectors:

- the diffusion of salesian news meant for use both within the Congregation and the salesian family and beyond it (provincial newsletters, ANS, Salesian Bulletins, documentaries, audio and video cassettes, filmstrips);
- mass media for use in our apostolic and educative youth work, oratories, schools, etc.; in parishes and mission centers (cinema, closed circuit TV and radio); multi-media (audio-visuals; stage plays, music).

<sup>1</sup> EN 45; cf CP 13; Synod 1977, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Epist. IV, 318; Report of Don Bosco to the Holy See 1877.

<sup>3</sup> ASGC 451.

5.4.2 The second direction in which the commitment of the Congregation has been extended is to the *production* of these materials, of multi-media aids, mass media programs in the service of the gospel, meant "to increase almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people."<sup>4</sup> In this regard we list some works which seem to be privileged moments of creation, special spots of genius which have helped us realize our mission to the young and to the common people:

- publishing centers have produced and spread books, auxiliary aids, youth magazines;
- broadcasts and telecasts;
- research centers to produce programs of audio-visuals (records, cassettes, video-cassettes, films, filmstrips, posters, etc.), radio and TV. This is essentially salesian pastoral work.

We cite also the efforts made these past years to organize these centers on an inter-provincial, national, or regional level; also editing initiatives to strengthen and broaden their efficiency, while eliminating useless duplication of personnel and materials.

**151** Documents and reports reveal the following *weaknesses*:

- in the training of salesians in communication arts: lack of overall plans, of programs, of personnel who are qualified to train salesians in the systematic use of the mass media;
- in the diffusion of salesian information: lack of "an authoritative stable and secure orientation" for our bulletins and salesian newsletters;<sup>6</sup> lack of correspondents who feed news to the Center;<sup>7</sup>
- in the use of mass media in evangelization: disjointed individual initiatives not adequately supported by the community; lack of coordination of effort between centers of production and distribution centers; on provincial and national levels, lack of structures which will encourage and coordinate efforts with the Center; limited cooperation with Church organizations in the mass media.

<sup>4</sup> EN 45.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Sch Precap 185, 187c.

<sup>6</sup> Cf RRM 239c.

<sup>7</sup> RRM 239d.

But the *weakest and most sensitive area* is the distressing lack of confreres or teams of salesians who can utilize the mass media both in substance and style for the adequate evangelization of modern man. Teams who can plan, research, try pilot programs, and develop the mass media on a serious scientific basis, are either insufficient or entirely lacking.

Underlying this situation of course is the problem of shortage of personnel. But there is also a lack of foresight. We have been concerned with the provision of instruments and the setting up of structures and with the necessary technical and mechanical training, but we have not been equally concerned about the preparation of personnel to give these means cultural substance by research and planning.

### 5.5 Lines of action

The central structures (Salesian Family, Departments, and Secretariate) and provincial organizations should concern themselves, each at its proper level, with the training of salesians in social communications.

152

This calls for basic programs in our different stages of formation and for specialized training for those confreres who are going to be in charge of this aspect of formation. Assigning confreres to specialize in social communications does not mean that we are dispersing our apostolic forces; we rather strengthen their effectiveness and multiply them.

Another line of renewal is to introduce the multimedia language of communication into our pastoral work.

Audio-visual aids, the art of the theatre, creative projects (painting, design, graphic arts) music and song, are not to be seen as complementary skills, helpful aids to be used only on occasion; they constitute a true language which must not be disregarded or underestimated in our dialog with the new generations of youth; because the latter appear to take most willingly to these forms of communication.

Experience proves that the use of these new means of communication is very effective and productive not only in school and in art courses but also in our endeavors to catechize and educate to prayer and liturgy.

To avoid duplicating expense and labor, it will be good for provinces and regions to consider pooling their work. This will enable pro-

vincial conferences, various groups, and provincial communities as a whole to apply their best potential to create and consolidate specific aspects of the mass media in different countries, in agreement with the bishops' programs and joined in one organic whole to produce multimedia material which will be adapted and helpful to young people (radio-TV, publications, joint youth productions, cinema and TV program centers, etc.).

To sensitize our various apostolates to this new "language" and to change their attitudes, our schools, youth centers and parishes should promote courses for systematic training in critical approaches to the mass media's cultural and news programs; and greater use should be made of the mass media as an ordinary means of educational communication. In particular, more creative use of audio-visuals and dramatizations should be made in teaching and in catechesis.

More emphatically the mass media should concentrate on developing rapport between culture and evangelization.

To hasten and intensify our contribution to a more adequate social communication, we should initiate courses of career training for young men who are oriented towards the mass media as a profession.

### 5.6 Practical directives

153

- a) In dependence on the Department for the Salesian Family, the Secretariate for Social Communications should be concerned to coordinate, develop, and animate mass media in the Congregation, it should set up an organization which can adequately sustain the various departments and second their efforts to render those services expected of it. The secretariate should organize, at opportune levels, regular meetings to discuss programs, collaboration, and evaluation of various salesian activities in the field of social communication.
- b) To promote scientific research, study, and analysis of common salesian problems in social communication, the Central Office should create a central consulting body of experts, salesians and others.
- c) On a provincial (or provincial conference) level, some confreres should be appointed as coordinators, animators, and consultants in the field of

mass media, in agreement with the Central Office, for the training of others in social communication as a service to our mission of evangelization and to salesian information projects.

d) To make it easier for confreres to use primary sources of salesian spirituality and original documents, the study of Italian should be encouraged as a language of unity and communication within the salesian family.

## **6. NEW MODES OF SALESIAN PRESENCE FOR EVANGELIZATION**

At the close of its reflection on the general theme: WITNESSING AND PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL, TWO ESSENTIALS OF SALESIAN LIFE AMONG THE YOUNG, the GC21 realizes that it has touched upon many problems of our communities.

154

Throughout this document, which set out to be a calm and realistic evaluation of salesian life and activity especially during the past six years, we keep reverting to the term RENEWAL as a measure of the past and a vision of the future. It could not be otherwise since the GC20, characterized as "special" and desired by the Council, "has put the whole Congregation in a state of renewal."<sup>1</sup>

We would like to conclude with a further reflection on this theme which highlights the dynamic aspect of renewal in fidelity.

Hence we now speak of NEW MODES OF SALESIAN PRESENCE, using this terminology to mean varied initiatives, both on a personal and interior level and also on an organizational and structural level, with their impact on the spirit and mode of action.

### **6.1 "New salesian presence"**

In analyzing our pastoral action among youth, the SGC affirmed: "The salesian mission in many areas has unfortunately not been able to find that NEW PRESENCE which a changing world demands."<sup>2</sup>

155

<sup>1</sup> ASC 283, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> ASGC 393.

This is not an isolated statement. With reference to so central an issue of the GC21 as the SALESIAN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT we recall another assertion of the SGC: "With young people of today, the preventive system means that *a new kind of presence is needed*. Our educative efficiency is linked up with a renewed fidelity to the preventive system of Don Bosco."<sup>3</sup>

It is important, and in some ways essential, to meet this pressing demand of the Congregation.

"Realizing that a really efficacious renewal is often enough the result of initiatives of particular groups of people, the General Chapter encourages opportune experiments in new forms of witness and service among the very poor according to the missionary spirit of Don Bosco, and the readiness to offer our help wherever there is more urgent need."<sup>4</sup>

Reviewing the orientation given by the SGC we find some meaningful guidelines:

#### 6.1.1 *a relaunching of the SPIRIT OF INITIATIVE*

This is not a new discovery of the present day.

The first generation of salesians learned enterprise and boldness at the school of Don Bosco.

The history of salesian expansion throughout the world clearly proves the effectiveness of our Founder's teaching.

Father Albera asserts: "To the spirit of personal initiative we must join due submission to one's superior; it is *precisely this spirit* which gives our Society a *pleasing modernity* which makes it possible for us to achieve the good demanded by the needs of time and place."<sup>5</sup>

More incisively Father Rinaldi states: "This *supple adaptability* to all forms of good which endlessly arise within humanity is the *very spirit* of our Constitutions: the day a variation to this spirit is introduced our Pious Society will be doomed. The approval of 1874 has *canonized this principle*, and our Pious Society has begun to belong to all times as it has gradually spread everywhere. But this incessant growth has created the need of modifying our Constitutions."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ASGC 188.

<sup>4</sup> ASGC 619.

<sup>5</sup> ASC 2 (1921), 4.

<sup>6</sup> ASC 3 (1923), 21.

In perfect agreement with the above is Father Caviglia's view of salesian history: "To this we owe the fact...that the persons he chose to open new foundations, while they attended to the spirit of the Institute, were able to give each foundation an imprint of its own as demanded by the particular conditions of place, and to appear—no small merit this—as so many *founders themselves* of works which were powerfully efficacious in different ways.

"Anyone who has a grasp of life and of history will appreciate the real genius and wisdom it takes to conceive and actuate such a principle."<sup>7</sup>

### 6.1.2 *an appreciation of the INTUITION and SENSITIVITY of certain confreres*

"An efficacious renewal is often the result of initiatives of particular groups of people," affirms the SGC.

We are dealing here, we think, with an availability to the Spirit of God who calls and impels; and also with a sensitivity to the cry of boys and of young men who call out in expectation.

### 6.1.3 *a concern about working according to Don Bosco's MISSIONARY SPIRIT*

This ensures the "corporate identity" of our religious action "in spirit and in form."<sup>8</sup> For an initiative to be labeled salesian it is not enough that it call itself new, apostolically valid, and enterprising.

There are some criteria to be verified.

First and foremost, the *style of both life and action* must be communal. "To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental need if we are truly to fulfil our vocation."<sup>10</sup>

It is often enough a tiresome task to involve an entire provincial community in the process of renewal; but according to God's plan this is the guarantee of success of our apostolic enterprise and our salesian calling.

A second criterion, intimately connected with the community aspect of our mission, is that of the "*received mandate.*"

<sup>7</sup> A. Caviglia, *Don Bosco, Profilo Storico*, SEI Torino, 1934, pp. 169-170.

<sup>8</sup> Cf Address of Paul VI to GC21 (n. 000).

<sup>9</sup> Rector Major's intervention in the assembly, 30.1.1978.

<sup>10</sup> Const 50.

Pastoral charity demands a hierarchical communion.

It is not only the letter of obedience that has juridical value: "our superiors and community (are) the day to day interpreters of God's will."<sup>11</sup>

## 156 6.2 Realizing a "new salesian presence"

6.2.1 There is a NEW SALESIAN PRESENCE which directly touches the heart of the confreres, and it is only their *holiness* that will express it from time to time as they generously respond to the grace of the Spirit and relive the charism of their salesian vocation. By an interior self-renewal the confrere renews the Congregation.

To this end the GC21 calls upon all the confreres to reconsider the SGC's statement: "In order to work out this necessary discernment and renewal historians are not sufficient, nor theologians, nor politicians, nor organizers: we need 'spiritual' men, men of faith; sensitive to the things of God and ready to work with courageous obedience as our Founder did. True fidelity to Don Bosco consists not in copying him exteriorly but in imitating his fidelity to the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

## 157 6.2.2 There is a NEW SALESIAN PRESENCE which is linked to the work and action of the confreres, of provincial and local communities, carried out in the chosen apostolates of the past, known to us as TRADITIONAL WORKS AND ACTIVITIES.

In its reflection on the settings for and the means of evangelization, this document has tried to bring out some practical guidelines to revitalize those initiatives which are in danger of being rendered meaningless and futile by time, by changes in social, cultural and ecclesial conditions, and by the wear and tear on the confreres. They encourage a true renewal, even if it is difficult at times. The RRM explains: "Often... the concept of a new presence has been

<sup>11</sup> Const 91. The Conciliar Document, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, to which we can rightly refer, states: "This obedience leads to the more mature freedom of God's sons. Of its nature it demands that in the fulfilment of their duty priests lovingly and prudently look for *new avenues* for the greater good of the Church. At the same time it demands that they confidently propose their plans and urgently make known the needs of the flock committed to them, while remaining ready to submit to the judgement of those who exercise the chief responsibility for governing the Church of God." No. 15.

<sup>12</sup> ASGC 18.

impoverished and viewed in one sense only, i.e. with regard to a single 'model'. It would seem for example that we have not highlighted in the spirit of the SGC a new salesian presence in our traditional works, such as setting up a real 'pilot' school, creating a new pastoral image to give us a presence different from that in a school or in a youth center, etc."<sup>13</sup>

This renewal however is not to be one of mere method, pastoral action or workability. It must rise to the level of community.

"We must therefore *renew our communities, big and small*, so that they may be 'constantly' animated by the spirit of the gospel, nourished by prayer and distinguished by a generous mortification of the old man, by the discipline necessary for forming the new man, by the fruitfulness of the sacrifice of the Cross."<sup>14</sup>

6.2.3 There is a NEW SALESIAN PRESENCE which is the fruit of pastoral creativity for the benefit of young people; it fills in the gaps which have as yet not been carefully studied. We cite some instances of such gaps:

158

a) the spiritual needs of young people in urban areas—indifferent, or alienated from Church and faith;

b) a care to promote human and christian development among the young and people in general who are rejected or excluded, both in the so called developing nations and in those areas which have become industrialized;<sup>15</sup>

c) the promotion of *youth movements*, while at the same time assisting youngsters in their search and desire for bonds of unity which go beyond the confines of their own environment.

Our Constitutions provide a fine statement on these situations and demands: "We must use the pastoral inventiveness of Don Bosco, adapting those works which already exist to changed requirements and creating new ones which correspond better to the needs of the present day."<sup>16</sup>

Services arising from these demands will be offered:

— in some cases by individual confreres or groups of confreres, full

<sup>13</sup> RRM 175.

<sup>14</sup> ET 41.

<sup>15</sup> Cf the Conclusions of the Congress: "Salesians and human and christian promotion in marginal areas," Rome, Casa Generalizia, 19-24 February, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> Const 27.

or part time, who operate from a community whose main work is different;

- in other cases by communities specially set up for the purpose, generally with a smaller number of confreres, and always with the intention “to help and educate young people, especially the very poor, who can be effectively reached only in their own surroundings.”<sup>17</sup>

The salesian service which the community renders will be offered either directly to the institutions of the local Church or to those initiatives which are promoted by our own institutions to meet local needs.<sup>18</sup>

Realistically we cannot avoid the complex of problems emerging from such “pastoral inventiveness.” Difficulties generally center on a few knotty points, among which the following are the most significant:

- an uneasy rapport between such a new mode of presence and the original work, involving contradictions and tensions of various kinds, which make it hard to define the meaning of the new presence and disturb the balance between the demands of our religious life and those of our apostolic service;
- an uneasy relationship between the new salesian presence and the provincial community, which must be attributed to some extent to the lack of timely communication and understanding regarding certain choices of work, and also to what may seem to be an escape on the part of some confreres from tasks they had previously assumed in the province.

**159** 6.2.4 There is a NEW SALESIAN PRESENCE which, in the terminology of the ASGC, we call SMALL COMMUNITIES.

Within a diversity of forms adapted to place and need, the SGC identified the following as their fundamental characteristics:<sup>19</sup>

- a search for a better insertion of our salesian life among those to whom we are sent, so as to be closer to them in lifestyle and habitation;
- less structured services, more flexible and better adapted to the area’s specific needs;

<sup>17</sup> Const 30.

<sup>18</sup> Cf ASGC 81, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Cf ASGC 510, 515.

- the experimental nature of such a project arising from the “intense communion among its members, but more particularly the call to insert itself into special types of life and work.”<sup>20</sup>

### 6.3 The GC21's evaluation of one of the new modes of presence: that of small communities

Among the so-called new modes of salesian presence, the small communities have aroused deepest concern during the past six years in some parts of the Congregation. Hence we center our attention on them so as to take note of both positive and negative elements.<sup>21</sup>

6.3.1 *Positively*, in some provinces small communities have given rise to a more alert and realistic attention to peripheral young people, segregated from society, and to a search for a strategy to meet their real needs in surroundings which are pastorally isolated and unapproachable.

They have sometimes opened up new fields of apostolic action to young people among whom we work, helping to involve them in the christian apostolate. They have also given some confreres the possibility of reawakening a feeling of personal involvement, coresponsibility and poverty.<sup>22</sup>

They have helped to excite interest in the Faith and in the meaning of life in places which were strangers, and sometimes hostile, to the Church's presence; they have involved both juveniles and adults in progressive christian growth even to the point of witness and service in the areas in which they live.

6.3.2 *Among the negative aspects* we cite those which have contributed in greater measure to the failure of some experiments. Some defects and errors are more evident in “small communities”, even though they may not be lacking in others:

- shortcomings in common life, underscored by the immediate needs of community living; or insistence on ideologies which are unacceptable from a religious or ecclesial point of view;<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> ASGC 510.

<sup>21</sup> We have used: a) RRM, especially 135-136, 175; b) Sarti, Statistical Data, pp. 138, 139; c) Material of provincial chapters gathered by Gruppo di maggio vol. 2, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Gruppo di maggio, Scheme 5.

<sup>23</sup> RRM 135.

- difficulties experienced in returning to ordinary communities;
- problems in the exercise of authority, and sometimes the complete lack of it, due in part to the absence of clear indications in the matter;
- projects which have not been well thought out and sometimes lead to dispersion;
- an irregular pattern of common prayer, often caused by wide variety in apostolic tasks;<sup>24</sup>
- an attitude of confrontation in matters of authority and its norms;
- a search for forms of community life, not contemplated by the Constitutions, which will include also non-religious.

**161** 6.3.3 *The frame of reference* proposed by the GC21 endorses the indications given by the SGC:

- sincere communion with the province and its center, both at the beginning of the project and during its progress;
- an apostolic plan, realistic in its goals and drawn up in communal dialog with the provincial and his council, in line with the requirements of the local Church;
- the selection of competent personnel, adequate in number and excluding young confreres in the first phase of formation;
- provincial organizations are to determine the manner in which authority is to be exercised;<sup>25</sup>
- a program of prayer and meetings, in accordance with the Constitutions and Regulations, which will give rise to “a union between the demands of common life and those of the apostolate, two distinct but indivisible facets of apostolic charity;<sup>26</sup>
- a “new presence” is not to be sought for the purpose of experimenting with new forms of religious community life, but to offer services which otherwise could not be provided;<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> RRM 135.

<sup>25</sup> Cf ASGC 515.

<sup>26</sup> ASGC 508.

<sup>27</sup> This phrase is to be read in the context of the document: “New modes of salesian presence” and is understood by the *Technical Group* in the light of what is said in: n. 160 last 2 lines: “Amongst the negative aspects...  
— a search for forms of community life, not contemplated by the Constitutions, which will include also non-religious.”

- the provincial and his council should hold frequent fraternal meetings with the confreres as a sign of unity and support, and should periodically evaluate their commitment and work as a help to the members;
- the confreres should be always ready to return to normal salesian communities.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

The last word is still the same: renewal and self-renewal for the sake of evangelization.

"Deep understanding of present tendencies and of the needs of the modern world should cause your own sources of energy to spring up with renewed vigour and freshness. It is a sublime task in the measure that it is a difficult one."<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion: DON BOSCO MODEL AND LIVING PRESENCE

Every work of evangelization is carried out through some encounter "in which the individual's conscience is touched by the special words another addresses to him."<sup>30</sup>

Don Bosco was chosen by God to encounter youth most in need. God gave him a humanity particularly suited to this end, and with added gifts of grace he rendered him still more capable of evangelizing them and transmitting to them his own life.

Pope Paul VI describes him as "a marvellous synthesis of human talents and supernatural gifts, a genius recognized by modern pedagogy and catechesis, but above all a genius of holiness."<sup>31</sup>

162

n. 155 "There are some criteria to be verified. First and foremost, the style of both life and action must be communal. 'To live and work together is for us salesians a fundamental need if we are truly to fulfil our vocation'." (Const 50)

n. 155 "A second criterion, intimately joined to the community aspect of our mission, is that of the "received mandate."

<sup>28</sup> CF ASGC 515.

<sup>29</sup> ET 51.

<sup>30</sup> EN 46.

<sup>31</sup> Discourse of the Holy Father to GC21.

- 163** We salesians are called to participate in his apostolic project. For this purpose it has been given to us to know him, and we are led to love him as our Father and Founder. For us he is not just a memory of the past, but a charismatic and living presence, active and stretching out to the future.

In him we reach a better understanding of ourselves and we find the true sense of what it means to belong to the Congregation, which "came into being not only by human agency but by the providence of God."<sup>32</sup>

He gives a sense of unity to all the individual elements of our salesian life, from the interior life to our fraternal unity, to our shared responsibility, to the planning of our apostolic work.

- 164** From those same deep roots has been born, we think, also this document and its message.

The Church, Don Bosco and youth itself call us to be evangelizers in the salesian manner:

- to be salesians in order to be evangelizers;
- to be evangelizers in order to be salesians;
- to meet the young as they are, in the reality of their personality and where they are, in their actual situation, at the present day;
- to effect their evangelization and to provoke a concrete response to it in the life of the young, through the salesian educational and pastoral project, with its style and spirit and with all that it implies and contains, in the varied settings of our work.

- 165** These commitments are an indication and interpretation of the historical moment through which we are passing. We feel them as something inherent in our life and in our vocation which is in process of renewal. They are important and decisive, and in the context of evangelization they represent a deepening and in a certain sense something new, as regards the work of the SGC.

God calls us in Don Bosco to take on these obligations and we reply to him with salesian joy. "Yes, with joy... because joy is an absolute need for the young as well as being a reflection of the grace of God and interior serenity."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Const 1.

<sup>33</sup> Discourse of the Holy Father to GC21.