

DOCUMENT 2

**THE SALESIAN  
BROTHER**

**A "lay-religious" vocation  
at the service of the salesian mission**

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## **THE SALESIAN BROTHER**

### **a "lay religious" vocation**

### **in the service of the salesian mission**

#### **Introduction**

Don Bosco's large heart would have loved to save the entire world; for this reason he was constantly in search of fellow workers who would help him realize his apostolic dream. His first helpers were the boys themselves; then later came priests, clerics, and laymen. Some of these became his salesian "priests, clerics, and laymen," considered and constituted as such in the first handwritten draft of our Rules (1858-60).<sup>1</sup> **166**

To the salesian brother Don Bosco entrusted a vast gamut of activity: a specific means of sanctification in the discharge of a great variety of services to the community; administrative and managerial responsibility of certain departments; educational and apostolic projects; work of evangelization in mission territories. He saw the necessity of their enriching presence in the Congregation, as sharers in the apostolic activity of the community through their performance of tasks more suited to laymen than to priests, and through their ability to bring a christian presence and an evangelizing activity to those places where it was either impossible or inopportune for the priest to be.<sup>2</sup>

The first century in the life of the Congregation gives evidence of a progressive, if not always easy, realization of Don Bosco's intuitive perception, in a variety of expressions that are both rich and profound.

The GC19 (1965), aware of the new insights and of the new expectations of the Conciliar Church, undertook among other things an in-depth study of the identity of the brother, underscoring its novel and original character. It called to mind the fact that the salesian brother represents "a constitutive element of the Salesian Society, **167**

<sup>1</sup> MB V 937.

<sup>2</sup> MB XII, 152, 823; XIV, 394, 783; XVI, 312-314.

which without the brother would not be the society established by Don Bosco."<sup>3</sup> That Chapter promoted a fuller incorporation of the brother in the life of the Congregation.<sup>4</sup> It took steps to initiate a more comprehensive formation of the brother,<sup>5</sup> "leaving to competent committees the task of continuing the study of the specific nature of the brother along spiritual, juridical, historical and apostolic lines, for the purpose of formulating a clear definition of the spiritual identity of our lay confrere."<sup>6</sup>

**168** The SGC (1971), convened to re-define the total identity of the Congregation in its renewed context, considered the brother as a component element of the religious community entrusted with the salesian mission. Speaking of the people responsible for our apostolate, it stressed the complementary function and fraternal co-responsibility of all the members of the Society, for the purpose of attaining our established pastoral goals. It then outlined the identity of the brother, his divine call to a special vocation, his share in all forms of educational, pastoral, and salesian apostolate not directly linked with the priestly ministry, and his integral and irreplaceable role in a successful common mission.<sup>7</sup> It drew up a number of practical directives and concluded with the statement: "The most important basic work to be done is to sensitize and form the mentality of the whole Congregation with respect to the salesian brother."<sup>8</sup> To that end it called for the convening of congresses at the provincial, regional, and world level.<sup>9</sup>

**169** The World Congress of the Salesian Brother, which was held in Rome from August 31 to September 7, 1975, addressed itself to the following topics: the identity of the brother along historical, theological, and juridical lines; his apostolic activity; his formation; the presentation of the lay religious vocation to the youth of our own age.

From this Congress there arose, together with noteworthy doctrinal documents, some unresolved questions<sup>10</sup> which were taken up by

<sup>3</sup> ASC 244, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> ASC 244, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> ASC 244, p. 71-72.

<sup>6</sup> ASC 244, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Const 34; ASGC 145-149.

<sup>8</sup> ASGC 184.

<sup>9</sup> ASGC 184.

<sup>10</sup> AWCSB p. 545-554.

many provincial chapters a year later in preparation for the GC21. These chapters in turn asked the GC21 to gather together and collate all in-depth studies and research papers of recent years in an effort to resolve the questions that still remain unresolved.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the present vocation crisis, which is more serious for brothers than for priests, and the occasional conflicts in community life that appear here and there, are caused at least in part by an incomplete knowledge and a consequent inadequate appreciation of the brother. "In contrast with the priest's crisis which results from a weakened and deformed identity, the brother's crisis is caused by a total ignorance of his identity or at least by an inadequate appreciation of the brother's vocation, which is sometimes misrepresented and falsified. This type of ignorance is often found in salesian priests, and sometimes even in the brothers themselves."<sup>12</sup>

The GC21 wants in the first place to affirm the total validity of the lay religious vocation in all the dimensions envisioned by Don Bosco and in those necessitated by today's salesian mission.

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In the second place, it would like to respond at least in part to the legitimate expectations of the Congregation by producing a statement based on the findings of the SGC and within the context of Vatican II theology. This document would not pretend to exhaust the argument, but rather to continue the rethinking that has already been initiated and encourage further explorations along the lines opened up by the Council in the field of theology of the religious life in general and of the lay religious life in particular.

Our present work thus falls in line with the general theme of the GC21: "witnessing and proclaiming the gospel," because the brother is an indispensable component of the salesian community, evangelized and evangelizing, and as such he is called to be always and everywhere an authentic witness and a faithful evangelizer.

## **1. THE SALESIAN BROTHER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY**

In his zeal to save the young, Don Bosco associated to himself not merely willing and isolated workers, but also others more attuned to

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<sup>11</sup> Sch Precap 349-351.

<sup>12</sup> AWCSB p. 607.

his spirit, more committed to his ideals, whom he gathered into a religious congregation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus it will not be so much the individuals who will perpetuate his ideals as his communities, "formed of priests and laymen," closely united to each other by deep brotherly ties.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the clear precise dimension of each salesian can only be studied and evaluated adequately in the context of a brotherly and apostolic community.

When considering the vocational identity of the brother, it is therefore necessary to begin with this basic fact: he is a member of the salesian community. And it behooves us to keep this ever present during the course of the study. He lives, he unfolds his personality, he witnesses his vocation in the context of the community. In it he reveals to himself and to others the true identity of his vocation.

### 1.1 Basic characteristics of the vocational identity of the brother

- 172 At a first comprehensive glance, it is clear that the brother is neither "a cleric"<sup>14</sup> nor simply "a layman."<sup>15</sup> He is rather a baptized Christian, called by God to give himself wholly to him in Christ, and thus to serve him as a "lay religious" in the Salesian Congregation. In it and in union with the salesian priest, he realizes, under the inspiration of Don Bosco, the specific mission of promoting the integral christian education of the young, especially the poorest of them.<sup>16</sup> It will be profitable now to examine in some detail the principal elements of this definition.

#### 1.1.1 *A complete and meaningful salesian vocation*

- 173 Our Constitutions state: "The christian who enters the Society as a brother answers a divine call of a special kind: that of living a lay religious consecration, for the unfolding of the salesian mission."<sup>17</sup>

This vocation is a reality that is:

- *concrete*. God does not call one to be a salesian in a general sort of way but makes it understood, at times only gradually, that

<sup>13</sup> AWCSB p. 88-89; Const mss MB V, 937.

<sup>14</sup> Cf LG III, especially 28.

<sup>15</sup> Cf LG 31.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Const 2-7, 9-10, 17-20, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Const 37.

- such a call is to realize Don Bosco's idea of the lay religious;
- *complete* in itself. In the Congregation there are not two different degrees of membership. The brother shares all the elements that constitute a salesian vocation: apostolate of the young, fraternal-apostolic communion, religious consecration, salesian spirit.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, he belongs to the mission of the Society by his own right, not by one that is derived;<sup>19</sup>
  - *innovative*. The brother is "a genial creation of the large heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians." (Fr. Rinaldi)<sup>20</sup> This vocation is therefore a "specific" vocation different from others: both in the Church, because it is at the service of the salesian mission, and in the salesian family, because it is in the nature of a lay religious living in a community having specific forms bestowed by the Founder;
  - *meaningful*. It encompasses all facets of human life and offers the possibility for the full development of one's personality.

### 1.1.2 *Grafted on a christian vocation*

The vocation of the brother is an evolution of the consecration effected by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, through which he lives in the light of the christian values of the people of God. Sanctified and sent by the Father for the salvation of the world, he partakes of the mission and activity of Christ, prophet, priest, and shepherd, and thus inserts himself in the mission of the Church, to witness and proclaim the gospel.

In his calling to be a salesian lay religious, the brother shares also in all fundamental christian orientations such as consciousness of our common dignity as children of God and brothers in Christ, of our common responsibility in the task of building up his Mystical Body, and of our common call to sanctity; evangelical freedom, the gift of the Spirit; a vivid sense of belonging to the local Church, presided over by the bishop; a sense of renewed presence in society; christian solidarity especially with the poor; sensitivity and openness to "the signs of the times"; creative involvement in contemporary problems.<sup>21</sup>

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

<sup>19</sup> Cf Const 3.

<sup>20</sup> Cf ASC 40 p. 572.

<sup>21</sup> Cf AWCSB pp. 116-126.

### 1.1.3 *At the service of the salesian mission*

- 175** Don Bosco believed that to fully realize his mission of promoting human and christian values among poor and abandoned youth, the contribution of the lay religious was indispensable.

The vocation of the brother makes him share in the salesian mission entrusted to the community and makes him responsible with the other members for its actualization. Every brother "receives a part of the salesian mission to accomplish in so far as he is a member, and therefore in intimate solidarity with his confreres and superiors; thus every service in the community, even if not directly connected with the apostolate, shares in this mission and is a service and a witness with this ecclesial dimension."<sup>22</sup>

### 1.1.4 *Lived and realized in community*

- 176** Don Bosco's apostolic initiative is community-oriented. For this reason the brother received his salesian calling from God in view of his incorporation into the community, and lives within it with the full consciousness of his shared dignity as a brother, just as Don Bosco willed it and our salesian traditions have repeatedly sanctioned.<sup>23</sup> Faith and charity uphold this structure of salesian fraternity, which has as its principal trait the family spirit. This spirit engenders in the community a certain "climate of shared affection based chiefly on mutual esteem and confidence and leading on to fraternal rapport and sharing of all they possess by the confreres."<sup>24</sup> The brother forms part of the praying community, listens to the Word of God, shares in the sacraments of the eucharist and of reconciliation.

He contributes in a responsible way to the planning, execution, and evaluation of all community apostolic programs. He lives in constant fidelity to his specific vocation and becomes, together with his confreres, a sign of that new and permanent brotherhood established by Christ.

### 1.1.5 *Through profession of the evangelical counsels*

- 177** The brother is aware that the obligation of personal sanctification and the mission entrusted to him are superior to his human forces.

<sup>22</sup> Cf ASGC 29.

<sup>23</sup> Cf AGC19 p. 65-67; ASGC 146.

<sup>24</sup> ASGC 499.

At the same time he is convinced that the Lord, who has called him, will enable him to fulfill the one and the other, through the special consecration that sustains his life and activity. Under the action of the Holy Spirit he responds to the divine call by offering him his whole being and action for the salvation of youth.

He gives expression to this commitment through the vows, by which he witnesses his way of being a disciple of Christ and proclaims the new christian life and future resurrection.

The brother finds moreover in his religious profession a deep bond with the salesian mission and community life. In the vows he finds the guarantee of true authenticity and supernatural efficacy for his mission, a source of fraternity and pastoral charity, of enthusiasm and apostolic dynamism. The vows render him always available to others and effective in his work. They bind him to a full living of the gospel which he has to witness and communicate to the young.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.1.6 *Lay in character*

The lay dimension is the concrete form in which the brother lives and operates as a salesian religious. This is his specific characteristic, a noteworthy and essential value of his identity. This lay aspect then is not to be taken in a negative sense. Neither is it to be understood simply as a service or a function. It is rather the sum total of the values that constitute a lay christian, conditioned by the salesian religious consecration.

This is how the SGC outlined the lay dimension of the brother: "With the characteristics proper to religious life he lives his vocation as a member of the laity, seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. He exercises his baptismal priesthood, prophetic witness and kingly service, and in this way truly shares in the life and mission of Christ in the Church. With the intensity that derives from his specific consecration and by mandate of the Church, and not merely as a private individual, he fulfils the mission of spreading the gospel and of sanctifying in a non-sacramental manner. His works of charity are undertaken with greater dedication within a Congregation devoted to the integral education of youth, especially those in need. Finally, as regards the christian renewal of the temporal

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<sup>25</sup> Cf LG 44 & Const 3.

<sup>26</sup> Cf Const 68-72; ASGC 106, 117-125.

order, since he has renounced worldliness he exercises this form of apostolate as a religious in a most efficacious manner, educating youth to the christian renewal of work and to other human values."<sup>27</sup>

This lay dimension permeates the entire life of the brother: his salesian mission, his life in community, his apostolic activity, his religious profession, his life of prayer, and his spiritual life—all of which are lived by him in his capacity of a salesian religious layman. In this way his entire existence focuses itself into a life of witness to the salesian ideal, with respect to his priest confreres, the people who are in his care, and the various branches of the salesian family. All this gives to the salesian community a characteristic of its own, as envisioned by Don Bosco: the enriching presence of a lay dimension, which makes it possible to meet the world in a way that is apostolically more efficacious.<sup>28</sup>

- 179 Because of his religious consecration the brother differs from secular priests and laymen. Because he is a salesian religious he differs from other religious belonging to other religious families or secular institutes and from other branches of the salesian family. Because he is a lay salesian he differs from the salesian priest. This difference is not one of rank but of charism, which must not disappear into a generic salesian concept that disregards concrete differences, nor be cut off from the complementary dimension of the salesian priesthood. In our Congregation, "the brother retains his characteristic lay dimension in a close integrating rapport with the priestly dimension of the salesian priest."<sup>29</sup> We run into a difficulty when in underlining the common elements of the brother and priest, we affirm merely that "we are all salesians." In this way we seem to imply that the lay character and the priestly character are only accidental or secondary elements. On the other hand, if we consider the brother and the priest apart from the bonds of union that unite them vitally to each other, we run the risk of falling into a separatist vision, or worse still into a class distinction of salesian life.

This charismatic diversity postulates an earnest effort to put in proper perspective the specific elements of the brother's identity, during the initial important stages of formation.<sup>30</sup> So also the program of vocation recruitment should present the salesian vocation in its two

<sup>27</sup> ASGC 149.

<sup>28</sup> Cf AWCSB p. 147-154, 574-576.

<sup>29</sup> Cf AWCSB p. 574.

<sup>30</sup> Cf Reg 92; GC21 Doc. on Formation, n. 263.

components: the lay aspect and the priestly aspect.<sup>31</sup>

We must admit that a study of the identity of the brother presents special difficulty even today because of the lack of extensive research on the general topic of the laity. For instance, we have no studies on the lay vocation in the Church, on the christian layman in the local christian community, on the lay dimension of the religious life, on the charism of authority in religious life with respect to its lay members, etc. For this reason the task of deepening such an understanding is left to our confreres during the coming years. We shall have to explore the meaning of the lay dimension in the life and behavior of the salesian community and of the brothers themselves, bringing out its enriching influence. This study will have to be carried out in the context of our salesian tradition and in keeping with current developments in theology.

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## 1.2 The apostolic activity of the salesian brother

By reason of his sacramental character of baptism and confirmation and his special vocation, the brother shares in the salesian mission within the Church. As such he has the duty and the right as an educator and evangelizing member of the salesian community to engage in its apostolic activity, which is prophetic, sanctifying, and renewing in respect of the temporal order.

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Since he will bring a lay-religious dimension to the mission entrusted to the community, it follows that there exists a lay contribution which only he can make to the human and christian promotional services through which the salesian mission is unfolded.

This contribution lies in the exercise of those typically lay functions and services that further the development of the salesian mission. It consists in performing all kind of tasks within the structure of the apostolic community, thus sharing in its mission. It finds expression in his willingness to assume the various educative, pastoral, and missionary roles not directly linked to the priestly character, giving to them his own specific imprint of educator in the faith.<sup>32</sup>

The whole gamut of activities entered upon by the brother, whether catechetical, missionary, evangelical, pedagogical, cultural, administrative, clerical, domestic... all have an educational and pastoral

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<sup>31</sup> Cf GC21 Doc. "Salesians evangelizers of the young" 111.

<sup>32</sup> Cf Const 37; ASGC 149; AWCSB pp. 134-141, 148-154, 185-186, 555-557, 641-642.

value with respect to the salesian apostolic community. They contribute to the witness that the community gives of unity, cohesion, fraternity, and Christ-centeredness.<sup>33</sup>

In the same context and in reply to several provincial chapters that have raised the issue,<sup>34</sup> we have to consider the important question of the apostolic dimension of the work entrusted to the brother and of his educational involvement in the school scene, avoiding the pitfall of entrusting him with only the professional training of the students.

Wherever possible it will be necessary to widen the sphere of the brother's activity, remembering that he too has to be an educator in the faith. He will thus be able to bring together in a more unified way the goals of human advancement and christian formation through his effective educational influence. His horizon will be expanded in view of the possibilities of a wider range of salesian service to the young.<sup>35</sup>

The GC21 accepts and makes its own the invitation of Pope Paul VI: "The laity can also feel themselves called, or can be called by others, to collaborate with the bishops in fostering the vital growth of the ecclesial community by exercising a wide range of ministries, according to the grace and gifts the Lord chooses to bestow upon them."<sup>36</sup> The Chapter hopes that the brother, properly prepared, will be able to exercise those ministries "not linked to sacred orders"<sup>37</sup> that the evangelizing action of the salesian community will require.

The brother therefore can qualify for all educative and pastoral assignments proper to a salesian, provided they are not connected with a service that requires priestly ordination.<sup>38</sup> This means that in a salesian community there are no zones or activities that are the exclusive preserve either of the brother or the priest, with the sole exception of those ministries and roles that are specifically priestly or lay. The specific contribution of each will consist rather in fulfilling the various salesian assignments or service roles with a style, spirit and dimension that is either lay or priestly; thus our common mission will gain both in richness and efficacy.

<sup>33</sup> Cf Const 37; ASGC 29.

<sup>34</sup> Cf Sch Precap 367-371, 400.

<sup>35</sup> Cf AWCSB pp. 338-342, 555-557.

<sup>36</sup> EN 73.

<sup>37</sup> EN 73.

<sup>38</sup> Cf Const 37.

If however we consider the nature of certain activities and the socio-cultural milieu in which they are carried out, it can be that some of them are more evident and significant signs of the brother's identity. Considering the importance and the incidence of the working classes in many countries for instance, it is clear that activities connected with this area will certainly be the most significant apostolic field of action for the brother in these regions, even if not exclusively so.<sup>39</sup>

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

But today work cannot be reduced to this concept alone. It is a new and vast phenomenon that makes all social categories interdependent and interrelated, that determines the characteristics of a special group, creates new cultural models, forges a new type of man. It is a powerful factor in the development of the total human personality. With the expression "the world of labor" we intend to refer not so much to the material aspect of work as to the quality that makes it an agent for cultural and social change.

The brother's different forms of presence in the field of labor will be significant and effective on two conditions:

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- He should never forget that he is always and everywhere a salesian educator. His main objective should be to focus the different elements of that social reality that we call "work" towards those values, individual and collective, that refer to the person of the worker, so as to open up to him the possibility of finding the full and total fulfillment of his personality in adherence to the Faith.
- He should be faithful to his identity as "a lay salesian religious." This implies many obligations:
  - He will know how to capitalize on the many positive values present in the world of labor (such as the spirit of brotherhood, solidarity, and community, combined with respect for the perso-

<sup>39</sup> Cf AWCSB pp. 322-338.

nality of the individual), and at the same time he will know how to point out the evils that threaten him (a materialistic concept of life, resistance to spiritual realities, individualism, envy, sentiments of hostility, temptation to violence).

\* He will know how to defend and promote the good of the workingman. As a religious wholly oriented towards Christ, who is the foundation and the summit of all human values, he will be able to identify the dangers that beset these values and help people to overcome them.

\* By reason of the concern that he shows and the love that he unceasingly gives to others, he will be able to bear witness to a profound and universal brotherhood that dispels all forms of egoism, exploitation, and self-interest.

\* He will reveal the Kingdom of God, already present in the world and in the history of man, and in this way proclaim the Kingdom that is to come.

Technical schools, youth centers for the working classes, christian associations of young workers are some of the valid structures within which the educational efforts of the brother can run parallel to the practical instruction he gives.

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Finally, the brother is eminently suited to inspire cooperators and past pupils who have gone into the labor market, in their human and christian formation and in their apostolic activities.

### 1.3 Some points about the spiritual life of the salesian brother

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By spiritual life we here mean a practical way of perceiving, experimenting, maturing and living christian and salesian ideals of sanctity. The brother is called to live and bear witness in the salesian community to an experience of faith and of Church with respect to his particular vocation and state of life. This too belongs to his vocational identity.

Salesian spirituality does not exist as an abstract entity, but is embodied concretely in the life of laymen, religious, and priests. The brother perceives and lives it as a lay religious, with a view to being the promoter of an apostolate that is typically lay.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Cf ASGC 744, 750.

<sup>42</sup> Cf AWCSB pp. 154-157, 186, 189-191; *Spiritualità dell'azione*, Midali, Rome 1977pp. 278-282.

In keeping with the basic principles of salesian spirituality, the brother cultivates a living and personal union with Christ, the apostle of the Father, who calls everyone to be saved. He knows that he shares Christ's preferential love for poor and abandoned children. He is aware of being God's helper, as a humble and yet necessary and efficacious instrument. He has a deep sense of belonging, to the Church and to the salesian community. In his life and in his behavior he is attuned to the person, the style, and the spirit of Don Bosco, his founder and model. He is conscious moreover that these attitudes proceed from the Holy Spirit, whom he received in baptism and confirmation. It is this same Holy Spirit that continually gives life and meaning to his particular vocation and orients it to the glory of the Father and the salvation of the young who are poor and needy.

This spiritual experience has a certain personal character and therefore cannot easily be communicated. However, it would certainly be beneficial in this regard to make a collection of examples given by brothers who have had an intense life of prayer and union with God, an extraordinary love for work, a lively sense of belonging to the Congregation, and an ardent attachment to Don Bosco.

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Here it is possible to list certain component elements of the brother's spiritual life, drawn from the whole range of his salesian experience:

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- Joy is a positive and enriching value in the religious life of the lay salesian, that contributes significantly and essentially to the identity of the Congregation. The brother regards his vocation as God's gift and his life as the joyful, free, and personal response that he makes to God; it is the *raison d'être* of his existence, his only path to personal sanctity.<sup>43</sup>
- Together with his brother priests, he lives a life of family intimacy, work, and prayer. A characteristic of his spirituality must be this experience of deep interpersonal relationship with the salesian priest. This conveys to him a vibrant sense of the Church as a family in which all of us are children of the same Father and equally responsible, albeit with differing ministries and roles that enrich and complete each other. Hence flows the awareness of his responsibility, the indispensable nature of his contribution, and at the same time the need he has of others.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Cf Const 37.4.

<sup>44</sup> Cf Const 2, 34.

- 189 — The special characteristics of “the world of labor,” often a field of apostolic activity for the brother, enable him to experience in a concrete way certain values of the salesian spirit, such as a certain practical sense, a sense of urgency, a spirit of initiative and creativity, an ability to check back periodically and to adapt himself to different circumstances.<sup>45</sup>
- The lay orientation of the brother and the type of work in which he is often involved enable him to enjoy “a new and close presence” with the young and with lay people. He can thus put into practice in a very particular way “the salesian style of relationships”: openness and cordiality, simplicity, delicate familiarity, progressive development of the social graces characteristic of lay people.<sup>46</sup>
- Generally speaking, the brother is in a position to enjoy the special trait of salesian optimism, because of his involvement in the creative world of technology and art. He is thus enabled to appreciate material values,<sup>47</sup> to admire the creative power which God entrusts to man, and to rejoice in the achievements of human science.
- 190 — The brother is a religious who has the holy ambition of transforming all his actions, from the lowest to the most brilliant, into an oblation to God, for his greater honor and glory and for his Kingdom. Thus his life is dominated by a special “filial and priestly enthusiasm, and becomes a liturgy for the sole glory of the Father.”<sup>48</sup>
- Vatican II states that religious profession enables one to conform to “the type of virginal and humble life that Christ the Lord elected for himself and that his Virgin Mother also chose.”<sup>49</sup> The same Council presents Mary to the laity as “the perfect model of their spiritual and apostolic life.”<sup>50</sup> In this context devotion to Mary most holy becomes for the brother a personal and enriching experience.
- 191 When the spiritual life of the salesian leads him, in imitation of Don Bosco, to practise charity to an heroic degree, then we can say that

<sup>45</sup> Cf Const 43.

<sup>46</sup> Cf Const 45; AA 4i, 29c.

<sup>47</sup> Cf Const 47.

<sup>48</sup> Cf Const 67, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Cf LG 46b; PC 25.

<sup>50</sup> Cf AA 4.

he has reached the summit and becomes a source of enrichment for the entire Congregation. The GC21 finds reason to believe that this gift has been granted to several salesian brothers. Each one of us knows some confrere who has attained this fullness in different places and under varied circumstances, sometimes in the most hidden and self-sacrificing ways. Many have found a place in the annals of the Congregation. Some of them, martyrs for the faith or heroes of charity, have become candidates for canonization. All these instances give further evidence of the charismatic richness found in the salesian lay vocation.

#### 1.4 Sharing the life and government of the Congregation

As a member of the Salesian Congregation the brother finds himself in a relationship of corporate responsibility arising from his special salesian vocation, in which he lives as a brother among brothers.

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The whole of salesian tradition testifies to the rich and varied contribution made by the brother to the life of the community, with instances of direct responsibility in the structures of authority at all levels:

- At the local level he assumes various roles of responsibility, both in the religious and the educational community: principal, craftsman, technical director, financial administrator... member of the council.<sup>51</sup>
- At the provincial level, he shares in all the leadership functions of the province—standing committees, secretariates, can be a member of the provincial council and a delegate to the provincial chapter.<sup>53</sup>
- At the world level, he can be a member of the General Chapter,<sup>54</sup> and form part of the Superior Council of the Congregation.<sup>55</sup>

The brother thus makes his responsible and effective contribution to the life of the community.<sup>56</sup> Living in harmony, sharing authority and responsibility according to the principles of subsidiarity and

<sup>51</sup> Const 185-189.

<sup>52</sup> Const 171-176.

<sup>53</sup> Const 179.

<sup>54</sup> Const 156.

<sup>55</sup> Const 146.

<sup>56</sup> Cf Const 34.

decentralization, he plays his part in the animation of the community's apostolate.<sup>57</sup> His authority is exercised always "in the name and in imitation of Christ, according to the spirit of Don Bosco, as a service rendered to brothers to discern and fulfil the will of the Father."<sup>58</sup>

- 193** The GC21 notes that brothers are present in a large number of local councils, and form part of about one half of the provincial councils. Their presence at the provincial chapters held in 1977 was rather sparse and very few were elected as delegates to the General Chapter. In this regard, both the World Congress of Brothers and the provincial chapters of 1977<sup>60</sup> requested that the representation of brothers in councils, and more especially chapters be assured and made more effective.

Considering the nature and finality of Provincial and of General Chapters,<sup>61</sup> the request that a realistic and significant presence of brothers be guaranteed would seem to be well founded, so that the Congregation may not be deprived of the valid contribution of lay salesian experience at a moment of reflection, evaluation and decision so important for our life and mission.

It is not here a question of ensuring the presence of a particular group or class of confreres, nor even of responding to a sociological need. We are dealing instead with a charismatic reality, to which we are not yet perhaps sufficiently sensitized. Through a significant representation of the brother at the Provincial and General Chapters, we want to ensure the presence at these assemblies of the two dimensions, priestly and lay, that make up our Congregation.

If the presence of the lay dimension is found to be very inadequate, it seems imperative to provide a remedy to the situation in the best possible way. Rather than multiply juridical norms, the GC21 thinks it best to leave the solution of this problem to the salesian sensibility of the confreres.

<sup>57</sup> Cf Const 126, 127.

<sup>58</sup> Const 125.

<sup>59</sup> AWCSB p. 552, proposal 7.

<sup>60</sup> Sch Precap 372-374.

<sup>61</sup> Const 177, 151.

### 1.5 Essential mutual relationship between the salesian brother and the salesian priest

In an opening statement we said that Don Bosco's expressed will was that our salesian communities should comprise priests and laymen. As a consequence of this the brother should be able to live his salesian vocation in its many enriching aspects that we have presented above, not in isolation, but in brotherly relationship with the salesian priest. "In our Congregation," says Father Ricceri, "the brother lives his distinctive lay characteristic in a close integrating rapport with the priestly character of the salesian priest. The lay character of the brother is not something apart and independent... It exists in a wonderful symbiosis with the priestly character of the salesian priest. In our communities both of these qualitative elements are mutually complementary and result in a unique spirituality of action that characterizes a salesian community in the Church... In the same way the priestly character does not exist alone and independent... The lay function and the priestly function are interrelated in our Congregation. We are dealing here with a special charismatic phenomenon that needs to be studied at greater depth. This is the living reality that we are thinking about; we are a community of priests and laymen that in a vital exchange share the wealth of their vocational differences and in a deep spiritual bond share a common pastoral mission directed primarily to the young and the poor."<sup>62</sup>

A relationship of this sort does not mean subordination or opposition, nor does it mean the loss or fusion of one's individuating characteristics. On the contrary, it is a mark that distinguishes our salesian apostolic communities and their members.

In this way the presence of the brother enriches the community. It reminds the priest members of the values inherent in the lay religious vocation and recalls them constantly to an active collaboration with lay people. Effectively it achieves the ideal of Don Bosco, who wanted to influence the young through a deep experience of priests working together with lay people in the same religious community. "This presence serves to remind the salesian priest... of an apostolic goal and ideal that is complex in its reality, because it goes beyond priestly and catechetical activity in the strict sense."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> AWCSB pp. 574-577.

<sup>63</sup> Fr Ricceri, Cf AWCSB p. 575.

To the young it presents the values of the lay religious vocation as an alternative to the priestly religious vocation. To those who do not feel themselves called to the religious life, it offers a more immediate model of the christian life, of sanctified work, and of the lay apostolate. It offers the community a particular type of incarnation in the world and a particular presence in the Church.

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

For the salesian community to remain faithful to its original project and for its members to develop faithfully their own characteristic physiognomy, priests and brothers must know and be deeply open with each other in the contemplation of God's gift. "Thus it will be possible to realize this wonderful exchange, in which each one remains himself but is oriented toward the other, and both toward the ones to whom we have been sent. A priest who does not regard his brother in this light, or who belittles his real presence and prophetic mission, is a priest who does not have a full grasp of his own identity. This same uneasiness should likewise disturb the conscience of the brother in his desire for brotherhood, since he has freely committed himself to a life of communion. He should be disturbed when he sees priests who do not feel themselves stirred by the presence of the Lord... and who cheapen their ministry with various forms of clericalisms, worldliness, and vain spiritual banalities."<sup>64</sup>

Regarding this mutual relationship the Rector Major, Fr. Egidio Viganò, has stated, "I believe it will be a very useful thing if the experts continue to deepen our understanding of this peculiar type of fusion and organic complementarity which exists between the ministerial priesthood and the lay consecration in our salesian life."<sup>65</sup>

The Congregation therefore must continue its reflection on the manner in which the lay and priestly dimension of the brother and the salesian priest relate to and complete each other in the internal structure of the one salesian apostolic community.

<sup>64</sup> AWCSB pp. 307-308.

<sup>65</sup> GC21: Intervention in the assembly, 24 January 1978, n. 235.

## 2. THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION AND THE SALESIAN BROTHER

Up to now we have been dealing almost exclusively with the personal vocation of the brother. Now we would like to broaden our discourse to the level of the whole Congregation. 197

From what has already been said, it is clear that the brother is an enrichment for our Society; he represents one of its essential and indispensable dimensions. The special religious vocation of a lay salesian affects the global tone of the Congregation, and together with the priestly dimension defines its identity.

The theme of the brother "touches the very nature of the Congregation. To ask what is the brother is the same thing as asking, What is the nature of the Congregation, its mission, its spirit? Because the Congregation that Don Bosco willed and founded cannot be thought of as other than an apostolic community of consecrated laymen and clerics. If you look closely, the problems of the brother are the same as the problems of the Congregation. They are our most real and most essential problems."<sup>66</sup>

The Congregation therefore must keep faithful to the charismatic nature that Don Bosco gave it. This must be not just a theoretical or doctrinal fidelity, but one that is concrete and historical. In other words, it must not merely be said that it is both clerical and lay but it must really be so, in a clear, visible manner, as demonstrated in its attitude, in its life and external manifestations. A Salesian Congregation without the presence of lay members would no longer be the Congregation willed by Don Bosco. It would become historically unfaithful, even if in its official documents it continued to proclaim that it is composed of clerics and laymen. 198

Perhaps it should also be added that when in some provinces the proportion of brothers to priests is seriously compromised, then in those places at least we no longer give a complete and exact witness of what we are charismatically.

The GC21 declares with Father Ricceri that "the rediscovery and the reactivation of the brother will indeed mean a greater fidelity to the ideal of Don Bosco and a deepening of our community reality as salesians."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Fr Ricceri, ASC 272, pp. 63-65; AWCSB p. 588, 590-591.

<sup>67</sup> ASC 272, p. 65; AWCSB p. 591.

### 3. THE SERVICE OF THE SALESIAN SUPERIOR AND THE SALESIAN BROTHER

#### 3.1 The problem

199 After a century of peaceful and universal acceptance of the tradition that in our salesian communities the one who is called upon to lead and inspire the others should possess the priestly character,<sup>68</sup> the question has now been raised in the Congregation, more in some regions than others, whether the brother may exercise the service of superior.

Several questions are raised. Why cannot the brother lead the salesian community? Cannot the salesian community fulfill the same mission even if it is animated by a brother? Why not eliminate from the Constitutions whatever savors of distinction between the brother and salesian priest?

This question arises primarily from the fact that the brotherly equality of our members does not seem to be fully achieved as long as any distinction on this point remains in our particular Code. No development of the salesian lay vocation seems attainable, and no proper presentation of this vocation to the youth of today seems possible unless and until this distinction is taken out of our Constitutions. Other considerations are drawn from a renewed sensibility and from the new position assumed by the laity in the Church, especially after Vatican II. These questions are posed with a sincere desire of interpreting "the will of our Founder for our day and age."<sup>69</sup>

It is evident that we are not dealing merely with a juridical or sociological question; nor is it a problem that arises from a consideration of religious life in general. It is question of a specific religious ecclesial problem that can be termed "salesian." It is concerned with a particular mode of life, as found in the salesian community as started and structured by Don Bosco, and lived and approved by the Church, with a view to the fulfilment of the concrete mission that the Holy Spirit entrusted to our Father and Founder.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> "It is an undeniable fact that the rector in our Congregation has always been a priest." Address of the RM, Fr E Viano, 24 Jan. 1978, n. 214.

<sup>69</sup> Cf *Contributo di Studio* to Scheme III, n. 579-592, especially 579, 580, 584; Cf also *Sch Precap* 318.

<sup>70</sup> Cf Fr Ricceri, Closing address WCSB in AWCSB pp. 576-577 n. 3.3.

### 3.2 The considerations and the deliberations of the SGC

This question was deeply felt by the SGC (1971), which had the assignment of reflecting on the identity of the Salesian Congregation, with a view to the revision of the Constitutions themselves.<sup>71</sup> Thanks to the careful preparation made it was possible to grasp the question with all its motivations and implications.<sup>72</sup>

The problem of the priesthood as a condition for the office of salesian superior was studied specifically in the treatise "Those responsible for our mission."<sup>73</sup> It was discussed in depth, because it was realized that we were touching a point that concerned the very roots of our spirit and of our salesian life, both with regard to the internal government of the community and with regard to the pastoral method proper to our mission.

The SGC concluded its study with the decision that became part of the new text of the Constitutions: "It is our tradition that the salesian community be guided in its apostolic task by a member who by his sacerdotal ordination and by his pastoral experience is able to direct it spiritually and orientate its mission."<sup>74</sup>

The postcapitular program for helping in the application of the capitular deliberations included among other things Congresses for the Brothers, for the purpose of studying the documents that referred to them,<sup>75</sup> clarifying their identity and suggesting practical applications of what was discussed in the Chapter.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.3 The World Congress of Brothers and the Provincial Chapters of 1977

The authoritative answer of the SGC did not end the question. It continued to be deeply felt in various parts of the Congregation.

The World Congress of Brothers was held in Rome (1975) in a climate of true salesian spirit.<sup>77</sup> Besides the in-depth study of several themes touching the identity of the brother, his apostolic activity, and his

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<sup>71</sup> Cf ES II; PC 2,3.

<sup>72</sup> Cf "What salesians think of their Congregation today" (1969) vol IV, Chap VI pp. 134-143.

<sup>73</sup> Cf Sch Precap 319.

<sup>74</sup> Const 35.

<sup>75</sup> Cf ASGC 763, 4b.

<sup>76</sup> Cf ASGC 184, 4a.

<sup>77</sup> Cf Address Fr Ricceri AWCSB pp. 569-571 n. 1.

formation,<sup>78</sup> there emerged the psychological question of what was them termed "juridical equality."<sup>79</sup>

In his closing address the Rector Major, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, whilst manifesting his intention to have this topic of such vast importance studied further,<sup>80</sup> declared: "The conscience of the Congregation has for the present answered this question through the formal deliberations of the SGC, during which this problem was studied in depth and an answer given through the Constitutions."<sup>81</sup>

He then emphasized the point that for an eventual change in this matter it would be necessary to determine whether we were here dealing with an essential or non-essential element of our charism. He recalled the three conditions that have to be verified when we want to shed light on this or any other point that touches on the original charism of the Congregation:

- the explicit and verifiable will of the Founder
- the relation of the particular point in question to our specific mission
- the formal pronouncement of the Church.<sup>82</sup>

**202** Accepting these criteria, it must be admitted that the studies made thus far, especially during the past few years, do not support the possibility of a change in this matter along the lines suggested.

In preparation for the GC21, a certain number of provincial chapters returned to the same argument. Some asked that we should eliminate from the Constitutions every juridical inequality between the salesian brother and the salesian priest; others confirmed the decision of the SGC; still others requested a yet deeper study of so important a problem.<sup>84</sup>

The arguments put forth, both with respect to keeping the status quo and in favor of making a change, do not make any substantial addition to the arguments already expressed by the SGC and by the World Congress of Brothers.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Cf Sch Precap n. 334-340.

<sup>79</sup> Cf Address Fr Ricceri, AWCSB p. 573 n. 3.3; Sch Precap n. 342; Cf "Proposals and motions of WCSB" n. 4, AWCSB pp. 548-551.

<sup>80</sup> Cf Address Fr Ricceri, AWCSB p. 573, n. 3.2.

<sup>81</sup> Fr Ricceri, AWCSB p. 578, n. 3.3.5.

<sup>82</sup> Cf Address Fr Ricceri, AWCSB p. 579 n. 3.3.6.

<sup>83</sup> Cf Studies presented to WCSB in AWCSB.

<sup>84</sup> Cf Sch Precap n. 47-53.

<sup>85</sup> Cf Sch Precap n. 48, 49, 51: Contribution to Scheme III (1977), n. 578-601. "The reasons available are substantially those taken into consideration already by the SGC." Ibid. 603.

### 3.4 The 21st General Chapter

The GC21, in the light of the proposals of the provincial chapters and the resolutions of the World Congress of Brothers, decided in favor of a further reflection on this topic. At the beginning of the Chapter, the Cardinal Secretary of State, in the name of Pope Paul VI, sent to the Rector Major, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, a letter "of exhortation and orientation for the Chapter members." In it Cardinal Villot refers directly to this question with the following words:

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"Finally, filled with hope at the sight of the flourishing development of the Salesian Family and its organization, the Vicar of Christ expressed the desire that the Institute may remain faithful to the essential elements that give it its identity, even with regard to the figure and function of the Rector, so that the latter, enhanced by the charism of his priestly ordination, may be able to guide with ecclesial wisdom the increasing variety of groups whose aim is to lead a committed life under the leadership and in the spirit of St. John Bosco."

The significance of this message was underlined first by the outgoing Rector Major, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, and later by the incoming Rector Major, Fr. Egidio Viganò, who said in part:

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"This letter introduced a very clear orientation for the work of our Chapter. It is an additional source of light for us to see more clearly and securely. As Father Ricceri stated in answering some questions on the subject, 'They are the words of a Father inviting us to study with serenity, with thoroughness and with fine salesian sensitivity the problems of the Chapter, particularly those which bear on the living identity of the Society. They are the words of our guide in the process of discernment in which we are all engaged in deeds and not just in words, and they are the highest and richest guarantee we have of the authentic identity of our vocation.'<sup>86</sup>

The GC21, conscious of its responsibility, has studied at length the reality of the salesian brother and has amply delineated the figure of the salesian superior, to emphasize especially the latter's role of spiritual guide of the community and the pastoral guide of our salesian mission.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Cf n. 221.

<sup>87</sup> Cf "Salesians evangelizers of the young" n. 46-57.

Therefore in an attitude of veneration and special adhesion for the successor of Peter,<sup>88</sup> the supreme Superior of our Society, and accepting his teaching with docility,<sup>89</sup> mindful also of the way of thinking of Don Bosco who said that the word of the Pope must be our Rule always and in everything,<sup>90</sup> after prayer, reflection and a sincere seeking of the Lord's will, the Chapter has decided to maintain, in accordance with the Pope's wish the salesian tradition codified by the SGC in art. 35 of the Constitutions: that the salesian community be guided in its apostolic task by a member who by his priestly ordination and by his pastoral experience is able to direct it spiritually and orientate its mission.

The GC21 entrusts all salesians with the duty of making every effort to increase their awareness of the true and deep salesian brotherhood that Don Bosco wanted to be the form and spirit of our communities.

#### 4. Practical directives

- 206** We salesians must pay special attention to the acceptance and proper assessment of the richness of the vocational identity of the brother, and its essential significance for the life and mission of the Congregation.
- a) Therefore let every province draw up an efficacious program to ensure that all confreres, priests and brothers, deepen their understanding of the true sense of the consecrated life of the brother and his specific community commitment. Retreats and on-going formation courses can be very opportune occasions for this purpose.
- 207** b) To promote an accurate knowledge of the brother within the salesian set-up, to foster his spiritual life and aid vocational work in his connection, the Department for Formation shall arrange for further study of the newer aspects of this vocation, and for the publication of biographies of salesian brothers.
- 208** c) So that the equality and diversity inherent in the identities of the salesian priest and brother may be accepted as one of the riches of the salesian community and become a reality of daily life, each salesian must both

<sup>88</sup> Cf Const 44.

<sup>89</sup> Cf Const 128.

<sup>90</sup> MB VI, 494.

accept these facts internally and manifest externally through certain basic attitudes: a root conviction about their fundamental equality and respective diversities; family spirit; fraternal co-responsibility; the joyful recognition of the mutual need of the one group for the other; complementarity and generous solidarity; the practical recognition of a proper though relative autonomy and responsibility of each group.

d) The presence of the brother in a salesian community touches deeply the identity of the Congregation itself. In the next six years the provinces must feel the urgent need of intensifying the seeking of brother vocations. Let the apostolic presence of brothers amongst young people be intensified, so that they may provide a significant and evident witness amongst the young people concerned. **209**

e) A meaningful presence of brothers in councils and chapters is primarily a service given to the salesian community of the specific charism of consecrated lay life. For this reason in proposing members for provincial councils and electing delegates to provincial chapters, the confreres should keep in mind the advantages of having also brothers present. **210**

f) In electing delegates of the province for a General Chapter, the members of the provincial chapter should keep in mind the possibility they have of choosing delegates amongst the brothers especially when the province has the right to send more than one delegate.

g) To bear faithful witness in the Church and the world to the charismatic gift received by Don Bosco the Congregation at every level must present an accurate official image of a religious community of priests and laymen, and ensure that neither figure is privileged with respect to the other. **211**

## Intervention of the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò on

### "SHARING IN THE LIFE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE CONGREGATION"

*For convenience and because of its special character, this address of the Rector Major given on 24th January 1978, is inserted here after Document 2 instead of in the Appendix.*

I feel I have *an obligation in conscience* to intervene on the theme we were asked to reflect on over the past few days, i.e. "sharing in the life and government of the Congregation," and on the letter received from the Holy Father on the subject.

The fact that I am speaking to you on the 24th of the month, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales, our Patron, is partly coincidence but not altogether so; there was also an element of personal choice.

#### 1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MY INTERVENTION

**212** I feel compelled to intervene because of the nature of the Rector Major's role, through which I have been entrusted with the clear responsibility for conducting this General Chapter (cf Const. Art. 155) and with the guidance of the Congregation for the next six years (cf Const. Art. 129ff).

I have no intention of involving either the Presidency or the Central Coordinating Committee. I assume full responsibility and am speaking as Rector Major, after prayer and reflection, after discussion and assessment with the person you appointed as my "closest collaborator" (cf Const. Art. 138), the Vicar General, Fr. Cajetan Scervo.

I am intervening with particular seriousness, therefore: I hope I shall be both clear and precise because the point at issue goes right to the roots of our salesian spirit and life-style and is directly related, in consequence, to our future renewal, to the unity of our Congregation, to the identity of its members, and to the animation of the whole salesian family.

Evidently I am speaking at a particular and well-defined moment in history i.e. the GC21 and in view of my mandate as Rector Major for the next six years; it is normal for concrete aspects of life and the realism of government to be clearly defined, but the important thing to note is that precisely at this historical juncture I feel it my duty to have recourse, simply and in this family context, to the practical exercise of the supreme ministry of unity and guidance which is proper to the Rector Major.

## 2. WHERE THE PROBLEM REALLY LIES

Allow me to go straight to the heart of the problem. We are all in complete agreement, I hope, on the importance of the salesian brother and of the need for his advancement. But strictly speaking, this is not the problem which is causing tension among us: the real issue is a different one, even though it is linked with this.

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Even before the SGC the following question was raised: *when we consider the constituent elements of the salesian project, is the service of authority substantially linked to the ministry of the priesthood or not?*

At that time the question covered the problem of authority in the Congregation at all levels (Rector, Provincial, Rector Major); today the problem area has been limited for us to that of the Rector. For the proper presentation of this argument, direct consideration must necessarily be given to the kind of authority that must animate and serve the salesian community. In the Congregation no member has the right to accede to the function of authority (in the elections of the 15th December, last month, the thought of rights never crossed my mind when I heard the names read out; I just trembled with fear). Rather it is the community which according to the particular and specific character of our Institute has the right to be served by the appropriate authority; it is the members taken together in communion who have the right to be guided and animated by a certain specific kind of authority.

Now it is an undeniable fact that the rector in our Congregation has always been a priest; it is equally clear that the rector always figured among the prime concerns of Don Bosco, of all his successors and of all the General Chapters, and was always considered of central importance.

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The problem therefore presents us with the possibility of a qualitative change in the life of the salesian community. It would be foolish to conceal or to play down this fact: before making a qualitative change, one must have a clear and in-depth knowledge of the values at issue, of the motives advanced and of the consequences that will follow, together with the relative advantages and disadvantages.

The proposal for a possible and "radical about-turn" in this field stemmed from different ways of envisaging the function of authority in the salesian community:

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- some argued that the pastoral charity of the salesian community should, on account of the constitutive elements of the salesian project, be guided and nourished by a type of authority that is enriched by the graces of the priestly ministry, a ministry which was powerfully probed by Vatican II and then given fresh relevance in the Church in reply to the signs of the times and in view of a new epoch in history;
- others however took the view that the style and activity of the salesian community must adapt to the signs of the times as seen in the process of

secularization and socialization; and in the light of Conciliar Ecclesiology of the People of God, in which context can be seen emerging for religious life the equality values of baptism, and for the Church the importance of the laity. Following this line, the kind of salesian authority needed in this new age should no longer be necessarily linked with the priestly ministry.

The arguments for both sides were already accumulated in the course of the SGC. They were of various kinds: religious-ecclesiological, socio-cultural, psychological, those that were more concerned with the future and those that were more concerned with our past salesian history. In the various discussion encounters that have followed the SGC, more or less the same arguments have been heard over and over again, without any further substantial progress but with the loss at times of serenity in dialogue.

### 3. A SPECIFIC PROBLEM OF THE "SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO"

216 It will be clear by now that we are not dealing with a "generic" problem on the theology of the priesthood or on the theology of religious life, but with a highly individuated, concrete "charismatic experience": that of the Society of St. Francis de Sales which was begun by Don Bosco in whose spirit it has grown.

It is to this solid bedrock of living reality that we must descend if our arguments are to have any validity.

What are the elements that go to make up our Institute's "own special character"? When is some specific element considered to belong "substantially" to this special character as part of the foundation core?

The adverb "substantially," excuse the parenthesis, is to be taken "technically" here, with a meaning similar to that which it bears in theology in reference to the "substance" of a sacrament, which depends more on the free determining will of the Founder than on any ideological requirements or generic abstract arguments. The issue before us is not a doctrinal problem about metaphysical values but a clear-cut practical issue which is historical and pedagogical, and which cannot be deduced in any way from the nature of things but solely from the will of the Founder who determined the shape of his particular pastoral project of pedagogy.

In religious life there are many Institutes, but each has its own constitutive project in accordance with a truly wonderful pluriformity of charisms. Indeed, the religious state is "not intermediary between the clerical and lay condition" but derives from both, as a special gift for the whole Church (LG 43); on account of this there exists in religious life a whole range of types of authority, which go from the constitutional inclusion of the priestly ministry to its non-relevance, to its impossibility and indeed even to its positive exclusion.

All this helps us to situate the problem, but does not yet resolve it.

#### 4. THE SOLUTION GIVEN BY THE SPECIAL GENERAL CHAPTER

In our case, after the issue had been raised, we had a clear statement of the official position from the SGC, which because of its nature as a "Special" General Chapter, was called upon to deal with the issue of identity in all its essential elements. (Cf Pre-Capit. Scheme 1st Comm - A,4b "Peculiar form of the Congregation of the salesian religious" pp. 109-151. These pages served as a basis for discussion and approval of the solution taken by the Chapter Members).

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The solution of the Special General Chapter is an official and authoritative answer: it was given with the knowledge, preparation, discussion, qualified approval and explicit formulation that are proper to the supreme authority of the Congregation in a Special General Chapter, entrusted by the Holy See and by all the confreres with the mandate to study and decide whether the figure and function of the rector in the Congregation, by constitutive tradition, required the functions and charisms of the priestly ministry.

The substance of the answer given by the Chapter is codified in the text of Art. 35 of the new Constitutions, in which it is stated that according to our tradition, the community must be guided by a superior whose function is enhanced by the special graces of priestly ordination.

Furthermore, the SGC planned a whole process of renewal, in which the analysis of the situation and the promotion of the figure of the salesian brother featured clearly. The ultimate expression in this programme of activities was the World Congress of Salesian Brothers.

From the beginning, prior to the SGC, the presentation of this problem was couched by many in terms of a direct connection with the promotion of the brother—as if his missing "juridical equality" were the most significant aspect of it all; the outcome was that, for various reasons (on which it would be profitable to dwell), discussions, uncertainties and research carried on. We find all of these, collected in an orderly fashion, in the Acts of the World Congress of Salesian Brothers; some of them were taken up and expanded by various provincial chapters in some proposals sent to this 21st G.C. (see Pre-Capitular Documents).

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How are we to understand, and what meaning are we to give to this persistence of the problem after the SGC?

- First of all we must acknowledge its existence, because it does represent a concrete phenomenon that has to be dealt with. We are all equally responsible for the life and vitality of our communities. We have indeed to find a common point of fraternal unity and a dimension of growth, which will help us to overcome all difficulties and to see more clearly, for the love of Don Bosco.
- Then we have to admit that objectively we are dealing with a limited situation, peculiar to well-defined areas and groups of confreres who put

forward a "proposal" without the guarantee of a solution. As one of you has already pointed out, a World Congress is not an ordinary and even less a special General Chapter. No doubt it has more than a negligible weight of indicative and research value, but one cannot attribute to it a value of solution and directive with the authority of a constitutional body.

**219** In his concluding talk to the World Congress of Salesian Brothers the Rector Major, Father Ricceri, underlined the delicate nature of this problem and stated discreetly "It seems to me that we are dealing here with something that touches the very essence of our organization as a religious community... In the presence of a possible doubt, whether or not any one element belonged to the essence of our Congregation, we could not proceed with the change only for the reason that a change is possible." If we acted otherwise, in the specific case of the rector, without grave reasons and objective proofs, "we would run the risk of renouncing an explicit choice of our Founder, with the inevitable consequence of depriving our Congregation and the whole salesian family of one of its essential values. And by doing this, we would in time make less truly salesian the members of our family and therefore the very figure of the salesian brother that we want to promote" (Acts WCSB - English Edition pp. 457-458).

**220** Where does one find the criteria to establish whether an element belongs to the essence or not of our salesian charisma? In the same talk of Fr. Ricceri, three necessary conditions are indicated:

- a) the explicit and verifiable will of the Founder;
- b) the approval and formal declaration by the Hierarchy;
- c) the harmonization of such an element with the methodology of the preventive system in the practical realization of our mission (Acts WCSB, English Edition p. 458).

In these last years various studies, more or less enlightening, have been made in this threefold direction; it is certainly possible to go even deeper into this subject, and it is desirable that more than one scholar will undertake to do so with love and expertise.

## 5. THE EXPLICIT DIRECTION OF THE POPE ON THE FIGURE OF THE RECTOR

**221** At the beginning of this 21st General Chapter, the Holy Father intervened personally with a letter sent to us by Cardinal Villot, and solemnly read on the day of the official opening of the Chapter. The Pope's direction is clear in its expression: "*The Vicar of Christ expresses the desire that the Institute may remain faithful to the essential elements that give it its identity, even with regard to the figure and function of the Rector, so that the latter, enhanced by*

*his priestly ordination, may be able to guide with ecclesial wisdom the increasing variety of groups whose aim is to lead a committed life under the leadership and in the spirit of St. John Bosco."*

Obviously this letter introduced a very clear orientation for the work of our Chapter; it is an additional source of light for us to see more clearly and securely, as Fr. Ricceri stated in answering some questions on the subject: "They are the words of a Father inviting us to study with serenity, with thoroughness and with fine salesian sensitivity, the problems of the Chapter, particularly those which bear on the living identity of the Society. They are the words of our guide in the process of discernment in which we are all engaged, in deeds and not just in words, and they are the highest and richest guarantee we have of the authentic identity of our vocation."

I would like to point out moreover that when the letter deals with the subject of the rector, to the clear and precise terms is added a more deliberate and authoritative tone; in fact the terms "Vicar of Christ" and "fidelity" precisely to "an essential element" are used.

## 6. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHAPTER

How was the Pope's intervention to be taken into account by the Chapter as far as its work was concerned?

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One proposal was that in the final Chapter Documents due prominence and importance should be given both to its specific statements and to its implications.

For the moment I confine myself to an application to the situation we have reached in our discussion of this scheme.

The Commission's line of approach was to present in the last part of its document a synthesis of the two well known positions, and a provisional text was drawn up which was intended exclusively for the Chapter members (Cf GC21 424/4.0.28). It contains the affirmation (No. 131): "The only path that can lead to a possible change is that of spiritual discernment by the assembly." Once such a discernment has been carried out by the GC21, it is for the Holy See to judge of the genuineness and proper application of our charism (LG 12, Const 151-153). For this reason it was proposed to put four preliminary questions to the assembly for decision.

The Presidency of the 4th Commission discussed with the Coordinating Committee the significance of such a concept of 'discernment' with the object of initiating a debate in the general assembly on the two opposing positions as being equally tenable and with the further intention of submitting the conclusion (if it should prove to be negative) to the Holy See for a definitive judgement.

The Co-ordinating Committee were unanimously of the opinion that if this method were to be used, the assembly should first be informed. They

thought that Cardinal Villot's letter did not call for any request on our part for further clarification, but required our immediate and complete acceptance; any other reaction would have been incomprehensible to the majority of the confreres both inside and outside the General Chapter.

The discussion continued in this sense until agreement was reached on the three preliminary questions put to the vote on Tuesday 10th January. The result of the voting indicated the path to be followed and the 4th Commission revised their text in this sense.

## 7. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE AUTHORITY TO BE GIVEN TO THE LETTER

- 223 Everyone is well aware of the great extent to which a critical and hermeneutic capacity has developed in recent years, even in the Church; within proper limits this promotes in us a more reasonable and adult life of faith, but if it is exaggerated or distorted, it leads to a destruction of vital values which are central to the christian vocation itself.

If a process of hermeneutic analysis were to lead someone to formulate some such question as: "But what is the value of a letter like this, and what kind of adhesion does it call for, prompted as it was by a very limited and confined set of circumstances?", he would at the same time have to be prepared to answer the related question: "And what specific authority does the GC21 have in connection with this problem, and what would be the genuinely salesian attitude it should adopt?" A General Chapter, clearly aware of its objectives and its limitations, cannot in fact be anything other than an expression of fidelity to Don Bosco because, as I have already said, the authority of a Chapter is indeed confined and determined by circumstances.

An official letter from the Secretariate of State, sent through the Cardinal Secretary Villot, is an authoritative statement of the Holy Father's judgement on the problem of the figure and function of the rector which was to be considered in the GC21.

- 224 The authoritative nature of this statement can be illustrated by the example of the intervention of the Pope in connection with an analogous problem in the last General Congregation of the Jesuits. On 3rd December 1974 the Secretary of State, the same Cardinal Villot, sent a letter to the Jesuit General who was presiding over their 31st General Congregation. The letter discreetly expressed the mind of the Holy Father in the following words: "It is the desire of his Holiness that you should be informed that such an innovation would seem to present difficulties grave enough to impede the necessary approbation on the part of the Holy See."

During the retreat, Fr. Luiz Gonzalez told us of what happened subsequently. When the Pope heard of the Chapter discussions and voting on the problem he had referred to, he called for an objective report on the matter.

Then on 15th February he sent a further letter to the Father General, this time signed personally by himself, in which he reaffirmed "what our Cardinal Secretary of State wrote to you under our direction on the 3rd December last: ...no innovation can be introduced." And after an assurance that he was "not influenced by any minor considerations or by a grief which is ignorant of the problems involved" but by love for the Society itself which must remain faithful to its Founder and thus produce a great increase in the fruitfulness of the ever more difficult work in the future, he went on: "With this in view, we express the doubts we are feeling because of certain attitudes and tendencies which are emerging as the Congregation continues to hold its sessions. Will the Church be able to trust the Society as it has done in the past? What will be the attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy towards the Society? How will the hierarchy be able, without fear, to entrust the Society with crucial and delicate tasks?... The times is decisive for the Society of Jesus, for its future, and also for all religious families. We are thinking of the innumerable repercussions which, God forbid, a way of proceeding contrary to what we have outlined might have on the Society itself and even on the Church."

As we know, the eventual result was positive, and on the 7th March in an allocution to the Father General and his Assistants, the Holy Father insisted once again on the importance of fidelity to the 'Formula of the Institute,' which is the guarantee of the identity of the Society and assures the fruitfulness of its apostolate.

This episode, not unlike our own in its early stages, and similar interventions with other Congregations, makes clear the objective weight the Holy See attaches to this kind of letter and to the discreet literary style in which the Pope's thought is expressed. It makes us realise too that the problem of the rector, seen by some only at the level of the promotion of the salesian brother, must be viewed against a much wider ecclesial background. A whole delicate confrontation is involved in fact between religious life and today's secularization process with its dangerous tendency to degenerate in some ways into straight secularism, with ecclesiology being eroded by sociological ideas. This fact, I think, is making it imperative for the Holy See to view certain phenomena and ideological tendencies with reserve in so far as they impair, for instance, the values of the ministerial priesthood. In judging a problem like our own, the Holy See has the advantage of a much wider outlook and more comprehensive information.

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## 8. CONFIRMATION AND NOT AN IMPOSITION

On the other hand, the Holy Father's letter certainly confirms and illumines what the supreme authority of our own Congregation had specifically laid down in the SGC. This is not a point of fact that can be passed over, but it must give an objective bias to any dispassionate reading. There have even been those who have seen in this intervention a providential gesture that

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goes a long way towards righting the disorientation felt in the Congregation by the Decree ("a thorn in the heart of Don Rua") issued by the Holy See at the beginning of the century concerning the priestly ministry of the rector. I cannot let this opportunity go by without reading together with you a confidential page written by Don Rinaldi on this delicate theme:

"I was not able to foresee how things would work out," says Don Rinaldi. "When the order was first given, Don Rua told me that Rome would most likely bear in mind all that Don Bosco had done. *The blow, to anyone who evaluated it at that time, seemed indeed a very serious one.* One had to be a superior before and after that event to understand the effects of this disposition. It was to be feared that rectors would become administrators, pure and simple. It was at that time that the practice began of situating the rector's office near the front door so that he could deal the more easily with visitors, a task previously left to the prefect. *The figure of the rector, little by little, began to undergo a change.* Despite all this, I did not think that Rome would change its mind. Seeing how delicate the step was that Don Rua was considering taking, more than once I advised against it, as it seemed most unlikely that Rome would retract the order. The move was entirely his: he wanted to write to Rome. If he remained silent, he felt he would be unfaithful to that solemn promise he made to the dying Don Bosco: that he would be the faithful guardian of all the traditions. He declared: *I cannot betray that solemn oath.* Let Rome judge and decide. We will always stand by the Church and what the Pope commands us to do. He wrote. Rome replied within a few days. Don Rua summoned the Chapter (Council) together and, first of all, read the reply: it was a formal condemnation. All the Chapter Members sat stunned. Don Rua however, having read the letter, put it aside solemnly. He was completely master of himself as if nothing had happened, whilst the Chapter Members tried to recover from the shock." (Don Filippo Rinaldi by Don Ceria SEI 1932, pp. 172-173)

**227** From this precious page taken from Don Rinaldi, we may easily deduce two things:

- that it was clear to Don Rua that it was the Founder's wish that the rector be a *father* in the priestly ministry;
- that such was the attachment to the Holy See in the spirit of Don Bosco that his first successor, in spite of a solemn promise, accepted a change in this important element when it was explicitly ordered by the Holy See.

## 9. A GENUINELY SALESIAN ATTITUDE

**228** But what is the witness, the exterior homage of reflection in faith and the specific attitude of sincere and operative conformity that the General Chapter must offer to our confreres and to the whole salesian family?

From the first days of the Chapter, I meditated personally about this question and at times discussed it with others. I feel there is need of a discovery

of a vital assumption and a global intention of what may be called "salesian hermeneutics" that precedes and directs the critical capacity and reflexive analysis; it is an attitude of virtue, a natural inclination of our own particular spirit. It was something so strongly lived by Don Bosco and we have seen it preached so often that faith in Peter's ministry is one of the columns of the salesian spiritual triad: the centrality of the Eucharist, the Marian aspect of our apostolic spirituality, and the ecclesial reality of a conscious and active adherence to the Pope.

We know that Don Bosco did not easily give way to this or that Curial Monsignor, or even to this or that individual Bishop when the very nature of his Congregation was in question. But he was eminently docile and even heroic when the explicit thought, desire or need of the Pope came into question. He considered him as the Founder because of his direct participation in the very beginnings of the Institute. Writing to Pius IX on the 1st March 1873 in fact he affirmed: "The Salesian Society which you, most Holy Father, founded, directed and consolidated by deed and advice."

Don Lemoyne, in the Apostolic Process stated that "the respect that Don Bosco had for the Pope was the result of a love that was a very part of his passionate love for Jesus Christ."

As for Don Rua, as can be seen by what I read a short while ago, we know how much the Decree of the Holy See caused him to suffer and how he reacted as a perfect salesian. I would like to read with you some of the salient points from a confidential letter of his, sent to all the rectors to communicate to them the line of action they should take:

"Up till now, according to the norms and deliberations of our General Chapters, we have tried to keep to a path best suited to our circumstances: now he who has been charged by God to teach all people, together with their teachers, has let us know that we must change our mode of acting; and we, gratefully and respectfully, with complete and willing obedience, must put into practice what has been ordered, thus imitating our good Father Don Bosco who always showed such a deep veneration and obedience to any directives whatsoever of the Holy See...

"We look upon this as a disposition of a loving Providence; that Christ himself has deigned to speak to us through his Vicar; and we will study ways and means of carrying out these orders with the utmost fidelity. The date of this Decree—the 6th July, the Octave of the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul—must remind us that it was St. Peter who, by means of his Successor Leo XIII gloriously reigning, has given us this precious document."

And then there is the episode of Don Rinaldi's unsuccessful confession: "One day, to give an example, after this new arrangement, I went to Don Rua as usual to make my confession, and had the door closed in my face" (Don Filippo Rinaldi: *Ceria* p. 172).

Of Don Ricaldone, I have heard quoted a sentence which he uttered after losing a petition he had presented to the Roman Curia, on behalf of the

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Cottolengo Institute: "Even if the Pope ever considered it his duty to suppress our Congregation, I would be entirely docile to his order." It is a paradoxical way of expressing what Don Bosco himself had said with a sense of deep faith: "If our Rules, if our Congregation were not to be a means of giving greater glory to God, I would be absolutely happy should the Lord allow such difficulties, that neither the former nor the latter could be approved" (MB VI, 72).

In this Congregation, we are sons of formidable believers: Providence urges us today to learn how to imitate them.

- 232** And so it is against this typically salesian background that we are being asked to make, both personally and in groups, a true spiritual discernment so as not to appear that we are either timid children incapable of making up our minds or of studying in depth, or the sort of critics who do not have a vital treasure to defend and develop.

Our straightforward witness—simple, virile and serenely objective in the face of a problem and wisely cognisant of the authoritative mediation of the Vicar of Christ—will have more influence on our identity, on the unity of the Congregation and the renewal of the whole salesian family than any reticence or hiding behind subtle disquisitions.

#### **10. THE WORKING PLAN FOR THE NEXT SIX YEARS**

- 233** But let us come down to something more explicit and concrete.

It seems to me that the assembly is very much in agreement about reaching a practical solution—an unequivocal and clear compliance with the wishes of the Holy Father.

It is necessary however to find a way of manifesting this attitude not only to our confreres but to the whole Church which is watching us, as Cardinal Pironio reminded us.

Ours must be a gesture that gives public testimony both to the practical spirituality that we have inherited from Don Bosco and to that mature salesian reflection to which we have been led by an adult faith inspired by our SGC.

- 234** In a special way it must be clearly shown that this GC21 is going to orientate all initiatives of animation and government at all levels over the next six years according to guidelines worked out in the light and with the help of this papal directive which, in practical terms, merely confirms what has been our praiseworthy tradition tested over the past hundred years.

This must not be undertaken on a mere juridical level but must be a practical and global undertaking in all activities of our life and apostolate. We are indeed convinced that by means of these directives of the Magisterium we have received a special grace of the Spirit which assures us of a kind of "biological infallibility," as Cardinal Journet put it; that is the

certainty that we are treading the right way of salvation and growth, without fear of being led astray down a mistaken path. Our work must be concentration on the renewal of the figure and function of the rector:

- The Congregation asks for this; cf precapitular schemes Nos. 245-247.
- The renewed salesian evangelizing presence demands it both in view of those for whom we work, and for the mutual complementarity and communion of our members (cf the theme "Salesians, evangelizers of the young" n. 1-165).
- The Pope's letter is both light and encouragement for us to do so.

If this 21st General Chapter goes down in history with no other qualification than that of being the "Chapter of the Rector," bringing him back to his original role, its influence on the future growth of the Congregation will indeed be a notable one.

## 11. WHAT OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER?

I have stated from the outset that I intended to refer directly to the problem which has brought a certain tension to the assembly. Though there are differing sentiments and thinking on the subject among us, we are all fully and totally alike in our enthusiasm and preoccupation about the salesian brother.

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I think the GC21 has achieved a good deal in the matter. The results of our work and vicissitudes seem to me especially strong:

- The Chapter has clarified *the importance and influence* of the lay component in our common educational-pastoral plan.
- It has affirmed and investigated the *complementarity* of the ministerial and lay dimension of the apostolic salesian community.
- It has measured, with the help of the Pope, the proportions of the mixture of one and the other: not a haphazard complementarity arising by chance, nor one marked by tension, but an objectively organic complementarity which signifies for all alike moving together under the pastoral leadership of one who serves the community with the gifts of a ministry which allows itself to be realised truly "in the person of Christ." (Cf PO 2)

I think it very useful that scholars continue to investigate this special organic complementarity between the ministerial priesthood and the lay quality of our consecration as salesians.

## 12. OUR PROGRAM OF ACTION

Our planning for the future, our practical directives for the next six years cannot be reduced to some sort of doctrinal research. They must lead us to commitment and action.

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The following questions touch the very heart of all our problems: How can we find ways of being truly present as salesians in the new cultural situations which are emerging? How can we truly be effective while at the same time remaining faithful to our community life style? What types of activities should we choose so as to be faithful to the original apostolic thrust of our Congregation? Where do we look for our beneficiaries, and how do we evangelize them? How should we put the preventive system into practice in our own day? How can we succeed in stirring up vocations among the young? ...We should be united in courageously facing these problems in a practical way.

- 237** During the coming six years, let us by all means strive to correct on the one hand the defects relating to the salesian brother which are linked to a cultural and ecclesiastical era which has seen its day; on the other hand, we must make every effort to avoid the very real dangers of a socio-cultural and religious outlook which is subtly out of line and man-centred. But our program must not stop there, for it could be too negative and incomplete and would tend to lead us to useless arguments and debates.

We must above all be positive and creative, though humble in our planning, as we strive for the growth of the Kingdom of God among needy youth. We find our origins, in fact, in Don Bosco's generous "practice of charity towards his neighbour." The work of the GC21 and the Message of the Holy Father contain for us three very clear objectives:

1. The preaching of the gospel to the young in our own specific salesian style. In terms of this task the Pope reminds us: "The social and ecclesiastical needs of our modern times seem to correspond more than ever to the genius of the apostolate of the sons of St. John Bosco, which caters with special interest and dedication to boys and young men."
2. The personal and communal witness of our 'sequela Christi'. This we accomplish by striving to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Constitutions of our Society, and by trying to live by them, emphasizing our religious spirit as the Pope suggests.
3. The animation of the salesian community, by stressing realistically and with careful planning what the salesian rector should be and what his main duties are. All this is to be done in agreement with our original spirit and in fidelity to what the Pope indicated in his letter.

- 238** With regard to this third objective, I should like to say that I was deeply struck by the similarity between what many confreres are saying today and what Father Rinaldi, the 3rd Successor of St. John Bosco, said 50 years ago. We consider Fr. Rinaldi as "a bridge between the first and second generation of salesians; the last Rector Major who lived on familiar terms with Don Bosco and knew his mind well" (E. Valentini, *Don Rinaldi, Maestro di pedagogia e di spiritualità salesiana*, Turin-Crocetta 1965, p. 3).

The pre-capitular documents, after enumerating the outstanding problems in terms of the animation of local communities, present among the sug-

gested solutions the topic which should receive the most emphasis. There we read:

"The ministry of animating the community (the role of the rector) could very well become one of the key points of the GC21." (p. 158 No. 246).

The text goes on to specify which aspects of the role of the rector should be clarified, and how the rectors should be prepared for their mission (cf No. 247).

Fifty years ago, in addition to what I have already quoted above, Father Rinaldi had this to say in a conference: "When the Decree of the Holy See came out... under the pretext of avoiding every possible abuse, the salesians went beyond what the Decree actually called for... My dear provincials and rectors, I beg of you in the name of the love of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to reawaken in yourselves and around you the tradition of spiritual fatherliness, which is unfortunately disappearing, with incalculable damage to the souls of the young and to our very salesian spirit" (E. Valentini, o.c. pp. 76-77).

## CONCLUSION

I said at the beginning that this date, the 24th of the month, was a happy coincidence and also a date which I chose on purpose. I wanted to speak to you under the special protection of Mary Help of Christians, and in the festive spirit occasioned by the Feast of St. Francis de Sales, upon whom, among the variety of charisms in the Church, our salesian vocation is modelled.

In 1887, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Pope Leo XIII's ordination to the priesthood, Don Bosco was invited to write an article as part of a booklet to be published in honour of the Holy Father.

Those were the last months of the life of our holy Founder. I mention this because the fact tends to give his words the force of a last will and testament.

Don Bosco wrote a brief article, describing how devoted to the Pope St. Francis de Sales was. The conclusion of this article was a fatherly and practical exhortation to his own salesians:

"It is my express wish that the members of the humble Congregation of St. Francis de Sales never depart from the loyalty which this great Saint, our Patron, had towards the Holy See. They should accept promptly, respectfully, and with simplicity of mind and heart, not only the decisions of the Pope which regard matters of doctrine or discipline, but even in matters which are open to discussion they should always accept his opinion even as a private teacher rather than accept the opinion of some theologian or teacher of the world." (M.B. 18, 277)

