

SALESIANS AND LAITY: COMMUNION AND SHARING  
IN THE SPIRIT AND IN THE MISSION OF DON BOSCO

*INTRODUCTION*

*THE EVENT OF GRACE OF 12 APRIL 1846*

*"There was a shed there, belonging to Joseph Pinardi. Come and we will draw up a contract. On the following Sunday, which was Easter Sunday, all the church furniture and the equipment for recreation were brought there, and we went to take possession of our new place".*

(John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, pp.256-7).

[1]

*A happy anniversary*

The happy event of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's arrival at Valdocco, celebrated during the General Chapter, made us more attentive to our origins.

Don Bosco describes them in moving fashion. He reveals his heart, so similar to that of the Good Shepherd: his zeal for education, his apostolic temerity, his sufferings under trial, the uncertainty of the future, his abandonment to Providence, his joy at unexpected help.

We are struck with wonder at the marvels of the Spirit, but provoked by them as well. It seems almost as if Don Bosco is inviting us to enter the world he himself created, which then developed around him: a world of communion in spirit and mission.

There he is, surrounded by a huge crowd of youngsters, in the middle of a meadow which he must leave without any idea of where to go or what to do. And then suddenly arrives a certain Pancrazio Soave, with a suggestion from a Mr. Giuseppe Pinardi: there is a place where he can gather the boys together, a modest shed which can become a chapel and around it a strip of land for a playground. On the following Sunday two women will come forward with the first donations to help him. Later Mamma Margaret will arrive,... and there will be others as well.

It is the story of a love which is contagious and spreads, drawing many people into its light and strength, a Family, a Movement!

We Salesians, the successors of those first boys who wanted to stay with Don Bosco for ever, find ourselves in the company of many lay people, men and women of our time, who feel the same kind of call and ask to be able to work with the heart and manner of the *Father and Teacher of youth*.

To enter that circle of light and strength is what we propose to do through our Chapter reflections:

- starting from the present situation of the relationship between SDBs and Laity (first part);
- proposing a rich dynamism stemming from Don Bosco's charism (second part);
- which projects us towards the future through concrete commitments for sharing in his spirit and mission (third part).

We want to celebrate the memory of that event with grateful praise:

[2]

To you, Father, our praise is due

for Don Bosco  
the dream that inspired him  
the trials that tempered him  
and the signs that guided him;

for those who have shared  
his indomitable zeal  
men and women, religious and lay,  
in every time and place;

for the humble beginnings at Valdocco  
and for every educative environment  
called to be a revelation  
and gift of your love;

for the immense ranks of young people  
who invade our life  
and disturb our heart  
prompting it to imitate that of the Good Shepherd.

To you, Father, our praise is due:

With Mary  
our powerful Helper  
in the Holy Spirit  
through the Risen Christ.

Amen

*"On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of its rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry.*

My God, I exclaimed, why do you not show me where you want me to gather these children. Oh, let me know; show me what I must do. (Memoirs, p.255)

FIRST PART  
SALESIANS AND LAITY TODAY  
THE SITUATION

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## CHAPTER 1

### ELEMENTS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SITUATION

#### 1. The horizon: together in spirit and in mission for the service of the young

[3]

The beginning and the model

*At the beginning of salesian history we find Don Bosco's love of predilection for poor youngsters and his concern for the working classes living in densely populated areas. Animated by the charity of the Good Shepherd he gathered around himself a large number of other persons because the new condition of the young, as it seemed to him in the city of Turin, needed a new and immediate response.*

*So was born the Valdocco Oratory, a true 'laboratory' or workshop in which Don Bosco, other priests, adult laymen, youngsters and some women, first among them Mamma Margaret, lived the original and genial style of predilection for the young known as the preventive system. This system, lived first at Valdocco and then later at Mornese and other places, became a true spirituality, bringing educators and pupils together in the same movement towards holiness.*

It is a spirituality which lives in a quite special manner in the heart and activity of the members of the Salesian Family and of a vast movement of persons, as a gift to the Church for the salvation of the young and for the holiness of its adherents.

[4]

Secular and prophetic dimension of the charism

The mission to the young and the poor has a particular *secular dimension* "because it is a charism that has been raised up in the Church for the world" (AGC 350, p.16).

The charism of Don Bosco, precisely because it is educative and ranged on the side of culture, creates a singular harmony with tasks proper to lay people.

It is for this reason that on becoming a mission it extends beyond SDB communities and the works themselves. Mission and works, in fact, are not the same thing, even though the work may be necessary as a setting for the convocation and formation of the vast movement of those who work for the young, within and outside salesian structures, in the Church and in the institutions of civil society.

*This mission has also a prophetic dimension because of its significance with regard to educational and social problems and because of the new perspectives of existence which it opens up. Evangelizing by educating and educating by evangelizing become a message of hope, light and leaven, since it does not reach immediately every individual, nor does it cover materially every space and activity in human life (cf. Vecchi Report n.297).*

Attention to secular values was so much alive in Don Bosco that it led him to invent an *original figure of the consecrated layman, the salesian coadjutor brother; the latter develops in himself a genial propensity to be an apostolic ferment within secular realities taken up in their autonomous consistency, on account of which the salesian community, "enriched by its lay dimension, can meet the world in a way that is apostolically more efficacious" (GC21, 178).*

[5]

Efficacious mediations: CEP and PEPS

The mission is one and only, but it can be realized in different ways, as many in fact as are the historical, geographical, religious and cultural situations and contexts in which young people are living.

*The salesian educative and pastoral project (PEPS) is the historical mediation and the practical instrument used in all latitudes and cultures of the same mission. The project therefore is not just a technical fact but a cultural horizon for constant reference, and is demanded by the necessary inculturation of the charism.*

It is specified and realized in every salesian work by a community which we call the *educative and pastoral community (CEP)*. *This is the group of people (youngsters and adults, parents and educators, religious and lay, representatives of other ecclesial and civil institutions, including also those belonging to other religions, and men and women of good will) who work together for the education and evangelization of the young, and especially those who are poorer.*

#### 2, The context: World and Church

[6]

## Incarnation of the charism

The salesian charism, raised up *in the Church for the world, must become incarnated in the different cultural situations in order to express its powers of service to the young and the poor. In contact with the different cultures it can illustrate its vitality and acquire new and enriching characteristics.*

### 2.1 In today's world

[7]

#### A new scenario

After the events which marked the end of the East-West conflict, the '90s presented a new economic, political, social and cultural scenario, and some of its tendencies have a particular influence on our life and activity.

[8]

#### Primacy of economic factors

The economic and political system followed by the new liberal ideology increases impoverishment, injustice and social imbalance in the greater part of the world, with the result that big trans-national economic groups make enormous profits and bring about the exclusion of the poorest parts of the earth, with a consequent increase in new forms of want.

The absolute priority given to the economic factor provokes grave consequences: the elimination of economic frontiers, the difficulty of defending social gains of the workers and elbow room for small productive units, unemployment, fall in income, the need to emigrate, limitation of expression and possibility of action on the part of ethnic minorities and groups living in various ways on the fringe of society.

*Progressive economic and social exclusion, moreover, provokes forms of "anthropological impoverishment", which appear as a widespread feeling of inferiority affecting social classes and entire peoples, culturally oppressed by the dominant ideology ("culturicide").*

The massive and incessant presentation of different models creates modifications in mental processes and criteria of evaluation, increases the difficulties of building a human and Christian identity, and amplifies uncertainty about the future. At the same time the new possibilities for information, intercommunication and action bring about a different structure of society and public life.

*Economic globalization and the new groupings of countries in blocks can have social and cultural consequences of kinds that are still uncertain and difficult to foretell.*

[9]

#### Ambivalence of communication

The emergence of a global culture, on a massive scale and with a pluralist character, conditions the perception one has of the world and the Church, and even earlier of the very sense of life.

*The challenge of interpersonal communication is made more difficult by the weakening of cultural values, and by the proliferation of languages and growing forms of incommunicability. Communication passes through new channels: multimedial languages, means of social communication, access to information, cybernetics. All this provokes modifications of mentality and calls for new ways of learning. And these need new abilities and qualifications.*

The power of knowledge, modern and post-modern codes, learning to work in groups, access to information, the critical use of the means of social communication, are some of the factors which require of Salesians and laity greater competence and continual updating.

[10]

#### Family and education

The family and the traditional agencies of education seem to lose their privileged position of former times with respect to the maturing of the individual. Nevertheless the fundamental importance of the family in the field of education is still acknowledged.

In the new cultural situation a subjective interpretation of sexuality is being spread abroad; new forms of family organization are appearing as affective nuclei, to the detriment of the traditional model of marriage and the family. This renders uncertain and problematic educative processes, the integration of educative factors and the very educative capacity of adults.

In this family situation, the question put by Fr Egidio Viganò makes us think: "We have to ask ourselves: can an educator at the present day form the person of his youngsters without the deepening, clarifying and reliving of family values?" (AGC 349, p.6).

[11]

#### Youthful discomfort

The uneasiness tends to become deeper because of the shortcomings of the institutions (especially in the family, school, Church etc.) and of their difficulties in communication in the languages of the young, and in coping with their superficiality and the absence of values. In some contexts the youthful misgivings are caused by new and old forms of poverty, the lack of prospects in life, of social opportunities, and by ethnic, cultural or religious forms of racism.

We detect in all this a *sign of the times and hence an appeal from God to renew our educative mission.*

[12]

The presence of women

In every setting of social life, the woman is acquiring an important presence which fosters the recognition of her rights. In the Church, the woman feels the call to take up a role of participation and shared responsibility.

In every field attention is being given to specifically feminine elements, because of the contribution they can make to a better quality of life and an enrichment of values at every level.

[13]

We note the continuation of a process of secularization which involves not only specifically religious matters but also fundamental aspects of life: family, education, moral conscience, customs, cultural expressions. In some contexts it almost seems that anything divine is being totally eclipsed. And at the same time we are nevertheless assisting at a new sensitivity for spiritual values and the seeking of new forms of relationship with the Transcendent, especially among the young. On the other hand the *religious phenomenon is taking on multiple facets, some of them uncertain and frequently ambiguous.* Emerging also is a widespread religious indifference, especially in what regards institutional aspects, with a tendency to privatization.

This hunger for the spiritual draws many persons, especially among the young, towards sects and movements which offer intense experiences which are nonetheless problematic, because they lack an integral vision of the person and of an objective content of truth.

We find parallel manifestations of religious syncretism, of superstitions and other expressions with an esoteric and reincarnationist slant. Particularly alluring at the present day seems to be the movement called *New Age*.

Alongside all this one notes a demand for interior reality and a thirst for the spiritual, attention to ecumenical dialogue, the eagerness for prayer meetings between the great religions for justice and peace in the world.

[14]

Signs of hope

The new economic, social, political and cultural scenario, gives us a glimpse nevertheless at world wide level of tendencies of substantially positive value, even though they must be redeemed from the historical ambiguity with which they are presented

We note, in fact, the *emergence of new transversal sensitivities which concentrate the attention of the world community and mobilize its energies. The vast list of mega-events, with which the United Nations are sealing the closure of the twentieth century, are a proof and sign of this.*<sup>1</sup>

These are supranational events which indicate, as path to be followed in the future, some presuppositions for the taking up of a new ethical, social and political standpoint. They constitute a practical perspective for a "global social response" which can redeem personal respect, communal participation and social justice in face of the uncertainty of the present moment in history.

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- In 1989 the United Nations General Assembly approved the International Convention on the rights of the Child and the Adolescent (persons from 0 to 18 years), consolidating the doctrine of the integral protection of infant and youth populations.

- In 1990 in Thailand, the PNUD, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF realized the World Conference on "Education for all", which produced the "World Plan of Action for satisfying the fundamental requirements for learning".

- In 1992 at Rio de Janeiro, the World Conference on the Environment introduced into the agenda of humanity the concept of harmonized development with the environmental demands which will have a growing influence on the relationship between man and his environment.

- In 1993 at Vienna, the World Congress on Human Rights placed the respect and dignity of the human person as the fundamental criterion for the verification of any measure in the economic, social and political field.

- In 1994 the International Year of the Family produced important indications concerning economic, social and cultural rights of the Family; and at Cairo the World Conference on Population and Development, in line with what had been said at Vienna, reaffirmed the integrity of the human person before the State, in matters concerning demographic policy.

- In 1995 at Copenhagen the Summit Conference on Social Development discussed questions concerning unemployment and social exclusion, looking forward for the first time to social measures of a global nature; and at Beijing, the IV World Conference on the Woman proposed a continuation of the study of questions of this nature, with special reference to the giving of proper value to women's work.

- In 1996 at Istanbul is foreseen a Conference Habitat II, which will consider human takeovers, a fundamental question for the practical realization of social rights and the improvement of the quality of life on the planet in the next century.

These appear, therefore, as obligatory points of reference which give consistency and legitimacy to the so-called new social and political subjects: the child, the young person, the woman, the individual, the family, non-government organizations, social and ethnic minorities, the excluded, etc.

This new sensitivity extends, in fact, to the most harrowing problems of humanity: the recognition of the dignity of the human person, education, demographic policy, ecology, development, unemployment and social exclusion, peaceful living together in pluriethnic and plurireligious societies, and peace.

It is within this conflictual and ambivalent frame of reference that the Church, like the Congregation, strives to identify the great objectives and to work out relevant practical strategies, so as to be a source of solidarity and hope.

## 2.2 In the Church

[15]

The new way of the Church

In this world context on the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Church is living ever more consciously the *new ecclesiological atmosphere born of Vatican II, replanning her presence in the contemporary world, with an intense effort at inculturation and active involvement on the part of all her components.*

The starting point is the self-understanding which the Church has of herself as the People of God, called to be leaven in history. Within this People the protagonism of the Laity is becoming ever more evident as a sign of the times.

It is especially the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* which authoritatively asserts the secular identity of the lay person, as the subject of evangelization with full rights within the People of God. At the same time, reflection and pastoral practice are reconsidering the figure of ordained ministers to recover the genuine aspect of the pastor: he is the one who is at the service of all vocations so that they become transformed into ministries; he thus builds up ecclesial communion, while educating all to share the mission for the salvation of the world. The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* has given a new impulse to the ordained ministry, placed at the service of a Church which is wholly ministerial.

Consecrated persons too in the post-conciliar process, of which the most recent stage is represented by the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, have managed to clarify their identity in the Church and to mature the conviction that their charism can be shared with the laity. For this reason the latter are invited "to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes" (VC 54), thus beginning "a new chapter, rich in hope, in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity" (ib.). The same Exhortation recognizes that communion and collaboration with the laity is one of the fruits of the doctrine of the Church as communion (ib.)

[16]

The challenge of the New Evangelization

The progressive impoverishment taking place in the world, the spreading of a post-modern culture, and the recognition of emerging cultures in general when compared with the message of Jesus and the reflections of Vatican II, have led the Church to make a qualitative pastoral option in the *New Evangelization*. It is characterized by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, by human advancement and the inculturation of the Gospel, in the perspective of an option for the young and the poor. This obliges the Church herself to a process of conversion, so that poverty and freedom may become signs which render credible the Gospel of the beatitudes.

In the spirit of the New Evangelization - which demands new enthusiasm, new methods and new expressions - the Church has experimented in the last ten years with a strong social commitment, thanks to the prophetic appeal of so many Christians, to the Magisterium and Episcopal Assemblies in various continents.<sup>2</sup>

A new style is spreading of being Church. It is moving towards man, sharing his joys and hopes (GS 1); it is respectful of cultures, has at heart humanity's future, justice and peace, the family, life and ethical values, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, politics and economy, young people and education.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The concern for a New Evangelization is widespread and variable in form. In addition to the pontifical documents quoted, has also been expressed in authoritative meetings at continental level. That of the Bishops of **Europe**: "We are witnesses of Christ who has set us free" (1992). *The Fourth General Conference of the Latin-American Episcopal Conference of Santo Domingo on the theme: "New Evangelization, Human Advancement, Christian Culture - Jesus Christ yesterday, today and always"* (October 1992). *The special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa: "The Church in Africa and its evangelizing mission in the approach to the year 2000 - You will be my witnesses"* (April 1994).

In preparation too are the Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, and for the Americas.

<sup>3</sup> We may recall the Pope's meetings with young people at world level: Rome 1985, Buenos Aires 1987, Compostella 1989, Czeszchowa 1991, Denver 1993, Manila 1995.

Also the convocation of our "Youth Congresses" have been expressions of the educative proposal for groups and have given increase and awareness to the Salesian Youth Movement.

The New Evangelization therefore appears as a global project of new missionary commitment, a concrete response to the appeal of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

[17]

Path of the Salesian Congregation

The Congregation feels as its own the concerns and hopes of the young and of the Church, of which it wants to be an efficacious sign while serving the world to which it has been sent.

Motives of joy for the Congregation at the present day are:

- \* its missionary expansion in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia;
- \* the participation and sharing of Don Bosco's charism and mission by innumerable lay people, in and outside salesian works;
- \* the presence of lay volunteers in some sectors of the Salesian Movement;
- \* the earnest desire in many SDBs for a deeper spirituality, a growth in the quality of pastoral work for youth and a greater integration in the pastoral work of the local Churches.

The Congregation also feels the effects of secularization and other ambiguous aspects of the contemporary world:

- \* the falling off, drastic at times, in the number of vocations (especially of Brothers) in many traditionally Christian countries;
- \* the spiritual superficiality which, to the extent that it accepts forms of an easy life, provokes a cooling off of pastoral thrust and the inability to penetrate the world of the young;
- \* the presence of symptoms of individualism, manifested in personal projects without reference to the communal project;
- \* the little exploitation of the educative and apostolic energies of the laity, and especially women, due to a lack of knowledge of the theology of the lay state and a certain difficulty in understanding the feminine ethos.

The Congregation in its recent General Chapters, beginning especially with the SGC<sup>4</sup>, has acquire an ever greater awareness of itself and of its mission in the Church and in the world.

At the same time, as regards its mission among the young and the poor it is committed to the involvement in a single vast movement of persons, especially lay people, attracted by the charism and spirituality of Don Bosco.

[18]

GC 24

If on the one hand the GC24 constitutes a significant stage in the process of renewal, on the other it wants to be a point of departure: the Salesian Congregation intends to approach the Third Millennium with a new look, involving in its spirit and mission the greatest possible number of men and women who, by educating and evangelizing, want to work with it for the Kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> The horizons of the salesian mission have characterized the reflections of the Congregation in the period following Vatican II.

The *SGC (1971): the Congregation reexamined its charism and the salesian mission in the light of the teachings of Vatican II.*

The *GC21 (1978): the reflection on evangelization, prompted by Evangelii Nuntiandi, indicated in the evangelized salesian community, renewed by the Gospel, the evangelizing and animating community for other apostolic forces called to share authentically in the salesian mission.*

The *GC22 (1984): at the end of a period of reflection which had lasted 15 years this Chapter gave to the Congregation the **definitive text of the renewed Constitutions.***

The *GC23 (1990): the challenges created by the youth situation in various cultural, religious and social contexts of the world, especially with regard to the faith, led the GC23 to draw up a **process for the education of young people to the faith.***





## CHAPTER 2

### SITUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SDBs AND LAITY

#### 1. Desires and realizations

##### *1.1 Positive aspects of the relationship*

[19]

New awareness in the SDB community

The Provincial Chapters revealed a notable convergence about the *need for a deep relationship at an operative and existential level between SDBs and laity.*

There has been a positive outcome almost everywhere. The Provincial Chapters have produced unexpected results. Many lay people were involved at local and provincial level in sharing with the SDBs a reflection on the theme of the GC24.

The salesian community is ever more aware that it has *a precise role and task of animation and formation with respect to the Salesian Family and the lay people with whom it shares the mission.*

In various contexts of the Congregation significant experiences are reported, Many communities are slowly rediscovering their task and, after a first period of uncertainty, have found positive results after entrusting areas of responsibility to the laity.

To the extent that this new sensitivity is growing and emphasis is given to the process being followed by the community and by individual Salesians, *there is an insistent call for a more decisive change of mentality, so as to reach a welcoming acceptance of the presence of lay people and a new attention to women, recognizing and accepting the values of complementarity and reciprocity.*

In some countries in which women are relegated to a subordinate role, it has been found that their involvement is not only an innovation but has also a prophetic element.

[20]

Settings for closer relationships between SDBs and laity

Reflection in common, a shared project and relationship with the laity are positive experiences, especially in the so-called new presences, as a prompt response to the problems raised by youth unease, emargination, etc. It is in such settings as these that are being developed the best forms of lay participation and volunteer work.

Relationships too are closer in parishes, schools, oratories and youth centres open to the neighbourhood. Here too there is increasing space for the laity.

In the missions lay protagonism is a consolidated fact. It would be useful however if more thought could be given to their systematic formation.

Because of its educational significance, a special mention is due to the commitment of parents and the role of the family in many of our foundations; this is sometimes expressed in the form of associations recognized also at provincial and national level.

[21]

Progressive involvement of the laity

*The involvement of the laity in the salesian spirit is a progressive process towards communion. More often than not it begins with a more or less chance contact with Don Bosco and his work. From this develop many attitudes, ranging from an empathy roused by a first contact with Don Bosco, his environment and the salesian style, to an interest in getting to know more about the charism; from the assumption of the values and form of life of the Salesians to communion in the spirit through the discovery of a vocation.*

This is the manner in which the discovery and growth of their vocation happens for many lay people; it is a call to live lay values in a Christian and salesian vocation: an offering of time, energy and competence for the mission.

[22]

Participation of the laity in the mission

Participation in the salesian mission also appears as a gradual and progressive variegated reality: from the simple obligatory presence of one who does paid work, offering skill and nothing more, or one who is a member of a salesian parish, to collaboration for motives of work or free choice, and to the shared responsibility of one who takes on with us the common mission.

The process of involvement leads to communion in spirit, to shared responsibility, and then to sharing of the salesian mission. Communion and sharing, involvement and shared responsibility, these are the two faces of the same medal.  
[23]

#### Variety among lay people

In sharing the mission to the young and poor, the Salesians enter in fact into a relationship with a great variety of lay collaborators: Catholics who are fully conscious of their identity, Catholics who practise their religion more or less constantly, non-Catholic Christians, those belonging to other religions, adherents of religious groups which may be Christian but with fundamentalist tendencies, and laity who are agnostics or religiously indifferent.

In all parts of the world there are more than a few lay people who share the commitment for the young as members of a structured group of the Salesian Family.

All those who do so, through love of the young and of Don Bosco, are consciously or unconsciously members of a "vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young" (C 5).

[24]

#### Commitment of the young

Throughout the Congregation there are ever clearer prospects of a broad panorama of a youth commitment which manifests new sensitivities and promising perspectives. This new season of youth involvement in the salesian mission takes its rise from the discovery of a category of animation lived as a modern reincarnation of Don Bosco's shrewd perception of "*the young as missionaries of other youngsters*".

At the present day numerous young people are committed with the SDBs in oratories, youth centres, schools, ecclesial communities, parishes and mission centres. They are catechists, group animators, representatives of categories, in charge of various pastoral, cultural, artistic, musical and liturgical initiatives.

Many provinces have invested time and resources in the formation of the young. Classes and courses for youth animators, forms of coordination at local, provincial and national level, youth consulting groups and committees, teams for youth pastoral work, publications of various kinds as means of linkage, annual meetings, youth festivities, are all initiatives that have begun and are continuing in many parts of the salesian world.

[25]

#### Significant contribution of women

The new forms of the salesian mission and the progressive discovery of feminine values, the openness of the community to the locality and to the local Church, and not least the diminution of salesian personnel in our works, have opened up many educative and pastoral opportunities for women in the salesian mission. Hence the new climate following Vatican II has led to a greater involvement of women in the activities of the SDBs

The presence of women in our traditional educational environments, especially in schools and colleges, as well as in parishes, oratories and more recent educative and pastoral settings, and with tasks of high responsibility, has enriched the practical realization of the preventive system; it has created a more natural and serene affective atmosphere, with specifically feminine traits at the level of sensitivity, relationships, and manner of thinking and acting.

The assimilation, nevertheless, of the values of feminine complementarity and reciprocity is a slow process. Significant help in this direction comes to us from the FMA. In several contexts, in fact, different forms of sharing in pastoral work has been going ahead for some time, with full respect for the specific identity of each group.

[26]

#### The Volunteer Movement

The Volunteer Movement is a widely spread reality among young people and adults, and is of great relevance at the present moment in history. It is felt in the Congregation, in the Church and in society, as a new style of a life of "openness to others". It is a privileged and practical means of meeting lay persons who are formed and motivated. This is a challenge which the laity - Christian or not - raise against rampant injustice and selfishness.

The manner of realization of the volunteer movement is of various kinds:

- within one's own country or province, or outside it abroad;
- short-term or long-term (for a period varying from at least a month to several years);
- in approved projects financed by public bodies, or outside them (sponsored by private organizations: communities, provinces, local entities, non-government organizations, etc.).

The volunteer movement frequently constitutes a significant vocational outcome and a valid endorsement of the educative process followed by young people with SDBs, and of the plan to provide other openings for youth in pastoral work. The young animators, in fact, show themselves sensitive and solid with the world of poverty and youth emargination: the needy in general, street children, youngsters at risk, drug addicts. Availability for service leads to various kinds of volunteer work and other committed life choices. Youthful creativity and verve in this field is a challenge to us and stimulates us to extend the already consolidated experiences.

The youth volunteer movement sometimes requires that the young people remain in the salesian community. Experiences in this area are generally positive. After a period of direct contact with the salesian community and mission, more than a few young people have opted for the salesian life.

Moreover, in recent years many of our communities have lived experiences of activity in missionary territories with young animators. In the verification of such experiences it has become clear that the first persons to benefit from them have been the young volunteers themselves.

There are places too where the arrangements for conscientious objectors allow military service to be replaced by a gratuitous and well defined period of commitment to educative or social service, especially in favour of the young.

[27]

#### Lay management and the Provincial Project

The Provinces fulfil their mission through activities and works animated normally by a local salesian community. In recent years, however, various provinces, after a careful evaluation of the situation have decided to entrust some activities or works to the management of lay people, within the project and responsibility of the province itself. There have also been cases in which certain activities or works of education originally set up and managed by lay people have been absorbed into the provincial plan and responsibility. In some of these the salesian community is present, while in others it is not.

In some cases the relationship between SDBs and laity is recognized by law: as for instance the 'partenariato' and 'tutela' in Italy.

*The term 'partenariato' indicates the kind of participation, present in some of our works, regulated by a contract in which the lay person is normally placed on the same level as the religious as far as the assuming of responsibilities is concerned. The 'tutela' is a particular kind of 'partenariato'. Responsibility for the organization, management, pedagogical and didactic matters are completely in the hands of the laity. The SDBs remain as guarantors before the local Church of the Catholic and salesian ethos of the school.*

[28]

#### Motives for making a choice

The reasons which have prompted certain provinces to make particular choices are many:

- the new ecclesiology of communion which recognizes and fosters the dignity, vocation and mission of the "Christifideles laici";
- the availability of prepared lay people to take part in the mission of Don Bosco with direct responsibilities;
- the need to render Don Bosco's charism present in a particular area;
- urgent youth problems of an area;
- requests of local Churches, educative agencies, or other institutions;
- the desire not to close an activity or work which is valid and appreciated, through lack of qualified SDB personnel.

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#### Formative and organizational requirements

These situations have created new formative requirements to enable lay persons to guarantee the salesian identity of a work or activity, and to help the Salesians to recognize the involvement of the laity in Don Bosco's spirit and mission.

Such situations clearly require new organizational models; the normal ones, though corresponding to many concrete circumstances, can no longer cover all salesian activity.

The salesian community itself must seek adequate criteria to guarantee the charismatic identity of these works managed by lay people, and also draw up new practical guidelines.

### *1.2 Resistances and difficulties in the relationship*

Alongside the many signs of a positive growth in the relationship between SDBs and lay people, the Provincial Chapters do not conceal the fact that difficulties and problems persist.

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Difficulties of the SDBs and of communities

The communities do not always have the necessary flexibility in their lives to accept stimuli and innovations coming from lay people.

In some situations a defensive attitude may prevail, which makes the laity feel held back, so to speak, in their apostolic intentions. In others, the community as a whole fails to establish significant relationships with the laity.

In addition the availability for accompanying and animating them meets difficulties because of the reduced numerical presence of the SDBs, many of whom are absorbed to a considerable extent in organization and administration, and especially because all this can lead to insufficient significance of the SDB community.

In the matter of difficulties in relationships between SDBs and lay people, some provincial chapters pointed to different cultural horizons and levels of life: a different perception of the values of life as lived by the salesian community and by the laity in their families, social and economic conditions, especially in developing countries, and notably different social levels.

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Difficulties prevalent among the laity

Some difficulties noted by the laity in relationships can be attributed to differences in the manner of interpreting the concept of education, with a resultant lack of knowledge of the consecrated life and of pedagogical and didactic formation.

Sometimes it is economic matters that create between Salesians and lay people difficulties in dialogue, attention and reciprocal understanding, and so compromise the sharing of the mission.

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Difficulties of young people

The relationship between SDBs and young lay people is not always rich and deep.

The young would like the SDBs to be less occupied in organizational matters and to have more time and tranquility for meeting and guiding them.

On the other hand the SDBs sometimes complain that the commitment of the youngsters is lived more as a simple experience, more like a parenthesis, and does not become a premise for more demanding options.

Many difficulties arise none the less from the fact that what the SDBs expect does not coincide with what the young people offer or are able to offer.

Sometimes in fact the prevalent factors are the limitations arising from the youth condition itself: the volubility, inconstancy and fickleness typical of their age.

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Slow integration of women]

The integration of the woman brings with it modifications to the institutional culture and pastoral activity, it incorporates new aspects and specifically feminine values and provokes a new understanding of the male identity. This can be a source of difficulty for both the SDB and the woman, both of them called to work in the same project. We must be aware that here we have a problem which touches not only on ideas but on affectivity, relational ability and habits, with evident consequences on the formation of the Salesian, and also on the particular style of the presence of the woman in our environments. We must recognize that there has not yet been sufficient opportune reflection on this reality. The presence of women in our works is sometimes more a consequence of cultural and social situations than of reflexive and commonly agreed options. It may be useful also to point out that the presence of women in our works sometimes becomes prevalent, among both the educative and pastoral agents and those to whom our work is directed. In some cases this preponderance could develop into a problem of 'feminization' of salesian work.

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Problems of the Volunteer Movement

The experience of the volunteer movement is not without its problems either.

The more serious ones are found in developing countries but, though in different forms, they are present also in experiences lived in one's own country also.

It should be noted in the first place that the volunteer does not always keep up a close relationship with the community from which he came, nor is there sufficient communication between the communities sending and receiving him, either in the preparatory phase or in those of the experience itself and the return.

Particularly important are the problems of the volunteer on his return:

a) a *juridical and economic problem*: insurance and place of work, health aspect etc. The volunteer frequently finds it difficult to obtain employment, especially in the case - as is desirable - of a work in continuity and harmony with the experience he has gained and with his fundamental life-choices;

b) a problem of a *vocational and apostolic kind*: insertion into the local, provincial and ecclesial educative and pastoral plan. Sometimes the community is not sufficiently sensitive to the cultural riches which the returning volunteer brings with him and wants to offer to his new environment;

c) *psychological and affective problems*: acceptance on the part of the community as an expression of appreciation of the experience made and concern for his reinsertion at family, apostolic and working level and in volunteer groups, possibly linked with the Salesian Family. Particular attention needs to be given to affective links and bonds of friendship which the volunteer has developed on the missions; in this too he needs the follow-up and help of the community.

### *1.3 The relationship between SDBs and laity in particular situations*

[35]

Plurireligious and pluricultural contexts

In some parts and contexts of the salesian world, one may note an impressive fact: the considerable presence of lay people of different cultures and beliefs who take part in our mission. This is especially the case in Asia and Africa, where such people may even form the majority, but it is possible that their number will increase even in traditionally Christian countries. In many of them, what is particularly striking is the contribution they offer, their strong sense of belonging, and the esteem and veneration they have for the figure of Don Bosco and the salesian mission.

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Variety of situations

Even among Christians there are members of other denominations and those who call themselves Christian but belong to various sects. Some, unfortunately, prove to be indifferent or even hostile; and finally there are still others who are persons of good will who are respectful of our faith.

Cultural and religious pluralism conceals unsuspected riches and can facilitate an exchange of gifts with mutual advantage. But it can also give rise to a facile syncretism, and can become the cause of tensions, hostility and even of violence, as sadly happens in present day society.

Despite all this, there is a craving in the human heart for unity in diversity, to reach a convergence and move ahead together. Among our collaborators there are those who feel very strongly aspirations of this kind and ask to be more closely associated with us in the sharing of the mission to youth.

Some of them have a vivid desire to feel themselves part of our Family, but find difficulty because of tensions arising from different lines of thought, of living their life and giving to it an ultimate meaning.

[37]

Towards unity and belonging

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Provocations and responses

These different and problematic situations raise certain questions:

- What kind of relationship should we set up between SDBs and lay people of this kind?
- How can we make of the CEP, the PEPS, and other initiatives, occasions for contact and growth, for mutual enrichment, and a means of greater efficacy for the mission to youth?
- How can we ensure the salesian identity of our works and activities?
- How can we give them recognition in the Salesian Movement?

These are questions which constitute a real challenge for salesian communities.

## 2. The practical manner of communion and sharing: CEP and PEPS

### *2.1 The process so far*

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Common operative model

In the CEP is manifested in a particularly intense and visible form the communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco between SDBs and laity. As an operative model this is recognized everywhere to some extent as valid and as the only practicable model in present conditions, i.e. “the Salesians as the animating nucleus, the involvement of the laity and shared responsibility with them, and the drawing up of a possible plan, adapted to the needs of those for whom we are working, to the forces available and to the local context”.

But the effective role of the Salesians in such a scenario varies greatly. In many works they do succeed in forming the nucleus referred to; in others they are already becoming an accompanying presence which constitutes a guarantee; in others they provide support and guidance but in a less direct manner.<sup>2</sup>

The mission therefore is not realized by the salesian community alone: a vast movement of persons take part in it: “We realize in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and adults, parents and educators, in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of the Church and an indication of God’s plan for us”.<sup>3</sup>

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Problems emerging

The provincial chapters have reaffirmed the task of the salesian community to be the animating nucleus of the CEP,<sup>4</sup> and have noted a positive growth of the awareness of communities in this respect.

But recent changes have brought to light some innovations and open problems:

- the animation of the CEP cannot be referred to the salesian community alone, but must also have the support of lay people;
- the process of shared responsibility must be followed by all the salesian community in the animation of the CEP, and quantitative and qualitative inconsistencies must be overcome;
- solutions must be sought for the establishment of a clear institutional relationship between the salesian community and the participation of lay people in the decisions of the CEP, and in particular between the local council of the salesian community and the organisms sharing responsibility in the CEP;
- the manner must be established as to how the salesian community can be the animating nucleus in works in which there is an agreement with a public body, and also in associations which have juridical recognition even before the State, with their own statutes and councils of administration.

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The course of the CEP

The realization of the CEP, even in its early stages, has given positive results: the work of the SDBs has been shared to a greater extent; functions and tasks properly belonging to lay people have become clearer, and the youngsters themselves have felt the benefit of an enrichment of the educative presence.

The articulation of the various organisms and councils has improved, thereby permitting a more active participation and integration of the laity. Their shared responsibility and involvement is increasing especially in youth centres, associations and groups with varied interests. This is due to a growth in the sense of belonging to the CEP and of sharing in the educative commitment by its various components.

In some contexts the presence of persons of other religious faiths seems not to have created serious obstacles to the educative process. Sometimes, in fact, it can enrich the CEP.

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PEPS: meditation of the mission

Since the GC21 the PEPS has been recognized as necessary for the realization of the salesian mission. Educative and pastoral projects are always better understood, in every latitude and culture, as a realization of the salesian mission in history. It is important also to emphasize that the laity have expressed the desire for greater involvement in the realization of the PEPS.

The elaboration, realization and verification of the PEPS provides an opportunity for growth in the mentality of living and working together.

Educative and pastoral communities which have drawn up the PEPS now live it as a criterion and guide for shared action, as a verification for their activity, as a practical instrument for animation, and as a privileged means for the ongoing formation of SDBs and laity.

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Formation through activity

The use of the new operative model has highlighted the need for updating and greater competence. But it has also been found true that the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the CEP. When realized in the best conditions this has also demonstrated the originality and fertility of reciprocal formation.

Some communities have gone further still; they have organized special meetings for exclusively formative purposes, and have also launched experiences of involvement in initiatives of a religious character (prayer, retreats, celebrations) for all the members of the educative community.

## *2.2 Difficulties of realization*

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### *A difficult beginning*

In the launching of the CEP some difficulties have been found on the part of both SDBs and laity, due sometimes to civil legislation and the lack of a clear understanding of the relationship between the salesian religious community and the educative community. It needs to be emphasized that relations between the religious community and the CEP reflect also the internal changes within the religious community itself: the numerical diminution of the Salesians, the increase in fields of intervention, rhythms of life, age and health. Present experiences are therefore varied in nature: some positive and forward-looking, others slow and somewhat resistant.

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### *Apprehension of those who are consecrated*

The maturing in the period following Vatican II of the lay vocation challenges the SDB identity from the specific standpoint of consecration.

In some SDBs one notes sensitivities which give rise to concern:

- sometimes the Salesian feels he has to live a double life: of consecration when living community life, and of the laity in his professional work, no different from lay people;
- it seems to some that lay persons can now do everything or nearly everything that the consecrated person does, while still remaining a lay person;
- others think that the good they can do as consecrated religious in a community which “limits” their activities, they could do more efficaciously outside, as committed laymen;
- and finally there are here and there still attitudes of clericalism shown in the difficulty of thinking in the key of the educative community or in the resistance in entrusting to lay people tasks of decision-making and coordination.

In addition there are lay people who feel somewhat at a loss with regard to certain SDBs: rather than consecrated persons they seem at times more like entrepreneurs or administrators preoccupied about efficiency. One wonders whether they have done away with all differences between the two. We need to find a more mature balance.

If on the one hand the present discovery of the lay vocation can seem to be a reaction against the supposed superiority of those who are consecrated, as being more competent and responsible in educative commitment and the only true bearers of the charism, on the other hand the insistence on the vocation of the lay person must point to the identity of those who are consecrated as a specific and dynamic force for the education and animation of the CEP.

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### *Communication and involvement*

The present situation of the CEP is an indication of the insufficiency of communication, of involvement and of the full sharing of responsibility.

Mutual openness between SDBs and laity sometimes reduces merely to interpersonal communication, which lacks the support of institutionalized communication within the CEP.

This situation detracts from the proper sharing of responsibility in planning, and the personal acceptance by all, SDBs and laity, of the consequences of concrete programmes. It has not yet been possible to involve all members of the CEP in the exploitation of the competence and ability of lay people and to make them share responsibility for educative experiences and for Christian formation.

Cooperators too, and other lay people in our works who are members of groups of the Salesian Family, have not yet found in the CEP an adequate integration of their vocation.

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### *Lack of the PEPS*

The PEPS is not yet present in all salesian works, and its absence is an obstacle to SDBs and laity successfully working together.

Sometimes the PEPS is drawn up by some member of the community, and hence it runs the risk of remaining just a theoretical document, little known to the laity and to the components of the CEP in general. In consequence it becomes in no way a point of convergence and reference for daily collaboration.

And then there are salesian communities too who find it difficult to accept the task of being a centre of communion and participation. In these cases the PEPS is not used in a systematic manner and pastoral work is considered a task only for the Salesians or pastoral animators and not one for the entire educative community.

## *3. Forms of communion or sharing and belonging:*

### *The Salesian Family and Salesian Movement*



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#### Salesian Family

Don Bosco “founded not only the Society of St Francis de Sales but also the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators”.<sup>5</sup>

These groups and others born later make up the Salesian Family.<sup>6</sup>

The unity of the Salesian Family increases with the understanding of the common mission starting from the specific vocation of each member.

The work of the postconciliar period has left us a precious heritage of goals achieved: the publication of the official documents for each branch of the Family for the animation and life itself of the associations; the Common Identity Card; the participation of lay people in the GC24, a visible and prophetic sign of a formation process to be carried out together.

But the change of mentality needed to reach recognition of the common responsibility required for confronting the mission to the young has not been assimilated by all because, among other reasons, vocational discernment has not always been carried out within the various component groups with attention to the role of the lay faithful.

There are still environments in which a certain paternalism weakens the autonomy of the laity, and inadequate formation compromises the sharing of responsibility in the mission.

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#### The Salesian Movement

It would be an impoverishment and an excessive simplification were we to reduce the area of influence of the person and message of Don Bosco to the Salesian Family alone.

From the very beginning of salesian work, in fact, a vast movement of persons and groups, men and women of different conditions of life, grew up around Don Bosco.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent history shows that the movement has been marked by a spiritual convergence and a shared objective of education, with so broad an approach as to involve also those outside the Christian category.

The Valdocco model has overcome cultural and territorial limitations, and the objective of “good Christians and upright citizens” has been spread far and wide. Today the salesian presence is embodied in widely different contexts, characterized by pluricultural and plurireligious settings, thus realizing a wide range of collaborations.

If we are looking for images to enable us to understand all this, we could say that just as an echo belongs to the sound that makes it, and every flow of water refers back to its source, every branch to its root, every ripple (even the weakest and most distant) is concentric with its starting point, so it is with those who “work for the salvation of the young” in Don Bosco’s name.

The Salesian Movement is not a structured reality with a precise organization. Above all else it is an awareness, a mobilization, an affective and effective belonging in view of the good of the young.

Although not everywhere are the SDBs and Salesian Family aware of the richness and vast nature of the radiation of Don Bosco’s charism, the latter is well known to those who want to be involved in educative processes.

Of this there are two visible indications:

- a. the youthful and social volunteer movement understood as an offering of time, dedication and commitment, of support and service in pastoral work and human advancement;
- b. the dialogue and educative involvement now existing in every continent, with varying cultural and religious intensity, in an interactive process of exchange of gifts and of ecumenism.

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In this broad context of the Salesian Movement is inserted the variegated reality of the Friends of Don Bosco: sympathizers, admirers, benefactors, collaborators, advisers, believers and non-believers, and non-Christians.<sup>8</sup> With different shades of meaning they present the following identity:

- they reveal an attitude of empathy for the figure of Don Bosco, his spirit and mission;
- they express a personal attachment to Don Bosco;
- they intend to collaborate in various ways in initiatives of good, sharing in this way in the salesian mission.

It is recognized that the Friends of Don Bosco are inserted in a wider movement than the present reality of the Salesian Family. Their insertion in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco is diversified, with a variety of degrees and attitudes, after the fashion of concentric circles: for some it is a matter of direct involvement, for others of indirect participation.

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Since the centenary of 1988 and the GC23, the SDBs, Salesian Family and Salesian Movement have been sharing a true and proper process of communion and sharing.

In this the young people form the most sensitive and reactive part, willingly entering the Movement so as to live the salesian option for the service of youth.

Even though the same objectives and degree of sharing have not been achieved in every province, everywhere attempts have been made to establish with the SDBs a new kind of encounter, able to open up vocational outlets and to develop with young people frontiers with the indifferent and those at a distance, in response to new demands and challenges.

The Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) has received official recognition from the Holy See and takes part in meetings of the "Consilium pro Laicis".

It is a movement with an educative character offered to all young people and with a missionary slant. The more sensitive members are aware that they are bearers of a precious patrimony for the Congregation, and ask to be helped in the discovery of the project of life and in the choice of a process which will make them strong in spirituality and witness.

The animating force of the SYM is not, in fact, its organization but the salesian youth spirituality: it is in this that all groups converge.

For this reason spirituality requires a constant effort at formation. Particular attention needs to be given to the vocational guidance of the young so that they become inserted into the ecclesial and social world with options and commitments which are a response to problems of the present-day world.

### CHAPTER 3 PROSPECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

[52]

From the present context of the Church and of the relationship between SDBs and Laity, there arise certain prospects which call for a fundamental doctrine for shaping our activity, as significant openings to a future of innovations and charismatic fertility.

#### *1. Broadening involvement in the spirit and mission*

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Today the mission requires the mobilization of all the forces of the Salesian Family and of the vast Movement of persons who surround Don Bosco, to face up strategically to the present social, cultural and religious situation with its many facets through an adequate service, in the context of the local civil community and of the particular Church, which are the ordinary settings for educative activity.

The relationship between SDBs and Laity makes the Salesian grow as a prophetic sign of the newness of the Kingdom: his consecration bears witness to the primacy of God, and celebrates the love of the Father in the human heart and in history. The same relationship promotes in the Salesian a change of mentality and opens him to a new style of communion and sharing.

With regard to the SDBs the laity express the desire to feel them nearer, more concerned about animation and coordination, more involved in their accompaniment.

The same young people press the Salesian to introduce them to the problems of life and to link them up with the neighbourhood and the local Church, associating them with the mission and giving them responsibility.

The presence too of the woman helps SDBs not only to interpret the feminine ethos, but to live a more complete educative relationship: in fact the man and the woman help the boy and the girl to discover their own identity, to accept as enriching their own specific nature to be offered as a gift in reciprocity.

Young confreres receive more efficacious help when, from the period of their initial formation, they are introduced to experiences of collaboration with lay people both at a directly practical level and in the process of the elaboration of the PEPS.

#### *2. Encouragement of a new style of communication and shared responsibility*

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To be together at certain important moments, to give more time to informal meetings and to sharing, enlivens the family spirit, fosters reciprocity and intensifies collaboration.

A new style of communication is needed if one is to be efficacious in facing complex challenges like inculturation, the new contexts and the youth condition.

Openness to dialogue, to what is new, to the rich qualities and talents of our collaborators will increase the ability to give new responses.

This new style enables the lay person to take on real responsibilities with respect to the mission. Commitment is a determining factor in some cases, especially among the young, for vocational discernment and the choice of a life of consecration.

Thanks to these stimuli, the Salesian becomes aware of the primacy of God in life, of the prophecy of the Kingdom, witnessing to communion, a worker of salvation in the midst of the young, and a guide in spiritual life.

Already Fr Egidio Viganò, in convoking the G24, had said: "To tackle the theme of the laity means to speak of the salesian community to itself, of the reformulation of its services and commitments, of its manner of being and working. Testimony of fidelity to God's gift, received and expressed on the part of a religious community more attentive to the requirements and shared responsibility of the laity, cannot fail to involve, from the standpoint of identity, the primacy of spirituality".<sup>1</sup>

### *3. Development of a process of formation in common*

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Mission, inculturation, dialogue, communication, all demand a new style of formation for facing present circumstances, for responding to the young and for sharing responsibility with lay people in the mission.

The laity ask in the first place for the elaboration of a plan of formation for their spiritual and charismatic preparation.

Secondly they note that formation to communion and sharing should be realized by both parties together.

At the same time we have to face up to the changed youth condition; together we have to address the vast plurireligious and pluricultural contexts; together we must live the fruitfulness of the CEP and the efficacy of the PEPS; together we have to find new initiatives like the volunteer movement or other significant experiences.

The conviction is also increasing that the field of daily commitment is the place for authentic growth: the web of relationships created by a lively and efficient CEP becomes a setting for intense ongoing formation, touching on human, pedagogical and salesian aspects. These relationships are a vehicle for messages, they prepare us to use new languages, they foster a more attentive listening to what the world and youth culture are saying, especially when the CEP promotes youthful protagonism.

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Sensitive to the provocations which reach us from our world, and especially to those of the young, in the light of God's gifts and of the vocation to which we are called we are conscious of our limitations, and so we pray:

*With humble hearts  
we confess, O Father:*

*our inability to meet the challenges  
of the world of the young,  
and the frailty of a faith  
which does not dare to hope;*

*the fading of an ardour  
which does not prompt us to seek new ways,  
and the many fears which hold us back  
from the mutual exchange of gifts;*

*our tiredness and omissions  
and our poverty of every other kind.*

*But with serene trust and confidence  
and celebrating the power of your grace  
we dare to ask you for:*

*mature faith  
love for the young  
apostolic courage  
renewed creativity  
salesian optimism*

*the will for communion  
and patient charity.*