



ACTS OF THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

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LETTER OF CARDINAL J. VILLOT,
SECRETARY OF STATE OF HIS HOLINESS
TO THE RECTOR MAJOR

SECRETARIATE OF STATE
No. 182803

From the Vatican.

26 April 1971.

Very Rev. Father,

The Supreme Pontiff has learnt with satisfaction that on 10 June at the new Generalate on Via della Pisana, Rome, you will begin the work of the Special General Chapter of the Congregation founded by Saint John Bosco.

For this event, so very important in the history of the Salesian Society as a sign of its perennial youthful vitality and of its desire to measure up heartily to the directives of the Holy See and of Vatican Council II, His Holiness desires to express his good wishes and assurance of prayers that the meeting of such numerous and seasoned religious who bring with them the experiences, the response and the expectations of the great family of Don Bosco scattered throughout the world, may produce the results desired by yourself, the superiors and the confreres.

The Holy Father is aware in fact that your Institute is holding the Chapter at a particularly historic moment, one full of promise but not without difficulties and crises. These latter are either external, because of the transformations taking place in the society in which we live and which make the penetration of the Christian message more difficult; or internal, because of the repercussions which these changes have had in general on the religious life as it questions itself, its purposes, its achievements, and specifically also on the great Salesian Family. In fact when one thinks of the enormous burden of the world problem of youth, to whom you dedicate your best energies, the turbulence

which possesses and agitates young people, the seeming futility attributed to traditional pedagogical methods, and the need that is widely felt and experienced for new educational techniques, one cannot help but be aware of what immense problems have to be brought to the consideration of the Council Fathers.

Whilst applauding the noble undertaking which proposes to up-date the apostolic and religious directives of the Salesians, the Supreme Pontiff at the same time stresses that the solution of the most urgent problems is to be sought above all in the conscientious study and willing application of the Council documents relative to the priestly and religious life understood as a total consecration to Christ and to the Church in the service of souls. In the case of your Congregation this will regard the special dedication to young people so as to help them to be themselves, to live their own human and Christian experience authentically, helping them to find in the friendship with the Divine Redeemer which they cultivate with loyalty and feeling, the pivot which animates their complete formation, centred in the sacramental life of the Church and in charity towards their brothers. But such a programme — which is none other than that of the founder of your religious family — cannot be fully applied without re-discovering the genuine spirit of Don Bosco which has hitherto given an indelible impression to his works and has been a most fruitful principle of good for the Church and for humanity, the directing force of every energy in the care of youth; and even today this is and remains the chief task of those who, like the Salesians, love the young and desire to preserve their strength intact in the service of the Gospel ideals, in defence of sound values pertaining to the individual, the family and society.

Whilst renewing the good wishes and advice addressed to the members of the Salesian Congregation in the recent audience of 3 April 1971 (cf. Osservatore Romano, 4 April 1971), the Vicar of Christ is pleased to express to you and to your collaborators his lively gratification and encouragement regarding the direction and stimulation which will come forth from the Chapter and the aims proposed for it. In particular the Holy Father realizes your daily anxiety and solicitude, he appreciates the fact that your work is neither easy nor restful and he wishes to assure you that at this delicate moment he is close to you with his fatherly benevolence and prayers, invoking upon you

God's almighty help through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians and of Saint John Bosco, whose solemn office you have inherited, so that heaven may not fail to protect and inspire the Family founded by him.

The Holy Father accompanies these good wishes with the auspicious Apostolic Blessing which he wholeheartedly imparts to you, to the Chapter members and to all the confreres of the Congregation.

I express my own cordial good wishes for the good work and I take this occasion to confirm my religious respect for your person.

*Yours devotedly in Our Lord,
J. Cardinal VILLOT.*

THE RECTOR MAJOR'S
OPENING ADDRESS AT THE SPECIAL GENERAL CHAPTER

My dear confreres,

It is difficult to hide the many feelings that move me deeply at this moment. There is the sentiment of joy at seeing confreres from the most diverse and distant regions all present here with the same ideal, moved by the same spirit in the name of our common Father. There is a feeling of satisfaction because your presence in this hall is a visible manifestation of the crowning act of the long and laborious plan of preparations for this Chapter. I experience too a lively and solid feeling of confidence that by the grace of God, *viribus et cordibus unitis*, we shall happily find the way to fulfil the truly exceptional mandate entrusted to us by the Congregation in compliance with the Church's desire.

Unfortunately we have to note with deep sorrow that some confreres who are particularly dear to all of us are absent from this assembly, not permitted to live with us during these days of fraternal, Salesian and constructive charity. They suffer intensely on account of this enforced absence but at the same time they find in their love for the Congregation the strength needed to transform their suffering into a holocaust of prayer for all of us and for our labours.

Together with this invaluable form of prayer they offer the Congregation the no less precious gift of their fidelity. Let me quote from a recent letter from behind the Iron Curtain:

« Believe us when we say that we never loved our vocation more than we loved it under tribulation... We assure you of our fidelity, promising our humble but fervent prayers that the General Chapter may bring about a salutary renewal and a betterment of life in the great family of Don Bosco ».

Our affectionate thoughts of admiration and gratitude go out to all these dear brethren, wherever they are and in whatever way they are restricted in exercising their rights as free men. From them too we

take warning and example regarding that fidelity to the Congregation which is all the more tangible and generous when bedewed with tears and suffering.

« **The Lord be with you!** »

Officially announcing the opening of the Special General Chapter in accordance with article 138 of our Constitutions, I can find no better and more pleasant greeting than this: « *The Lord be with you!* ». Jesus our Lord has assured us: « Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them ». I had already written those words when I thought of consulting the *Biographical Memoirs* to see what our Father said to our confreres gathered together at Lanzo on 5 September 1877 for the *First Chapter* of the Congregation. Here are his words:

« Our Divine Saviour says in the holy Gospel that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there one can find Him in the midst of them. We have no other purpose in this meeting than the greater glory of God and the good of souls redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. We can therefore be certain that Our Lord is in our midst and He will guide things in such a way that everything will redound to His greater glory ».

As you see, there is a coincidence of thought and feeling which incites us to accept and live intensely that greeting which comes not so much from myself as from our Father: « The Lord be with you! ».

Ours is an extraordinary service

Our Lord has brought us together here along the mysterious ways of His Providence. Why? The reason is a simple one.

We have been called here to render an extraordinary service to our beloved Congregation. Certainly, taking part in a General Chapter is always an exceptional task, but participating in this particular General Chapter we feel that ours is a truly extraordinary and in fact unique service. As we all know, this Chapter is quite different from all the others. It is a « special » Chapter called for by the Church, which has laid down norms, directives and standards for its preparation and realisation. Moreover, the Church has also clearly indicated its purposes and objectives. Following in our Father's footsteps we are fundamentally

committed to the faithful carrying out of the Church's desire.

The preparation has been extraordinary: it went on for three years; the extent of consultation was vast so as to get to know the mind of all the confreres in the Congregation concerning its numerous problems; vast too the participation and study contribution of individual confreres, groups and communities; the two Provincial Chapters (as also this General Chapter itself) had an increased number of members. But that is not all.

It is only right to mention the excellent work done at the two Provincial Chapters and by their respective study-commissions in an atmosphere of liberty, respect and dialogue, as also the intelligent, patient, generous and self-sacrificing work accomplished by the various Central Commissions. I would like particularly to mention also the general gratitude of all towards those splendid confreres who worked indefatigably for several months at Villa Tuscolana, near Rome. In an atmosphere of Salesian brotherliness and exemplary community prayer they dedicated themselves to the truly exceptional and laborious task of patiently drawing up the basic or guide-line documents you have already received. To them and to all those who, in whatever mode or measure, have given their contribution to the preparatory work, and to Fr. Scrivo, the Regulator, who animated and coordinated all this immense labour, we extend our own thanks and those of the whole Congregation for the invaluable service rendered.

The venue

Speaking of the special preparations involved, we cannot pass over in silence the technical matter of the buildings. After the XIX General Chapter decided that the Generalate be transferred to Rome, the possibility of its being used for General Chapters was gone into. However, to accomodate two hundred and fifty or more people and provide all the necessary services was no simple matter. The solution seemed to be to have two places: the Generalate and a house for retreats and meetings. With an act of trust in Providence the work was begun.

It must be confessed that more than once we had cause to worry. Unforeseen obstacles and difficulties arose which hampered the timely completion of the buildings and equipment needed for the Chapter members and for the functioning of the whole organizing complex of

the Chapter itself. We can say in fact that quite a record has been set in that, notwithstanding numerous and huge difficulties, at least the essential services are now ready in the twofold complex of the Generalate and the adjoining house for retreats and meetings. I am sure I voice your feelings in here expressing a well-merited vote of thanks to our Economer General, Fr. Pilla, who allowed himself no rest in battling against obstacles of every kind, determined to overcome them at any cost. Our thanks also to his immediate and valuable collaborators.

True, not everything is as yet perfect in either the Generalate or the other house but your spirit of understanding, adaptation and sacrifice will know how to make up for whatever is lacking.

Our fundamental and special task

This being stated, it is extremely important that we all be fully conscious of the mandate confided to us by the Church and the Congregation.

The basic task of each Chapter member is this: we have been called here as legislators for the whole Congregation, with the mandate to search for and find what is best for the common good of the Society as a whole. The duty is incumbent upon each of us to secure that common good, if necessary by sacrificing our own particular interests. This, it seems to me, is the spirit that should animate each capitular legislator who respects this absorbing mandate of universal character.

The scope of this Chapter makes it something really special because, as you know, its purpose is to actuate an « appropriate renewal » adapted to the religious life of our Congregation. Those two words contain an enormous programme involving huge and complex problems which we are called upon to study and resolve. It is enough to read article 3 of *Perfectae Caritatis* to see how vast and even universal is the scope given to the General Chapter in the matter of renewal:

« The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted to the physical and psychological condition of today's religious and also, to the extent required by the nature of each community, to the needs of the apostolate, the requirements of a given culture, the social and economic circumstances anywhere, but especially in missionary territories.

« The way in which communities are governed should also be re-examined in the light of these same standards.

« For this reason constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies, and similar compilations are to be suitably revised and brought into harmony with the documents of this sacred Synod. This task will require the suppression of outmoded regulations » (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 3).

That compendious enumeration alone could, as experience has shown, give rise to a certain reaction: Must everything be changed? Must nothing of our past remain? It is wise then to go back to the substantial root meaning of the word « renewal » itself. It is not a matter of destroying the Congregation or substituting it by another, nor does it demand a new foundation. We are not here to form a new Congregation, for we have neither the charism nor the mandate to do so. It is the same identical Congregation that is called upon to reanimate itself whilst remaining essentially what Don Bosco wished it to be according to heavenly inspiration and as it has developed along the lines of sound tradition.

It is question here of the delicate operation of rejuvenation. Precisely on account of this it requires extreme attention and maximum respect since a scalpel must be applied to the actual living body which has generated us. Those who gird themselves to undertake this operation must, as it were, put on new clothes and be imbued with the charismatic spirit of our Father. Let us at least undertake this task with a delicacy composed especially of humility and deep respect, filially intent on interpreting the mind of our Father without falling into the temptation of substituting ourselves for him.

Duce Ecclesia! We shall tread on solid ground by relying constantly on the Church's guidance, for she offers all those helps that facilitate the clarification of our mandate as legislators of the renewal of the Congregation.

A secure guide in the magisterium

The first help it provides is simultaneously a guarantee of well-founded work. This is to be found in the conciliar and postconciliar documents and then in the papal and hierarchical magisterium. For the rest, the Church itself in calling for the renewal of religious insti-

tutes clearly points out that this must be inspired by the Council, the whole Council as understood and represented by the words of Paul VI: « a spirit that is at once renovating and innovating ». Needless to say, among the conciliar and postconciliar documents we should primarily give constant and deep attention to those that concern us directly. However, it is obvious that we should not restrict our continuous attention merely to those statements. Through its documents we must be aware of the whole Council as completed especially by the Pontifical Magisterium which has in recent years been rich in its teachings and in its constant up-to-date recommendations, especially regarding renewal. It would be a grave sin of omission and a sign of infidelity to our Father, who was so filially attentive to the words of the pope, were we to ignore that authoritative and magisterial word which includes all the interesting and renovating literature dealing with the renewal of the religious life on authentic conciliar lines.

As Chapter members we shall also find an indispensable help in Salesian literature. I appreciate that there will not be time for everything but still we should be able to read up on so many essentially Salesian matters. We cannot take up definite positions on even basic problems without such good support. To this end the programme of work will certainly be organized in such a way as to allow at least a minimum of time for such necessary study.

We are dealing with God's affairs

At this stage I feel it is necessary that we should once more take deep and clear cognizance of our task, for from this there will flow consequences that are essential to the success of the enterprise in which we are engaged.

Dear confreres, I do not presume to posture as a master before you but the heavy responsibility imposed on my shoulders as the successor of Don Bosco obliges me to recall first to myself and then to you the words of the Apostle: *Videte quod tractatis* — « Pay heed to what you are doing ».

Ours is not a gathering of shareholders in a firm; it is not a political assembly with contrasting economic interests, prestige and ambitions. Here we are the Church, or better an assembly of consecrated men, re-united in God's name, vowed totally to a supernatural ideal; we

feel we are men of faith whose concerns are deeply rooted in that faith and whose activities, including those of the here and now, are fully enlightened, animated and motivated by faith.

We are not here because of any mere human concerns; ours are the interests of God, of His Kingdom, of His Church. We are here primarily concerned with the souls of our confreres and those confided to our care. Even if we have to discuss questions of organization and economy, this will be only in so far as they are necessary instruments in our mission. All the sociological, statistical, historical and philosophical sciences which we make use of are merely utensils in carrying out the mission to which we are consecrated — a spiritual, supernatural mission. If we do actually realize that we are here to treat of God's affairs, of souls, then we shall not need to convince ourselves that all the many human means which we can put to use will be of little value in fulfilling our mandate if we are not on God's wavelength — more explicitly, on a supernatural level and outlook.

Renewal and holiness

Certain obvious and useful considerations follow upon this. Regarding the General Chapter the word « renewal » has suffered much abuse. However, not even the most perfect plan of renewal would be successful if it were not to be set in motion in the actual life of the individual members. This actual living of all the valuable implications of renewal has a name: holiness. It must be clearly stated that as consecrated people our specific and professional vocation is and always will be to aim at sanctity more earnestly than the ordinary baptized Christian. The Church, the Council and the postconciliar period have all reminded us of this fact.

But our own Don Bosco did not weary in repeating the same fact to our predecessors. In a circular letter on 9 June 1867 he wrote firmly: « The first object of our Society is the sanctification of its members. Let each one impress this well on his mind and heart, starting with the Superior General and right down to the last member: no one is necessary in the Society; God alone is the Head and the absolutely necessary Master » (*Ceria, Epistolario di S. G. Bosco, Letter 559*).

The very foundation of our Congregation demonstrates the need

and desire for this deep renewal summed up in the word « holiness ». Straight off then let us ask ourselves with extreme honesty and a sense of responsibility: How does the Salesian of today respond to this categoric commitment and need? How can he be faithful to this engagement in the new situation and climate created in the world in which he has to live and work today? Does our Salesian entity, as it exists and functions today, succeed in giving each confrere that supernatural status of which he has absolute need? How can we succeed in producing and in communicating the genuine apostolic vitality which in the past so stimulated the Salesian? Is our Salesian organism suffering from a certain lassitude? It is true that one notices in communities a certain attitude and mentality tending towards a worldly, secularized and materialistic life, towards a christianity that is « easy, without sacrifices, without duties, without renunciation, without superiors, without pain » — all of this alien in word and deed to the demands of a consecrated and Salesian life. What are the reasons, all the reasons, for such a situation? And then let us ask ourselves if the ways and means offered by the Congregation to the Salesian today to help him towards holiness are proving adequate to the new situations of our times. How are they being utilized? Is it not perhaps necessary to substitute them with other efficacious resources still inspired towards great zeal for sanctity and perfection?

Truly Salesian renewal

The same questions should be asked regarding apostolate, authentic apostolate primarily among the young and especially among the poor, the needy and abandoned. In his message to our Chapter the Holy Father reminds us of this authoritatively, saying: « When one thinks of the enormous burden of the world problem of youth, the turbulence which possesses and agitates them, the seeming futility attributed to traditional pedagogical methods, and the need that is widely felt and experienced for new educational techniques, one cannot help being aware of the immense problems that have to be brought to the consideration of the Chapter Fathers... ».

The Provincial Chapters showed that these very elemental and basic problems are to be found in a wide variety of shades in the whole Congregation.

I repeat, the Congregation must and wants to recondition itself, above all in its religious, spiritual and apostolic life — and you understand what a range of values is contained in these words. But I would like to add at once that such values must be renewed on Salesian lines and for the Salesian himself, taking into account his spirit, his mission and his particular make-up (which is different from that of the Little Brothers of Jesus, the Jesuits, Opus Dei, etc.). Let us be realistic then, neither closing our eyes to our deficiencies and weak points nor lingering upon them except to eliminate them.

« *Recta sapere* »

Such being our problems, it is not merely evident but absolutely necessary that we unite our hearts in prayer as the Apostles did in the Cenacle.

As the Special General Chapter drew near, all sections of our multiple family felt more intensely committed to prayer, convinced of the absolute need of divine help. From all over the world I have received assurances and evidence of this immense chorus of prayer and I have in mind especially those souls who have offered up to God not only their sufferings but even their very lives. Grateful for such charity, we today feel comforted and full of hope. But obviously we cannot delegate to others our own duty of prayer consequent upon the special responsibilities awaiting us.

The philosopher Peter Wust at the end of his life left his disciples this message: « With absolute certainty I have discovered the key, the magic key of Wisdom: it is prayer ». At our present great task we too require the wisdom that comes from God, and therefore all the greater is our need for the key of prayer.

Our Lord has said: « The Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who pray ». And what is the Holy Spirit if not the infinite Wisdom of God? Let us therefore have recourse to Him day by day so that, enriched by His wisdom, we may understand aright (*recta sapere*), i.e. see clearly in order to judge wisely and hence come to right decisions. We have besides the good fortune of living these extraordinary days together and our community encounter with God will unite us even more than our work, for Our Lord has assured us that our prayer will thus be tremendously enriched and exalted.

But there is even more: each day we shall be united around the eucharistic table. For us it will not be just a more or less meaningful drama but rather the re-living of the mystery of Holy Thursday with the same faith as the disciples. United with, in and through Christ, nourished by the same food and drink, we shall feel encompassed by His solidarity. Having brought our problems and doubts and our daily life to the eucharistic table we shall take away from it that strength and health (*robur et auxilium*) which we so greatly need.

But even our personal and community prayer and the Eucharist itself would be hampered in their divine effect were we to present ourselves to God without that humility which is the *sine qua non* for the reception of His grace: *Resistit superbis, humilibus dat gratiam*, says Our Lord.

Humility: premise for construction

Precisely because we are convinced of this law of humility, we must be careful in defending ourselves against the *ego* of self-love which is ever prompt to nudge other things aside, camouflaging itself eloquently and persuasively.

Speaking to bishops, cardinals and to the Pope himself on retreat, Fr. Voillaume in commenting on the words of Jesus, « Unless you receive the kingdom of God as a little child, you will not enter therein », explained that those words implied complete humility of intellect and poverty of heart. And that is precisely the attitude and spirit which each of us must bring to the Chapter.

It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that dialogue, which is so important and irreplaceable for the efficacious study of problems, is founded above all on humility and hence on respect for one another and on mutual trust. It will be fruitful if no one considers himself omniscient or to have a monopoly of truth, and it cannot consist in expecting the unconditional surrender of the other side. This implies therefore that the mind of each one should be charitably disposed not merely to hear but above all to listen to the others.

Still on the subject of humility, I would like to add another word: with our own personal humility let us also bring to the Chapter what we may call a collective or collegial humility. On account of his approaching Beatification it gives me great pleasure to quote Don Rua,

who wrote thus to the Salesians in a circular letter dated 29 January 1894: « It is certain that when we examine the actual state of our Pious Society we shall easily perceive many imperfections, but God permits this so as to keep us in holy humility ». One can hardly say that Don Rua was a triumphalist!

But what of ourselves? With that « holy humility » we must be loyal and frank in recognizing the deficiencies, infidelities and miseries to be found in the Congregation, shunning the pre-conceived and basically proud notions of those who do not wish to face up to less pleasant realities. This does not mean that we are to set ourselves up as judges to condemn the men and concerns of the Congregation. Rather it should mean for all of us an examination of conscience prompted by our love for the Society which we desire to be *sine macula et sine ruga*.

Fidelity

I would say that fidelity is consequent upon the humility which ought to guide our activities in the Chapter. It urges us to raise our minds to, or better still to adhere with firm and unhesitant confidence to what is important: God, the Church, the Congregation. In doing so we must renounce our own selves, our own affairs, our own views.

This word « fidelity » is going to recur frequently in our Chapter work, just as it did in the preparatory documents. « Fidelity », it has been written, « is the endeavour to keep contact with the rock from which we have sprung forth, simultaneously as we strive to reach the goal we are aiming at ». Fidelity therefore is the continual re-discovery of the profound and inseparable link that unites these two pivots. Fidelity means penetration beyond the smoky veil of superficiality into the very *raison d'être* of what we accept and profess. Briefly, it is a law of life. The meaning of fidelity therefore must not be confused with customary practice or immobility, for it demands a restraining attitude of awareness that is animated by the light of experience.

It is important that each of us here persuade himself that in times of renewal such as we are living and working in, fidelity is an essentially positive and dynamic attitude. It is not and must not become a mere passive acquiescence to whatever has been inherited or has become part of our patrimony, but rather it should be an active care

to use it and bring it to maximum expansion. Fidelity is in no way related to jealous immobility or timid traditionalism; rather it is intertwined with activity, reflection and meditation. Basically, fidelity is the expression of love (in our case love for Don Bosco and the Congregation), a true love that is intelligent and genuine and which is anxious that the person or thing loved should not become a mere archeological specimen but rather remain itself, vigorous with a life that is active, dynamic and fruitful.

But we must also convince ourselves that fidelity cannot have any connection either with a certain type of inadvisable progressivism which desires novelty for novelty's sake; which unconsciously leads to confusion; which credits and accepts every hypothesis as proven or provable; which, in the name of open-mindedness empties and laicizes both the Salesian and his mission.

Having said that, I appreciate that in practice discussion is always something very delicate, just as the positive situations to which these principles must be applied are likewise delicate and complex. But precisely on that account we must go ahead with a great sense of responsibility so as to avoid extremes at either end.

One sole heart

Dear sons, at the beginning of my talk I invited you to make of our fine big family here a cenacle that is alive and active, but it cannot be such without that fervent brotherly charity which constitutes its soul. The principal nourishing source of our fraternity will certainly be the eucharistic celebration diligently and fruitfully lived. But many other spiritual and even human elements will contribute towards keeping alive amongst us the atmosphere of that charity which unites hearts in understanding, forbearance, collaboration and joy.

We have one specific and particularly interesting motive for making all of us constructors of our cenacle of charity. In a book on renewal I read these unforgettable words which come from a person of vast experience of religious life and of General Chapters: « Renewal cannot be accomplished without charity. Renewal in fact signifies greater love and then better structures so as to give impulse to this greater love ». How greatly misguided are those who think that love for reform justifies the violation of charity.

We believe in charity and wish to adhere to it in its fullest sense even though we hail from every corner of the world and belong to so many different cultures, civilizations and customs. Our age-range is rather wide, our ideas and points of view will not always coincide, but all this can be overcome by our spirit of brotherliness. Not for nothing do we say and feel that we are sons of the same Father.

Unity through combined strength

The most precious and coveted fruit of our cenacle of charity will be the fulfilment of Christ's prayerful testament: *Ut unum sint*, words that have re-echoed from our Father's lips since the very origin of the Congregation. Hardly had Don Bosco received from Rome in 1869 the longed for approbation of the Congregation than he called our first confreres together and held a long conference on the theme *Vivere in unum*, enlarging on the many motives and aspects of living as one (*M.B.*, IX, p. 571 seq.). Here and now I feel I must repeat the grave words of our Father: Let us live and work with a will towards unity — let us create a true communion of hearts.

I realise that we each carry in our hearts the disturbances, tensions, entreaties, the impatience and the numerous aspects of crisis that are upsetting the Church and human society and our own Congregation. As I said before, we bring with us here a combination of causes, mentalities, sensibilities and worries that are often quite diverse. But our very diversity will prove a providential asset if we act on the higher level of truly genuine communion.

Nevertheless no one should think of, still less desire, a preconceived, we might almost say a prefabricated unity, an artificial unanimity worth nothing. Let us rather consider and aim at a unity that is secure because it is sincerely desired, sought after and even gained by suffering — and I say this deliberately. On opening the great Catholic Synod of Federal Germany Cardinal Doepfner appealed for unity, quoting the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: « Be zealous in preserving the unity given by the Spirit ». But he also pointed out that just before that the Apostle had invited those Christians to bear with one another in fraternal love, to accept one another. « Those words », said the Cardinal, « presuppose conflicts, divergence of ideas, controversies,

points of friction ». As we know, all that is in the ordinary run of things, which would not be normal otherwise.

But if we are animated by true and positive fraternal love, and especially by a pure and sincere love for Don Bosco and the Congregation, the mutual toil and suffering in search of truth will make us accept one another and find a point of contact and identification even in such great problems; together then we shall seek for the best solution, which will be the happy outcome of the integration of the diverse and invaluable energies present at this Chapter.

Courage and confidence

Dear Chapter members, I trust you will forgive this long discourse. I hope that its length has not been detrimental to the utility of the things I have said with brotherly heart for the sole purpose of doing my own dutiful service to our common Mother, the Congregation.

And now, to work — with courage and confidence! In a spirit free from all triumphalism or over-simplification let us confront the problems that await us. Let there be no fear in facing up to those problems, mountainous though they may seem, nor let there be any discouragement or pessimistic defeatism. Our Chapter should proceed along the lines of realism and courage. But what kind of courage? Let it be the fearlessness which is a virtue, the virtue of the strong and wise, that true fortitude which cannot be separated from wisdom. The result therefore of fortitude and wisdom happily united, this courage cannot be confused with the blustering rashness that rushes into the unknown. Ours then must be above all the courage of strong men who think before venturing. But there is more to it than that. We feel that Our Lord's words to the apostles apply also to us: « Fear not, it is I! » And let us remember, as Fr. de Foucauld wrote, that « Jesus is master of the impossible », with command over people and things, one who gives to those who abandon themselves to Him a sense of security and peace amidst the waves. « Let nothing disturb you! ».

Reason for trust

Rightly too have I recommended confidence. We have many and strong forces in the Congregation, in all categories, at all levels, of

all ages, in every corner of the earth. You become aware of this when you get to know the Congregation, the whole Congregation in all its component parts.

I would like especially to point out that in the Congregation we have a section of youth with ideas, attitudes, needs and sensibilities which are often very different from those of the preceding generations. Sometimes youth is the victim of insecurity, of an exasperated and problematic situation, of a secularism which obscures or wipes out the supernatural. Nevertheless among these young people there are also some elements which are splendid in every way: they live their consecration with generosity, they sincerely love Don Bosco and the Congregation even though they see the defects and inefficiencies; they are ready to give themselves to the point of sacrifice; they have a solid and convinced piety; they are our hopes for the Congregation of tomorrow. Let me continue.

The Church has confidence in our Congregation, a trust that emanates from one who knows us on what we might call a universal plane, a confidence that sometimes makes me almost afraid. In the last audience granted me, once again Paul VI used expressions that embarrassed me when I thought of our many deficiencies, but he wanted to confirm his own great confidence and that of the Church in our Congregation.

When I speak to the Generals of other orders and congregations I am able to re-assess that judgment in the light of reality, including all those deficiencies that we must not ignore or underestimate. Among other things I can see that we are all struggling with very similar difficulties. But we Salesians still have reasons for confidence that are both familiar and altogether special. Perhaps the fact is unique that in the origins of our Congregation there is an unquestionably exceptional supernatural presence. Speaking of the Congregation, its birth and development, Don Bosco said verbatim: « One can say that there has been nothing that was not known beforehand. I took no step in the Congregation until some supernatural fact counselled it; no change or improvement or obstacle occurred which was not preceded by an order from Our Lord. From this fact I think it well not to consider the man... What does it matter to me if people speak well or badly about this? What do I care when men judge me in one way or another?

All that is necessary is that the works of the Lord be made manifest! » (*M.B. XII*, p. 69).

The following impressive statement by Don Bosco will therefore cause no surprise: « Among all the religious congregations and orders perhaps ours has more of the word of God » (*M.B. XVI*, p. 305).

That being so, how can we possibly suspect that God will forsake the Congregation at the very moment it is being called to renewal by the Church and therefore by Don Bosco, that He will leave it without that presence of inspiration and guidance which He gave it so generously at its origin? We have every right to count upon God's help: *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini!*

Mary our guide

We must seek to deserve that help but we shall secure it more easily through the Virgin Help of Christians. In the life and mission of Don Bosco, even if for different reasons, two figures are inseparable: youth and Mary. On the morning of the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1887 Don Bosco seemed to be looking back upon the difficult pathway of his life. Then he said to his deeply moved Salesians: « We have walked securely: we cannot go wrong. It is Mary who guides us! » (*M.B. XVII*, p. 439). Don Bosco repeated this truth frequently, for it was confirmed over and over again: « Mary was always my guide! ».

If that was so for our Father, surely Mary will be a guide to us also who, in unconditional fidelity to Don Bosco, wish to work during these months so that the Congregation may emerge from this Chapter *qualis esse debet*.

With unlimited trust in our Father and in Mary, with all the fervour of the apostles in the Upper Room, let us gather about her as we repeat with filial and humble hearts: « O Mary, you were our Father's secure guide at the birth and development of our Family. Be so to us also who are aware of our weakness and insecurity as we tread the path traced out by Providence to bring our beloved Congregation to that true and faithful renewal which will be for it the revival of spring! ».

PRESENTATION OF THE « REPORT ON THE GENERAL STATE OF THE CONGREGATION »

Dear Chapter Members,

I am here to fulfil the mandate of the XIX General Chapter which, in article 31 of its regulations, stated: « At one of the first meetings of the Chapter the Rector Major will give a general report on the state of the Congregation ».

As this is something new, I have tried to find the best way to reply to and interpret the wish of the XIX General Chapter. I say « interpret » because obviously a report on « the state of the Congregation » could take on various forms unless otherwise clearly indicated. Because of this difficulty and in my anxiety to make it beneficial to all I have made use of the collaboration of the Superior Council.

Collaboration of the Superior Council

It is here opportune to state that we have always worked collegially and with obvious results and benefits — and this applies not only to the present report but to all other problems of note. I am in fact more than ever convinced that today especially it is possible to confront problems usefully and resolve them adequately simply by getting together in a free, serene and respectful confrontation of the different angles, points of view, and assessments. I have always noticed that such exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of total freedom and yet mutual respect and esteem always leads to the best solution possible at which the Superior could arrive.

And it is precisely this method, clearly indicated and encouraged by Vatican II and by our XIX General Chapter, that I have sought to follow with the cordial, fraternal and constructive collaboration of all the members of the Council. And here I believe it to be my special and pleasant duty before this solemn assembly to acknowledge this fruitful work accomplished about me by the members of the Superior

Council. I think I can say that we have always worked in unity of aim in order to serve the Congregation in its true interests and in particular to carry out the inspiring deliberations of General Chapter XIX and to infuse and circulate its spirit of renewal in the Congregation.

As you will notice from the reading of this report, this task, begun and carried on immediately after the Chapter, met with difficulties of various kinds. One of the problems was this: whilst a start was being made to actuate the deliberations of General Chapter XIX there was already abroad what someone has called the postconciliar wind. In fact the Congregation found itself as it were in the eye of the cyclone right at the very moment in which it had put in motion the apparatus destined to render operative General Chapter XIX which was already in a position to benefit by many points of Council documents.

This coincidence, it is well to recall, has had quite considerable repercussions and consequences, aggravated by the fact that simultaneously we had to mobilize and convoy our forces for almost three years in preparing for the Special General Chapter willed by *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. Certainly it has been a great benefit besides a duty to the Church and the Congregation, but one cannot deny that through force of those circumstances quite a few deliberations and directives of the XIX General Chapter could not be carried out.

Characteristics of the report

Returning to the report presented, as I have said it is the fruit of the combined work of all the members of the Council. They first gave suggestions and ideas for its presentation and then, each according to his own competence, all the first-hand information at their disposal on the various points dealt with. The report was then collegially re-examined and discussed, re-drafted and finally coordinated by the Rector Major according to the remarks and observations received.

In spite of this work the report has no pretence to be perfect and exhaustive. Apart from the difficulty and uncertainty deriving from the fact that this is the first time such a document is being presented, it has to be stated that big difficulties of various kinds arose. Let us mention just one.

The Congregation is a living and composite reality, with situation differences which are often considerable. From this fact arises the problem of presenting a report which, without wasting time in a detailed analysis, will give a faithful image of the actual state of the Congregation. However, I feel that in spite of its deficiencies and limitations, not only is this report an act of obedience to General Chapter XIX but it can also offer us a kind of thumbnail sketch of the Society. The Special Provincial Chapters had at hand a similar compendium of the mind of the Congregation.

In spite of its limitations this report can be called a radiograph of what the Congregation is actually doing and how it is acting in the various sectors of its life. I have used the word « radiograph » but perhaps it is inexact, for it does not present even a panoramic photograph of the Congregation. A photograph is essentially static, capturing just one moment of reality. This report which I offer to your attention is instead something forceful. It does not try so much to pin down the actual state of the Society today as rather to show in forceful perspective how it has arrived at its actual state during the evolution of these past six years.

Besides being expressive the report is a summary, at least relatively. As you will notice, however, precisely because it is a summary its one hundred condensed pages are combined with statistics presented in a special leaflet. These, correctly read and interpreted, serve to give an up-to-date and documented panoramic view of the Congregation in all the essential aspects of its life. Particular aspects and details of the life of the Society are illustrated and, when occasion offers, will be developed gradually as the Chapter comes to deal with each specific subject.

To conclude this preface which I have considered necessary, I think and hope that the report which the Rector Major presents to you in the name of the Superior Council will, among other things, facilitate your work in so far as it offers you not merely a sectional view of the life of the Congregation but one which is general or at least very wide, even if not quite complete, and at the same time one that is up-to-date within the bounds of possibility. From it you can realize the type of soil that is going to receive the seed, the very real situations that prevail, and the expectations of those to whom you will have to present the deliberations of this Chapter.

Centre of the Congregation's interest

The report has a certain sequence and consequently follows a line corresponding to the rich directives emanating from General Chapter XIX.

One of the most significant, most productive and most binding norms given us by that Chapter was that the Salesian is at the very centre of the Congregation's interest. In placing the Salesian at the centre it obviously intended to make him more Salesian, a better Salesian; it aimed at raising him in his entire being as a baptized person, as someone consecrated, as an apostle, as one specifically dedicated to continue the mission of Don Bosco in his spirit and with his style of doing things.

Actually the Congregation is not its works but its Salesians; the Society is active and fruitful only in so far as each Salesian responds to the ideal which the Church and the Congregation places before him.

Although such a view, responding as it does to heartfelt and very valid aspirations in the Congregation, has found some response and development, it cannot be denied that it has fallen short of our expectations. This is not the time to make a profound and detailed diagnosis of the truly complicated causes which are also connected with situations extraneous to the Society and which have limited the energetic actualization of this vital directive of the Salesian as the centre of the Congregation's interest. What one can say however, with humble and serene sincerity, is that some progress has been made in this direction.

The report, even though it may not clearly seem so, does actually accompany and present the aspects and events in the life of the Salesian, a life of consecration, of prayer, of fraternal and practical living together, of apostolate.

Stages of formation

The Salesian at profession is not automatically the finished product. Hence we have successive periods of formation with all that that implies. But if it is true that there is a time-period dedicated specifically to formation, it is no less true that even after such a time there remains

in all the need and hence the obligation of what is today called « ceaseless formation ». The experience gained at the so-called Second Novitiate course for thirty priests at Caracas proved completely the vital importance of this « ceaseless formation ».

The report touches on all the stages of formation which concern the life and future of the Congregation in the light of the experiences of these difficult times, which for a variety of well-known reasons have placed before the Congregation and particularly before those responsible for formation at all its stages, new, complex and urgent problems without end. The present phenomenon, with diverse and even notable gradations throughout the world, has acute and sometimes grave stresses in certain regions. The report seeks as realistically as possible to give a picture of the situation. But as I have already said, one must keep in mind the often notable diversity of situational circumstances to be met with in the Congregation.

In my opinion, in dealing with the theme of formation in the light of our own experience and that of others, especially in recent years, we must completely review the whole cycle of Salesian formation right from the very first sign of a vocation until the attainment of its essential aims, together with its continuous nourishment and renewal. The errors of the past, even the recent past, should help us correct these mistakes with the necessary courage and a healthy realism in order to forge new paths that will help the Salesian of our times to live his vocation authentically, with strong conviction, in detail and fruitfully.

Still dealing with formation, in the report you will find a section treating of the problems of the P.A.S. Reading those pages you will realize at once that the subject is of special importance. Representing as it does the whole Congregation, the Chapter must not only get a responsible view of the situation but it must study at least in broad outline the solution of the problems posed. I feel that in the light of experience this major assembly of the Congregation will have to indicate responsibly what the Society expects and demands from the P.A.S., what directives it intends to give so that the very grave sacrifices being made by the Congregation for the support of the life of the P.A.S. may produce adequate results that are not only intellectually and culturally sound but at the same time apostolically Salesian.

Crisis of vocations

The sad subject of the vocations crisis will be found treated with abundant data in the report. It deals not only with the diminution of the flow of new vocations but also with the sad phenomenon of those who leave the Congregation at various stages.

It is always painful to see confreres leaving us, but more so when it concerns those who are mature in age, perpetually professed or priests. We deal here with a phenomenon afflicting both male and female religious orders and congregations and the whole Church. Perhaps not all are aware that, according to the figures we have received, our Congregation, although it has suffered acute losses in the last three years, has nevertheless one of the lowest percentages of loss on the statistical scale of the large male congregations.

A point that has notable influence in determining our situation is the fact that the all-inclusive number of newly-professed, whilst considerably reduced in comparison with what may be called the boom years for vocations, has nevertheless remained at a steady level which gives a discreet proportion of compensation for the losses due to departures from the Society.

Obviously however, this fact should not make us close our eyes to the grave reality confronting the provinces and the Congregation. On no account must we obscure or underestimate the phenomenon of the truly serious and sometimes almost chronic haemorrhage suffered by various provinces, simultaneously with the ageing of personnel and the inability to cope any longer with tasks previously carried out.

The problem imposed by the vocations crisis is neither simple nor easy and it is definitely linked up with many other problems, some of which at a superficial glance may seem foreign to it.

As you will see in the report, steps have already been taken to confront this problem at various levels as it exists today, but I think I can say that we have still a long and difficult way to go. We have to equip ourselves with a great deal of humility to examine realistically and see clearly, as far as depends upon us, the past and present causes of this haemorrhage so as to tackle the whole problem in all its component parts decisively, correctly and at the proper time. We can say that this Special General Chapter has the life and future of the Congregation in its hands and therefore it must get to the bottom of

the problem and crisis of vocations and all the facts connected with it.

The contribution of so many qualified men from such diverse regions, rich in the most varied experiences and especially animated by firm and sincere love of Don Bosco who lives and is perpetuated in the Church through the Congregation, will be invaluable in re-invigorating in the Society that twofold fruitful, spiritual and apostolic vitality which, whilst mitigating on the one hand the sad losses that occur, will on the other attract and make itself esteemed among the youth of our times.

Salesians coadjutors

Speaking of « the Salesian », of vocations, of crises, the report rightly pauses to illustrate the situation concerning our very dear confreres, the Salesian coadjutors, as seen under various aspects and at various levels. Let me state at once that in the Congregation we have in every continent many wonderful coadjutors, including not only those mature in age but also very young ones who are exemplary in every way: generous and very often truly self-sacrificing workers, many greatly gifted through a cultural and technical formation which has enabled them to undertake various difficult offices splendidly. Their presence in the structures of government and education has been a decidedly positive one. I feel it my duty to witness to their religious and Salesian life, lived as it is so coherently, conscientiously, and so often in suffering. I say « suffering » because of the fact that they do not always receive the direct or indirect help they have the right to expect.

Having said that, I must state that in addition to losses it is a grave fact that the number of coadjutor vocations is small — to such an extent that very many provinces have no coadjutor vocations in the novitiate or beyond. This void should not leave us indifferent. Whilst admitting the varied causes of the situation I feel that a lot depends on ourselves. In the light of the whole realistic situation the Chapter will certainly not fail to pinpoint these causes so as to find the most suitable ways and means to eliminate them or at least diminish them. With the highly distinguishable characteristics that neatly differentiate him from the lay members of so many other congregations — a point not always or everywhere appreciated — the Salesian

coadjutor constitutes something very special. As I have said on other occasions, the Congregation would not be what Don Bosco conceived and wished it to be if through some absurd hypothesis it were to be deprived of the absolutely essential element of the Salesian Coadjutor.

This subject therefore must certainly be deeply studied here, looking to Don Bosco and the constant line of development through his successors, at the same time taking into account the renewed assessment given by Vatican Council II to the layman in the Church and in religious life, and the various consequences of this.

Salesians and poor youth

To live his special vocation, whether as a person or as a living element of the community at local or provincial level or at that of the whole Congregation, the Salesian must carry out the mission confided to the Society by Providence. The ideas « Salesian » and « mission » are necessarily concomitant. Hence the second part of the report is on Salesian activity. You will find it illustrated with the criteria already stated, namely the sectors within which our apostolate in the world is framed and developed.

It is unnecessary to recall that this apostolate, whilst it has a very special bias towards youth, and in particular the poor and needy, is still valid even though developed (right from its beginnings) in a variety of ways.

With regard to apostolate among poor youth, works of social assistance and promotion, we have asked all the provinces for one final effort in this laborious preparation for the General Chapter, namely to provide as complete and up-to-date a report as possible — not just a dry, disjointed list but rather an account which objectively presents and describes the aspects and implications of all the activities undertaken by communities, groups or individual confreres in various forms of service to the poor and especially the young.

I would here like to thank the confreres in the various provinces who undertook the systematic collecting of all this informative material. But I feel that at this moment I am interpreting the unanimous sentiment of the assembly in expressing the Congregation's gratitude to the thousands of confreres who in every place and in the most diverse

and daring forms, with a sense of total dedication deeply combined with humility and simplicity that does not seek for thanks or publicity, look always to Christ and to Don Bosco and are the good samaritans of so many poor and needy brethren.

Not long ago, speaking to me of our confreres (poor among the poor) who work in the immense and miserable slums of Tondo (Manila) which he had visited, Paul VI repeated in accents of deep and sincere emotion: « They are heroes! They are heroes! ». Many other confreres deserve this eulogium with those of Tondo. In fact, thanks be to God, the confreres of Tondo are not the only ones in the Congregation who work thus with sacrifice and that joy that derives from faith. We hope that the Chapter will give strong impetus to increase their number and also that supernatural charity which is the uniquely efficacious spur capable of carrying on such generous Salesian activities.

Returning to the documentation of the activities on behalf of the poor, I think that the Chapter members will find in it sufficient material to gauge the true position of the Congregation in this field so congenial to the Society and to which such a great section of young people in the Church and in our own environment are rightly very sensitive. This documentation will be put at the disposition of the Chapter members in its original form as it came from the various provinces. In these accounts you will find not only many praiseworthy things but also notable lacunae that betray a weakened and perhaps in certain cases a deadened sensibility. Obviously it will be the Chapter's task to find new forms in order to give where necessary a renewed and courageous impulse to the work of service on behalf of poor youth in the footsteps and spirit of our Father.

Youth centres

A propos, of this irreplaceable apostolate of ours which is mainly and generally directed towards youth, I think it opportune to emphasize two facts which seem to me to be very indicative and closely connected.

In 1967 the Rector Major launched the idea of having a youth centre in each province, even if necessary by transforming some existing work. The idea was that each province should have at least one work which was substantially faithful to the idea of Don Bosco's Oratory,

adapting it courageously to our times and putting it at the service of today's young people, together with activities corresponding to the real and various needs of the times. This invitation clearly implied above all an effort and commitment to seek new ideas that correspond to the needs of today.

In all truth and sincerity I must admit that the appeal was not very successful. Whilst giving due acknowledgement to what was done I must state that it was not much, apart from the fact that in certain cases some ventures were youth centres only in name. I mention this not so much because not many new youth centres were opened as for the fact that all this is indicative of much deeper and preoccupying situations and motivations to which I call your attention in the report to the Chapter.

Re-dimensioning results

In compliance with the decision of General Chapter XIX, after long and deep preparatory study, the Rector Major with his Council invited all the members of the Congregation, through the various organs of government, to collaborate in the realization of that vast, complex and vital operation which went under the name of the re-dimensioning of our works. Even if imperfect it was nevertheless a first tentative step to interest all the members of the Congregation in its problems.

What were the results of this operation? We must admit sincerely that they were not really brilliant. Moreover, a serene and careful study shows that the many causes for the lack of success can be reduced to a fact which we must admit with all humility, namely that in the various parts of the Congregation the psychological and technical preparation for a clear and courageous confrontation of the mass of problems imposed by re-dimensioning was lacking. People were simply not able to gauge accurately the many values and spiritual, apostolic and formative interests which it not only wished to defend but to strengthen, keeping in mind the actual situations in which the Congregation lives and the prospects which it will inevitably encounter in the near future. In fact it was not a question of just closing houses

but of studying everything so as to find an operative plan that was realistic, farsighted and long-ranged, and in all this the reduction of works was only a part or rather a point of departure. But as I have said, people were not yet sufficiently prepared and mature enough for an enterprise of such proportions.

Nevertheless I must say that these recent years have seen a positive evolution in this matter. Evident proof of this can be found in the fact that in not a few provinces the work of re-dimensioning was later taken up again, often at Provincial Chapters and with criteria decisively different from the rather negative ones previously used. This is an evident sign that, even though slowly, correct ideas do go ahead progressively and find acceptance in minds open to truth and to the common good.

At any rate the re-dimensioning did one good thing in almost totally blocking the opening of new houses — but what resistance was made to this idea!

The lack of immediate success in re-dimensioning due to the reasons stated is, I feel, a realistic warning: when drawing up plans of work one must always keep in mind the foundation on which they must rest and above all the men who must understand and who can realize those plans.

Leaders

Closely connected with re-dimensioning is the problem of leadership at all levels of the Congregation. It is well to admit at once that this problem is also felt outside the Congregation, in the Church and in civil society and in extremely important sectors such as politics, industry, economy, syndicates, etc. There is no point here in giving all the complex causes for this.

Examining our own environment we are all daily aware of the difficulty in finding leaders who respond to the needs of today in our communities and works. These difficulties are aggravated first of all by the great number of key-posts to be filled, for it is not only provincials and rectors who have directive tasks. Think for example of provincial and local Vicars, parish priests (about 700 parishes!),

headmasters, Provincial Economers, Masters of Novices, directors of oratories, etc.

A good approximate computation comes to this conclusion: for every two to three Salesians one should be a leader. This we admit can explain so many situations, so many deficiencies in the most varied sectors of our life, religious and pastoral, organizational and administrative. It is true that we have begun to give a kind of specific preparation to new provincials; here and there for some years now courses have been organized for new rectors and others responsible for particular departments. This is very good but it does not resolve the problem, which is so very vast and has deterrent repercussions in the life of the Congregation.

The lack of capable leaders, grave as it is in itself, gives rise to other notable situations, e.g. the disproportion between personnel and tasks. As has often been clearly stated, there has been an excessive quantitative development through multiplication of works, sometimes simultaneous with an evident diminution of vocations and with other difficulties we can easily imagine.

On account of the haemorrhage afflicting the Congregation in these times I feel there is need of extreme courage in restricting our frontiers and in studying our choices well. Only in one way can the Congregation give attention to its vital need for growth in quality and depth, namely by the careful qualification of the confreres which is today more necessary than ever and above all in the spiritual, theological and pastoral fields as well as in the cultural, professional and technical spheres. I think, for example, of the need we have of confreres prepared in spiritual theology, catechesis, liturgy; I ponder on how we can prepare people for the various sectors of social communications and in the first place the press. It is true that here and there this grave necessity is recognized and effort is being made, but not enough. In my opinion the Congregation needs action that responds to definite plans with realistic criteria.

I trust that the Chapter members will once more take up these preoccupations already brought to light in our XIX General Chapter and will give the Congregation clear and precise directives for the solution of these two vital needs: the qualification of Salesians especially for the houses of formation, and at the same time the adequate preparation of leading personnel for the needs of today.

The Missions

A word on the Missions.

Each year a good number of priests have responded to the Rector Major's appeal for Latin America. In order not to upset the balance of strength in the provinces of origin many requests had to be turned down, but those we were able to send brought valuable aid to numerous missions which were in serious and urgent need. Huge problems still remain.

Whilst Asia in general, and especially India, is moving towards a certain self-sufficiency regarding indigenous vocations, Africa is finding it difficult and I think that the Chapter, in treating of the Missions, should give its attention to this enormous continent which offers us a field that is not only vast but also open to evangelization.

The problem of Latin America is a grave one on account of the responsibility deriving from historical grounds and because of our own considerable numbers there. In the audience I had with him Paul VI said: « Help Us to save Latin America! ». We can sense all the grief contained in that paternal invitation and commitment which touches our hearts. Don Bosco would certainly not have remained insensible to it. Yet we cannot hide the tangible and constant weakening of our forces in Latin America even in spite of the aid from Europe. The Chapter must concern itself with this great and difficult problem but I think that its very difficulty itself impels us to find adequate solutions elsewhere. One solution, it seems to me, is that we must seek to prepare layfolk, especially from our own works, so as to obtain understanding and proved collaborators in all the various sectors of our apostolate. Unfortunately, hitherto little has been done by us to enlist the precious contribution of our laity.

Recently something definite was begun here in Rome for the serious preparation of layfolk to collaborate with us in the countries that need help, but I trust that after the General Chapter not only in Europe but in Latin America itself and the other continents serious attention will be given to promote similar enterprises, utilizing experience already gained. This will benefit those who receive the help of these layfolk and no less the laity themselves who will feel greatly enriched in a spiritual, apostolic and Salesian way.

Fraternal solidarity

I cannot omit at least mention of Fraternal Solidarity. As has been repeated in word and writing, this enterprise has as its scope to break down certain psychological barriers and to develop a communal missionary sensibility which expresses itself in positive deeds. In its wide sense it also rings true to *Perfectae Caritatis* and the idea of Vatican II. The economic aid thus donated to many of our works which were in grave difficulties has certainly given tangible evidence of this initiative. And so I wish to thank the provinces, communities and confreres who, understanding the meaning and scope of the enterprise, came forward, even at the cost of sacrifice, to meet the needs of deserving confreres and works.

But solidarity cannot stop at financial aid, even though that is appreciated. People are coming to understand that it must extend also to fields and sectors much more demanding but also more enriching for those who give and those who receive. It will be the mark and result of that charity which is at the basis of the whole of renewal in the Church and in the Congregation.

Following the directives of *Perfectae Caritatis*, by means of the fruits of our solidarity campaign we have also given fraternal help outside the Congregation to dioceses in Vietnam, to bishops and religious in Pakistan and India, and to various social works in Brazil.

Social apostolate

From a reading of the report on the social apostolate it will be seen that whilst much has been done in our activities on behalf of the Cooperators a great deal still remains. This will be effected through the Vatican Council directives for the apostolate of the laity as well as through the very precious potential of multiple conscientious and qualified collaborators which we can find in our layfolk, of whom we have ever greater and more serious need. This, in my opinion, is a most vital and interesting point which is also connected with the thought of Don Bosco. The Chapter must study it deeply so as to come to clear conclusions.

As regards the Past Pupils, progress has been made in various parts

of the Congregation to organize and assist them but our sensibility on this subject must be developed at all levels of responsibility. The care of our Past Pupils is not a superfluous activity depending on the viewpoint of this or that individual; it is the natural and necessary completion of the years and years of education, work and sacrifice of so many Salesians. Hence this is a responsibility which the community as such must assume, even if individual persons are commissioned for it. Neglect of this activity creates a void and a mutilation of our entire educative work.

Regarding the instruments of social communication also you will notice that efforts have been made to go ahead according to the norms and directives of Vatican II and the hierarchy. It should be noted that this sector of the apostolate forms part of the specific scope of our mission in the Church. A very serious and as yet unresolved problem is the preparation of personnel suitable for this form of apostolate today, for they are more than ever needed under every aspect. But even here this goes back to the re-dimensioning of our works, to their grading and to the qualifying of the confreres.

Government and structures

We come now to the government and structures of the Congregation, as they are called today.

Even if not in great detail, you will find in the report an adequate account of the considerable work accomplished in these years at all levels, and especially regarding the evolutionary maturing and translating into new styles and standards of government. This transformation will appear all the more notable when compared with the customs and mentality itself that existed only a few years ago but which gave way before the deliberations of General Chapter XIX which were authoritatively confirmed at Vatican Council II.

The ideas which formed the basis of all this work emanating from the centre and spreading out beneficially in the Congregation were these: co-responsibility, mutual interest, participation, information, dialogue.

In harmony with these ideas were the very many meetings of the Rector Major with provincials, provincial counsellors, rectors and

confreres responsible for particular sectors (e.g. houses of formation) in the various continents; also the numerous meetings of the other Superiors of the Council at Provincial Conferences and with other groups and categories of confreres. It has been remarked that never before has there been such frequent and intense contact between the Centre and periphery as in these years. That remark is true and I should add that these encounters, held in an atmosphere of brotherly understanding and for the sake of mutual discussion of problems *in loco*, are, when well prepared and planned, a very efficacious instrument for a government which desires to obtain not so much the carrying out of decisions, whether imposed from above or from afar, as the search for the best solutions in the light of reality in the actual places and times and using the results of common and varied experience.

A very positive aspect of this collaboration and co-responsibility has been the consultation of the confreres in regard to the selection of men for special responsibilities. In the great majority of cases one noticed prudence and maturity in judgment and consequently well-pondered and wise suggestions. Like so many others, this experience has proved a very positive one and it will be defined and perfected by the General Chapter. I think we can say without hesitation that we are on the right road.

Economy

The last part of the report concerns economy.

In this delicate sector the Ecomer General has been in continual contact with the Rector Major and his Council and he has followed the directives of the Constitutions, namely to give guidance and service to the provinces, to administer goods not belonging to any specific province, and to take care of concerns proper to the general direction.

The report gives you an ample account of what has been done to provide both provincial and local administration with an organization corresponding to the importance and delicacy and in many cases to the complexity of administration.

Meetings at all levels, courses, and uninterrupted consultation with continual contact between centre and periphery have been excellent aids in improving many situations in the administrative-economic-

financial area which needs adequately prepared personnel. Deficiencies of various kinds still remain, due to different causes. I think the Chapter will have to insist on improvement in this area which gives such necessary service and is so useful to the community and to its apostolic work.

In the second place, as mentioned, the Economer General's office has given service in the general administration, a work deserving our grateful appreciation.

The report will certainly serve to discountenance those fantastic stories published here and there to the detriment of the Congregation, for it gives the actual facts which are in great contrast to them.

The first striking point in the report is this: the General Direction has no fixed source of income either in the Congregation or in property in order to meet the urgent expenses regarding its activities. As can be seen in the statement of assets and liabilities the General Direction, with all its worldwide burdens and commitments, lives on whatever Providence sends through benefactors, who are very often people of modest means, almost exclusively in Italy; the contribution of any house, whilst appreciated, is a mere drop in the ocean of its needs.

The charity of benefactors

In practice therefore the General Direction depends on charity and one might ask what would be the consequences of a cessation or even a slackening off of this source of help. Don Bosco, who always went ahead between debts and benefactors, will not allow his sons to lose their good name and the good cause which drew down God's blessings on him even in material aid. In any case I think the question needs to be asked also in view of the transfer of the General Direction to Rome and in the eventuality that the Chapter may wish to seek other arrangements in regard to the maintenance of so many of our works in the world which at present depend upon the Centre for support.

Whilst it is clear that we should be able to live by our work, it should also be clear that for diverse reasons our work is often not able to maintain all of our institutes (e.g. I think of the enormous difficulties encountered by some provinces in providing for the expenses

of personnel in formation), still less open new ones. This refers especially to certain types of work, e.g. technical schools, charitable institutes, retreat houses, the Athenaeum, or the Generalate. In these and other similar cases the Congregation has need of benefactors, persons or social entities which in one way or another can assist us financially.

Just now I have in mind as an example the enormous amount of good effected by our missionary houses which for decades have sent hundreds upon hundreds of confreres all over the Salesian world — the number has been estimated at about two thousand and fifty. Some houses of this kind, e.g. Rebaudengo, Bernardi-Semeria, etc., bear the names of those great benefactors who enabled us to build and equip them. There are many of them, not only in Italy but in almost all countries where our works exist and live through the generosity of such benefactors. Even recently we have been able to open certain works only because of help given by new benefactors.

However, such help, wherever offered, has never in any way conditioned our apostolate, methods and liberty of action. We have never become involved or entangled in operations or situations inconsistent with our condition as religious and Salesians. No matter what pressure comes from certain particular situations, we certainly cannot divert to other purposes those properties and donations accepted solely for ends consistent with our mission.

I understand modern sensitiveness to this point and I am convinced that far from ignoring it we should keep it well in mind and draw the necessary consequences. The Chapter will certainly deal with this argument, which has echoes and repercussions of great import in so many sections of our mission. But I think it would be unjust and unreasonable above all to pass judgment according to the standards and sensibilities of today on things that have happened in the past.

Precisely in regard to present day situations, sensibilities and requests, we should proceed calmly and prudently, with a discerning mind which knows how to distinguish things of value and moment from what are not. I feel that Don Bosco would certainly act thus at this juncture in reading correctly the signs of the times.

But I must conclude. Obviously economy has its due place and role as a functional instrument in the life of the Congregation but it is certainly not its central problem.

Central problem: the Salesian

I think you will all agree with me that the central problem of the Congregation on which the Chapter must concentrate its interest and from which all its other problems derive is the Salesian himself, his identity, his mission, his formation, his style of life and all the values that converge there. The Salesian is the living structure and true cause of the Congregation — he is the heart, the life, the *raison d'être* of the Congregation. For this reason let me express once more a firm conviction based on the Council and the whole postconciliar magisterium and on my own experience gained in meetings with Superiors General. It is one which has been suggested to me also by the numerous and extremely varied contacts I have been able to have in the different continents with hundreds upon hundreds of confreres. My conviction is this: the enormous amount of work done by the Congregation to prepare this Chapter will have been in vain, as also the no less necessary and heavy work to which we are now committed, if — *quod Deus avertat* — there does not come forth from this Chapter a Salesian positively and vitally renewed.

However, with full confidence we can say that such an hypothesis lacks all foundation. The report which I have presented and commented upon, with all its positive and negative aspects, presents the most realistic and existential picture of the Congregation possible but it should not tempt you to indulge in sterile criticism. It is presented merely to offer you a solid platform from which to go forth with renewed energy after a courageous and fruitful review of affairs, so as to actuate the programme which Paul VI already gave to the Congregation at the end of the XIX General Chapter in the happy phrase: *Progredire!* It is good for us to repeat that word today because it seems to me to be the ever-living and ever present echo of Don Bosco's own phrase: « We must not slacken off! ».

May the Virgin Help of Christians help us to utilize sensibly this twofold fatherly invitation: that of the Church through the Pope, and that of our Father Don Bosco.