

THE PROJECT OF LIFE
OF THE SALESIANS
OF DON BOSCO

A guide to the
Salesian Constitutions

Rome1986

**Translated from the Italian by
Fr. George Williams SDB**

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**IL PROGETTO DI VITA
DEI SALESIANI DI DON BOSCO**

**Guida alla lettura
Delle Costituzioni salesiane**

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PRESENTATION

One of the "Practical directives and Deliberations" of the GC2 was the following: "Let the Rector Major with his council study the desirability of preparing a commentary on the renewed Constitutions which will serve to deepen their sense, make the spiritual content easier to grasp, and encourage the confreres to live them".¹

The Rector Major and his Council considered the suggestion of the Chapter to be of great importance, and in December 1984 began to study how a response would be given; it was clear from the outset that such a task could not be completed quickly.

In the first few months of 1985 the Rector Major set up a team of some fifteen competent and available confreres, and distributed among them the various Parts of the text, assigning to each a particular sector on which to work,² indicating at the same time some criteria to be followed in the preparation of the commentary so as to achieve the objectives specified by the GC22.

By December of 1985 the work had reached a stage where it was possible to present to the members of the General Council a sizable first draft for their critical appraisal and comments concerning the overall structure of the text. This draft, together with the observations and suggestions made, was then handed over to the Secretary General, Fr. Francis Maraccani, who was asked to render the text homogeneous, coherent, consistent and properly proportioned, and to provide it with adequate documentation.

At the beginning of the present month, September 1986, all the material was ready for the press.

Following the thought of the GC22, the Commentary has three essential aims which characterize it:

- a deeper doctrinal and practical analysis of the sense of the Constitutions;
- a compelling perception of their spiritual implications;
- a convincing incentive for daily life.

From the editorial point of view it was decided to provide a commentary article by article, except for the Fourth Part concerning the structures of animation and government. While due attention has been given to the placing of each article in its own proper context (chapter and part) and in the Constitutions as a whole, its

¹GC 22, 4: Directive 1.4

²The team was made up of the following confreres: Joseph AUBRY, Cesare BISSOLI, Giovanni Battista BOSCO, Clemente FRANZINI, Raimondo FRATTALLONE, Nocolo LOSS, Francesco MARACCANI, Francesco MOTTO, Paolo NATALI, Giuseppe NICOLUSSI, Omero PARON, Ludwig SCHWARZ, Gaetano SCRIVO, Adriaan VAN LUYN, Juan Edmundo VECCHI, Angelo VIGANO, Egidio VIGANO

contents have been examined more deeply in relationship to their ecclesial and salesian sources, and helpful suggestions have been made for meditation and practice.

The commentary on the individual articles is preceded by a general Introduction on the significance of the Rule in religious life, a summary of the historical development of our Constitutions, and an organic view of the overall structure of the revised text.

A brief synthesis has also been introduced at the beginning of each part to provide a brief and appropriate explanation of the biblical quotations at the head of the individual chapters, and to throw light on the intrinsic connection between the Constitutions and general Regulations.

To highlight the spiritual content of the Commentary prayers have also been included, which will be of help in expressing the implications of each article in devotional form.

Among the criteria guiding the elaboration of the Commentary were the following:

- attention to the exactness of doctrine and objectivity of historical aspects;
- the background to be Vatican II and the directives of the Church's Magisterium;
- the foundation to be laid as far as possible on our documents of greater authority (references to Don Bosco and salesian sources, to General Chapters, Acts of the General Council, the 'Ratio', to writings of witnesses of particular significance etc.);
- emphasis to be given to aspects of the following of Christ, fidelity to the Founder, and a prophetic response to the problems of the present day; attention in each article to the overall unity of the text, of each part) and of each chapter;
- the whole to be expressed as far as possible in a clear and didactic style.

From all this it is clear at once that the work has no scientific pretensions, but is founded nevertheless on serious and demanding study and research by a team of co-authors, endowed with salesian sensitivity and competence in the contents of the sector assigned to each.

Because it is a book which comments on a constitutional text which was worked out in a "community fashion" (and hence showing certain differences of style and sensitivity, despite the efforts of the special commission which carried out a careful work of unification), the Commentary displays the same characteristics of collegial collaboration, and it is not difficult to detect a certain diversity in the style of the various contributions.

But from another point of view this variety enriches the objective value of the contents, which have the purpose (like the Constitutions themselves) of inspiring a manner of life based more on lived community experience than on personal logic or unified style.

This is not a book to be read through at one sitting like a novel, but rather a text for meditation following on the reading of selected articles. It may therefore be found particularly useful for reflection — and prayer — made either personally or in community.

It should be noted too that it is not an official document, discussed and approved paragraph by paragraph by the Rector Major with his Council; it is an authoritative text, in whose composition and revision the Rector Major and the individual members of the General Council have had a hand. It therefore enjoys no small austerity and value in connection with spiritual direction and the Salesian formation of the confreres.

While inviting all confreres to make use of the Commentary, I express sincere thanks to the Secretary General who has coordinated the work, and to each of the worthy collaborators, through whose generous dedication the Congregation now has available this valuable and competent aid which can be of help to both individuals and communities in successfully following the way of renewal indicated by Vatican II.

Rome, 24 September 1986

Fr Egidio Vignano
Rector Major

SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> —Vatican II
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AA. VV	Various authors
AG	<i>Ad Gentes</i> —Vatican II
AGC	Acts of the General Council
art.	article
ASC	<i>Acts of the Superior Council/ Chapter</i>
BM	<i>Biographical Memoirs</i> (English translation)
C	<i>Constitutions</i> (article of)
can.	<i>Canon</i> (of CIC)
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i> —Vatican II
CEC	Congregation for Catholic Education
Cf., cf.	compare
Ch.	Chapter
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> , 1983
Const.	<i>Constitution</i>
CP	<i>Communio et progression</i> , 1971
CRIS	Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> , 1979
Doc., doc,	<i>Document</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i> —Vatican II
EN	<i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i> , 1975
Epist,	<i>Collected Letters of Don Bosco</i> , 4vols. (edited Ceria)
ES	<i>Ecclesiae Sanctae</i> , 1966
ET	<i>Evangelii testificatio</i> , 1971
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , 1981
F. MOTTO	<i>Constituzioni della Societa di San Francesco di Sales 1858-1875</i> , critical edtn. F. Motto, Las Rome, 1982
FSDB	<i>Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco</i> (“Ratio”), 1985
GC	General Chapter
GC 19	Acts of 19 th General Chapter
GC 21	Document of 21 st General Chapter
GC 22	Document of 22 nd General Chapter
GE	<i>Gravissimum educationis</i> – Vatican II
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i> – Vatican II
Ibid., ibid.	ibidem
IGLH	<i>Instructio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum</i> , 1971
IM	<i>Inter Mirifica</i> – Vatican II
l.c.	in the place quoted
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i> – Vatican II
MB	<i>Memorie Biografiche</i> (Italian)
MC	<i>Marialis cultus</i> , 1974
MO	<i>Memoris of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales</i>
MR	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i> , CRIS 1978
ms.	manuscript

<i>n.</i>	number
<i>NT</i>	<i>New Testament</i>
<i>o.c.</i>	in the work quoted
<i>OE</i>	John Bosco, <i>Opere Edite</i> , LAS Rome
<i>OT</i>	<i>Optatam totius</i> – Vatican II
<i>p.</i>	page
<i>Para.</i>	paragraph
<i>PC</i>	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> – Vatican II
<i>PO</i>	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i> –Vatican II
<i>R</i>	<i>Regulations</i> (article of)
<i>RG</i>	<i>Renovationis causam</i> , CRIS 1969
<i>Reg.</i>	<i>Regulations</i>
<i>RFIS</i>	<i>Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis</i> , 1970
<i>RRM</i>	Report of Rector Major to General Chapter
<i>RSS</i>	Periodical of Salesian Historical Institute
<i>Sac C</i>	<i>Sacerdotalis caelibatus</i> , 1967
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> – Vatican II
<i>SCA</i>	Salesian Central Archives
<i>SGC</i>	Special General Chapter (GC20)
<i>v.</i>	‘vide’ (see)

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE CONSTITUTIONS

These Constitutions provide an authentic description of the apostolic project of the Salesians of Don Bosco (cf. C 192). They are their "identity card" in the Church, and their "book of life" as they follow the Lord.

In his spiritual testament Don Bosco tells us that the Salesian Congregation will have a happy future and that its vitality will endure as long as the rules are faithfully observed. The Apostolic See considers them to be our "fundamental code"¹

¹, which becomes the yardstick for measuring the baptismal authenticity of anyone professing them.

The Constitutions therefore occupy a special place in both the personal conscience of every Salesian and the life of the Congregation as a whole.

Hence the importance of a clear knowledge of their content and of the commitment to assimilate interiorly the values they contain.

Different meanings of the term "Constitutions"

Etymologically the word "Constitutions" comes from the Latin verb "constituere".

Among the various meanings of this verb we find: "to organize, to create, to found a group or a society".

The use in the singular of the derived term ("Constitution") serves to indicate, in the case of a society, which is a state, the complexus of laws which form the basis of its juridical organization.

When used in the plural on the other hand ("Constitutions") and in the ecclesiastical sector, it refers specifically to a basic document of Religious Life, which gives details or the way of life of the members of an institute as they follow Christ.

In this sense the term has had through the years a different meaning from one institute of consecrated life to another. Its use has been established only from the thirteenth century; before that the term in more general use was the "Rules". When, on account of their antiquity and authority, the famous Rules of St Benedict and St Augustine (of the ninth and eleventh centuries respectively) were declared untouchable, other supplementary documents were placed alongside the venerable book of the Rule with the purpose of interpreting its inspirations, guidelines and

¹ CI CIC, can 587

known as "Constitutions", as well as "Institutions" or "Institutes", "Statutes", "Regulations", etc.

After the Lateran Council IV (13th cent.), which restructured Religious Life in the Church — by that time it had become very complicated — it was laid down that for official recognition of any new religious project, the express approval of the Apostolic See was required.

Pontifical approval gave authenticity to the fundamental document of the new foundations; and this document could then be accompanied by other supplementary texts. And so, for example, the Company of Jesus (founded in the 16th cent.) has its "Formula Institute" as the basic document which lays down the structure of the Order; then come the "Constitutions" which complete and apply it; and then also, with the passage of time, the "Decrees" emerging from the legislative enactments of the General Congregations (General Chapters).

It was only later, at a time when the "modern Congregations" began to appear (so called because of their "simple vows"), the term "Constitutions" came into ordinary use to indicate the fundamental document of their project of religious life.

The process that a Founder had to follow to obtain Pontifical approval remained more or less uniform in ecclesiastical practice, with fixed juridical steps to be taken, especially from the 19th cent. to the Code of Canon Law of 1917. This obliged the author to conform to an already established model and to sum up in a very synthetic form what was original in his own spirit and mission.

And so Don Bosco, for example, in drawing up his Constitutions had neither the freedom of the ancient Founders nor the providential charismatic inspiration of Vatican II.

Evolution of its real meaning

Before answering the question: "What are the Constitutions for the Salesians of Don Bosco?", it will be well to keep in mind the notable evolution that has taken place as regards the real meaning of the term, and hence in the way we use it today.

Three principal stages can be distinguished in the evolution of its meaning. The Constitutions have been successively understood as:

a. An Application Document to accompany the Rule: this is the sense indicated above in the case of the old Orders with solemn vows;

b. A Basic Statute, which described the religious structure of a modern Congregation of simple vows, according to the strict scheme of the prevailing ecclesiastical practice (19th century and CIC 1917.) (Members of apostolic Congregations of simple vows were considered in practice as second-class religious);

c. A Fundamental Charter or Code, which included the classical sense of "Rule" and described the identity, evangelical qualities and particular character of the religious project of an institute of consecrated life. This marks a qualitative leap in the real meaning of the term, which made possible the renewal desired by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican.

The present text of our Constitutions comes under this last heading. The passage from the second to the third stage (which raised the Constitutions to the status of a true Rule) made necessary a careful and laborious return to the origins for a faithful re-thinking of the entire charisma of the Founder in view of the new and very rich perspective of being able to describe it in the constitutional text.

To obtain a concrete idea of the difference between the second and third stages it is useful to compare, for example, the requirements of the "Normae secundum quas" (of 1901, and substantially confirmed in 1921), which institutionalized the ecclesiastical practice then obtaining, with the 'Motu proprio' "Ecclesiae Sanctae" (1966), which specified for us the way in which the conciliar decree "Perfectae caritatis" was to be applied.

"Normae secundum quas" (1901)

Elements to be excluded from the text of the Constitutions:

"(27) Quotations from Holy Scripture, the Councils and the Fathers are to be excluded.

"(29) There should be no mention of civil laws, regulations of local civil authorities, govern mental approvals and similar matters. (31) Questions of dogmatic or moral theology, decisions concerning doctrinal discussions, should be removed, especially if they refer to the matter of the vows.

(33) There is no place in the Constitutions for ascetical teaching, spiritual exhortations as such, and mystical considerations... Hence the Constitutions should contain only the constitutive laws of the Congregation and the norms which govern community acts, both those concerning government and those which refer to discipline and manner of life" 2.

"Ecclesiae Sanctae" (1966)

The Constitutions should contain the following elements:

"(a) The evangelical and theological principles concerning religious life and its incorporation in the Church, and an apt and accurate formulation in which the spirit and aims of the founder should be clearly recognized, and faithfully preserved, as indeed should each institute's sound traditions, for all of these constitute the patrimony of an institute (PC 2b);

(b) The juridical norms necessary to define the character, aims and means employed by the institute. Such rules must not be multiplied unduly, but should always be clearly formulated."3

The new Code of Canon Law (1983) has codified this last real meaning, expressed by "Ecclesiae Sanctae"⁴: it fosters and protects the originality of the specific character of each institute, its spiritual patrimony, its particular apostolic qualities. The Code does indeed set out some general principles for the identification of consecrated and religious life, even from a juridical aspect, but it leaves and even demands that there be the necessary elbowroom for the identity of the particular charisma. It lays down, and it is well that it does so, that the fundamental structures of an institute should be clearly and precisely stated; that its form should correspond to the genuine will of the Founder; that the organization of the communities at different levels and the exercise of authority should be at the service of its vocational objectives, and that the principles of shared responsibility and subsidiarity should function adequately.

In the light of the evolution that has taken place it is clear that there has been a radical change. It brings to mind the comparison used by Don Bosco when he spoke of the "rough copy" and the "fair copy" .⁵⁵

The Council did not want a manipulation of the text of the Founder but a full and faithful updating of his "spiritual and apostolic experience" for the present day. Aware of today's social and cultural changes and knowing the limitations that many constitutional texts had to cope with, the Council wanted the Constitutions to reinstate the whole of the Founder's original patrimony.

This meant that the text of the Constitutions could no longer be reduced to a simple juridical statute, made up substantially of canons and norms; neither was it to become a generic doctrinal treatise of consecrated life. The text had to be drawn up again in such a way as to provide a clear "typological description" of the particular character of the institute, or in other words it had to provide a descriptive picture of the traits characterizing the model or kind of experience lived at the beginnings and tried and proven through living tradition.

It is true that "Ecclesiae Sanctae" wanted the Constitutions to be rich in evangelical, theological and ecclesial principles, not indeed as artificial insertions from outside but rather as a natural emphasis and explanation arising from within the project as lived and described, and in no way detached from an adequate basic structure.

A text, therefore, which would not be simply the fruit of the work of an able legislator nor even of a master scholar, but that of a leader of a genial school of sanctity and apostolate.

And so for us at the present day the Constitutions are the authoritative description of an original plan of consecrated life; they indicate the fundamental

² Cf. "Normae secundum quas S. Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedure solet in approbandis novis Institutis votum simplicium"

³ ES II, 12

⁴ Cf. CHIC, can 587, 598, 631, 662

⁵ Cf. BM Xi, 289

principles for the following of Christ and its ecclesial dimension according to the characteristic spirit of the Founder. They present a harmonious integration of gospel inspiration and concrete structures. They go beyond mere institutional requirements and indispensable norms, and highlight the experience of the Holy Spirit lived by the Founder and passed on by him to the institute.

We can say that our present Constitutions are a "Fundamental Code", more spiritual than juridical, more distinctive than generic, more apostolic than "conventual".

St. John Bosco, the Founder

As we have already said, the Constitutions of a Congregation are intimately linked with the Founder.

We see this clearly in Don Bosco. It is a good thing to reflect on the laborious negotiations he carried out over nearly twenty years before obtaining the desired pontifical approval of April 1874.⁶

We could say that he made every possible effort to transfuse his very self into the Constitutions, not in the sense of substituting himself for them but so as to leave a "living testament" which would serve as a mirror to reflect his more characteristic features. Rightly was he able to assert that to love Don Bosco is to love the Constitutions;⁷ and when he handed a copy of them to Fr. Cagliari, leader of the first missionary expedition, he was able to say in effect and with convincing emotion: "Here is Don Bosco going with you" (cf. Const. Foreword).

The authentic understanding of the Constitutions always and necessarily harks back to the living reality of the Founder, who remains the true model (C 21, 97, 186), the genuine standpoint and indispensable key for the reading of the constitutional text. There is an intrinsic complementarity between the Founder Don Bosco and the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, which calls for a living knowledge of Don Bosco and of his life in the one who reads them.

But of their very nature the Constitutions have need of other supplementary texts, and this for two very practical reasons.

The first arises from the impossibility of including in the brief text of the Constitutions all the riches of the spiritual patrimony, especially when one thinks of the limitations due to the ecclesiastical practice of the time; for this reason it is important to keep before the mind other writings of the Founder of particular significance (cf. for example, the appendix to the present book of the Constitutions, entitled "Writings of Don Bosco").

⁶ Cf. F. MOTTO, "Costituzioni della Società di Francesco di Sales 1858 - 1875", LAS Rome 1982; cf. also the chapter of this commentary on the history of our Constitutions: p. 36 ff.

⁷ Cf. MB XVII, 258, quoted in the Foreword to the Constitutions

The second reason stems from the fact that the Constitutions are meant to present a concrete plan for the following of Christ, with a specific ascetic discipline and a particular apostolic methodology. Now if they describe chiefly no more than the fundamental features of the specific nature of the Congregation, they need to be completed by practical and normative illustrations taken from living tradition and progressively condensed in some other complementary document. Don Bosco attached particular importance to methodological aspects of behaviour, and considered as indispensable the sense of an adequate religious discipline constantly updated.

And so a good number of our General Chapters, beginning from the first ones when the Founder was still alive, have drawn up concrete regulations.⁸ Suffice it to recall (before the Code of 1917) the General Chapters I (1877), II (1880), IV (1887) and X (1904), in which the legislative activity of the Congregation was particularly marked.

This led little by little to the drawing up of the General Regulations; these also were fundamentally re-drafted and reorganized after Vatican II. They come within the orbit of the Constitutions, which they apply and render specific in more than a few practical aspects. As the Rector Major wrote in an important circular letter: "The requisite knowledge of the Constitutions will not be complete and genuine without an adequate study of the Regulations as well. The difference, in nature of the two texts does not imply any disparity of importance, but rather the need for mutual integration. How could one assign any methodical force to the Constitutions if one misunderstood or disregarded the Regulations?"⁹

Constitutions and Rule of life

We have seen that in the ancient Orders the "Rule" was an authoritative and classical text, and therefore venerated and un touchable, which went back to the first beginnings (St Benedict, St Augustine in the West), but alongside of which were placed other texts, of a more precise and binding character which served for its interpretation and application.

With the appearance of new kinds of Religious Life new kinds of Rule also appeared.

St. Francis of Assisi, for example, did not want to adopt any of the traditional Rules as a model for his own Order, but created a new Rule (with various initial drafts) more suited to his own evangelical project.

As we have already said, St Ignatius of Loyola too wanted a "Formula Instituti" as the basic text, distinct from the classical Rules, with alongside it the Constitutions and the successive enactments of the Decrees of the legislative organ of the Society (the "General Congregation").

⁸Cf. this commentary: "A brief History of the text", p. 52 53

⁹E. VIGANO. "The renewed text of our Rule of life", AGC < 312, 1985,

with different procedures and texts, whose objective was always that of ensuring both the originality of their own evangelical inspiration and a concrete style of discipline of life.

All this confirms that there has in fact been a continual evolution in the very concept of "Rule", which has remained somewhat fluid and adaptable to the individual institutes.

In the modern Congregations (of simple vows) which have the Constitutions as their fundamental document, the concept of Rule is primarily linked with the Constitutions, but then becomes broadened to a certain extent so as to include the other texts which flank them for the purpose of "regulating" the life of the members.

In our own domestic use, in line with our Salesian tradition, the term "Rule" (or "the Rules") is often synonymous with "Constitutions"; Don Bosco used it in that sense at a time before the general Regulations existed. This serves to emphasize once again (in harmony with secular usage) the fundamental importance of the Constitutions for us, but we must not forget the significance of the other normative texts.

To make clearer the concrete meaning of "Rule of life" the distinction and mutually complementary relationship between Constitutions and Regulations are worth pointing out.

According to the new Code of Canon Law the Constitutions of a religious institute represent its "basic charter" and must contain:

- The intention of the Founder and what he laid down concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, as well as its wholesome traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the institute itself¹⁰
- Basic norms about the governance of the institute, the discipline of the members, the admission and formation of members, and the proper object of their sacred bonds¹¹. From a juridical point of view, the Constitutions become true ecclesiastical laws; they are approved by competent ecclesiastical authority and can be changed only with its consent¹².
- In the Constitutions, finally, the spiritual and juridical elements are to be aptly harmonized.¹³

The General Regulations on the other hand, which flank the Constitutions, regulate the practical life, discipline and activity of our Society. "They contain the concrete practical applications of the Constitutions to matters of universal import, and are consequently valid throughout the Congregation".¹⁴

¹⁰ CIC, can. 578

¹¹ CIC, can. 587,1

¹² CIC, can. 587,2

¹³ CIC, can. 587,3

¹⁴ GC21,381

From a juridical point of view the General Regulations are also ecclesiastically laws¹⁵ approved by the General Chapter. Since at times some norms are formulated to meet determined historical circumstances which are of their nature changeable, the Regulations are naturally easier to modify.

In conclusion the concrete religious life project, i.e. the original gospel inspiration and the practical norms which translate it into a way of life, imply the need to specify the different aspects which "regulate" the life of the members. Such specification finds expression in various but complementary texts.

One can see therefore a certain elasticity and evolution in the meaning of the term "Rule" which, in practice, has led to a wider use of the expression "Rule of life", in line with what is stated in the text of our present Constitutions: "The life and activity of communities and confreres are regulated by the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Society" (C 191).

In fact, if by "Rule of life" is meant not only the description of the particular gospel inspiration but also the practical norms of religious conduct, i.e. a concrete manner of following Christ with a spiritual discipline and a particular apostolic method which provides a guide for the daily personal and community behaviour of the members, its use appears more suitable for indicating simultaneously both the Constitutions and the General Regulations and including also other texts forming part of the particular law (cf. C 191).

Various modern Congregations use the term in this sense, and in this sense too it has been used by our Rector Major, as for instance in his closing address to the GC22,¹⁶ in his circular letter of 29 October 1984, presenting to the Congregation the re-written version of the Constitutions and Regulations,¹⁷ and in the official presentation of the renewed text of our Rule.¹⁸

We can say, therefore, that for us the term "Constitutions" indicates specifically and exclusively the "Fundamental Code" of our way of consecrated life (which is precisely the objective of the reflections contained in this Commentary); while the expression "Rule of life" (or "our Rules") although indicating principally and substantially the Constitutions, includes in practice also the General Regulations, and in a wide sense extends also to other directives and deliberations of our particular law (cf. C 191).

Process of interior assimilation

The Constitutions are not a library book; neither are they a talisman, nor yet a magic manual; they are a "book of life": "they are for us, the Lord's disciples, a way that leads to Love" (C 196). For this reason they must be meditated on and assimilated

¹⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 587,4

¹⁶ C.F. GC 22, *Documents*, 91

¹⁷ Cf. AGC 312, 1985, especially p. 20-21

¹⁸ Cf. Constitutions 1984, Presentation, p. 5-7

in a constant process of interiorization which makes of every professed member an emulator of Don Rua who became known as the living Rule".

The Constitutions "define the apostolic project" of Don Bosco (cf. C 2, 192).

The word "project" implies freedom and creativity in personally assuming a well defined orbit of life and action.

The professed member is not incorporated in the Congregation in the same way that a cog is inserted in a machine; nor is he called upon to apply once and for all a detailed and fixed programme which will then function in a monotonous manner; what he does is choose an evangelical orbit in which to function according to dynamic criteria which the Constitutions indicate to his spirit of initiative and to the commitment of his faith. The project determines the spiritual trajectory in which he is launched and offers him the criteria and methods needed to attain the objectives of the mission assigned to him. In this way the member takes on an adventure to be lived rather than a standardized plan to be followed out.

The project is also apostolic, i.e. characterized by the following of Christ, true Apostle of the Father. This in turn implies sensitivity and attraction towards two inseparable poles: the mystery of God, to be reached in the fullness of personal faculties, and the history of man in which to submerge oneself with saving ardour: two poles which are always new and which exclude any standing still or acquired habit.

And then the apostolic project in question is that of Don Bosco: i.e. an experience to be lived in the reality of history, not to repeat a stereotyped experience of the past but to incite with the same means and efficacy the development of the man of the present day under the impulse of the same dynamism of the Holy Spirit, rested and proved by the holiness and brilliance of the Founder.

These are all aspects, which call for personal initiative and commitment of mind and heart, i.e. for a continued living interiorization of the institutional text.

The vital qualities and components of this project demand certain personal and community attitudes towards the Constitutions, of which the principal ones are: knowledge, harmony, devotion and living practice.

- *Knowledge*: decision and free commitment always presuppose that the project is known; one cannot commit oneself to the realization of a plan of which the contents are unknown. Hence a careful study of the Constitutions is indispensable. When an institute begins to decline the root cause is indifference and ignorance among the members with regard to the Constitutions.
- *Harmony*: serious study leads spontaneously to a recognition of a connatural vocational ethos which brings with it feelings of esteem, attraction and love, i.e. an attitude of cordial harmony. The member looks on the Constitutions as a precious family legacy, as a sign of divine predilection and enlightenment for his personal existence, as a spiritual secret, which leads him to the discovery of the treasures of the Gospel. They constitute the specific viewpoint from which he

Revelation. In fact, "our living Rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour announced in the Gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young" (C 196)

- *Devotion*: knowing that "every human institution", as Paul VI wrote, is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened by formalism" and that "external regularity is not by itself sufficient to guarantee the value of a life and its inner consistency",¹⁹ it is indispensable that the content of the Constitutions should penetrate into life and that harmony with them should mature into an attitude of prayer: not a parallel external prayer but a prayerful reading of the text itself which will transform study of the articles into a dialogue with God. It is important to be able to "pray the Constitutions", i.e. introduce them in a vital manner into the spiritual dynamism of our devotion to Jesus Christ. A similar attitude will enable the member to find his way into the very heart of Don Bosco so as to feel its evangelical inspiration as the permanent creative source of the whole of his apostolic project.
- *Living Practice*: knowledge, harmony and devotion cannot stop at a purely affective level, but must necessarily lead to practical application in life. It is not a question of a mere legal observance which, as we have heard from Paul VI, can become fossilized.

How, for instance, are we to "observe" article 40, which presents Don Bosco's Oratory to us as the "lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works"? It is a question of translating the experience of Don Bosco into the life of the present day.²⁰

"Living practice" is much more than simple observance; it calls for fidelity supported by personal witness, by communion of life in the house, by a pastoral creativity to meet the challenges of the times, by an awareness of the local and universal Church, by a predilection for today's needy youngsters, and by a tireless spirit of self-sacrifice every day of the year.

It is not the purpose of our Constitutions to lead us into a convent, there to live as observant religious; they call upon us to "stand at Don Bosco's side" to be "missionaries of the young". Rightly could Fr. Rinaldi assert: "The new spirit which Don Bosco gave to the Constitutions, a spirit which was the harbinger of times yet to come, put many obstacles in the way of approval... The idea in his mind was that of a Pious Society, which would be a true religious Congregation, but without the traditional external aspect. Flexibility in adapting to all the forms of good which are

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²⁰ On the diligent and loving practice of the Rule, v. the impassioned circular letter of Don Bosco to his "dear and well loved children", of 6 Jan. 1884; cf. *Collected letters* IV, pp. 248-250

continually coming to birth in humanity is the distinguishing spirit of our Constitutions.²¹

This is why the process of interior assimilation of the Constitutions is in the last analysis the real basic commitment of our religious profession, to be lived out and developed all through our lives.

From Baptism to profession

To understand fully the significance of the Constitutions in the life of the Salesian one needs to reflect on the fact that they are specifically ordered to religious profession. In fact in the free and total offering he makes of himself to God, the professed member commits himself to live "according to the way of the Gospel set out in the Salesian Constitutions" (C 24). From this option, "one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make" (C 23), derives for the member the binding force of the Constitutions, "freely assumed before the Church" (C 193).

Profession expresses the will to belong to the Congregation, the decision to "remain with Don Bosco", to share the responsibility for its apostolic project, translating his own baptismal commitment into the intention to follow Jesus Christ as Don Bosco followed him!

As will be seen in the commentary on the text itself, profession is "an act which recalls and endorses the mystery of the baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression" (C 23).²²

The "new life" of Baptism is determined in the Salesian by the manner of commitment expressed in the Constitutions; they become the authentic description of the way in which he lives the mystery of his Baptism. "There are not two levels (in his option to follow Christ): that of religious life which is a little higher, and that of Christian life which is a little lower. For the religious, testifying to the spirit of the beatitudes with the profession of the vows is his only manner of living out his baptism."²³

And so for the professed the Constitutions enter in fact into the great biblical concept of the covenant.

From baptism to profession his existence moves along the track of a concrete covenant with God: on God's part it implies the seal of consecration by the power of his Spirit which makes baptismal life possible through the integral practice of the Constitutions,²⁴ and on the part of the professed member it implies the total offering of himself not simply by the making of vows, but by the overall assumption of the entire constitutional project (cf. C 3, 2).

²¹ASC 17, 1923, p. 41

²²Cf. also C 60; KG 44; PC 5

²³SGC 106

²⁴Cf. AGC 312, 1985, p. 22-23 and 30-34

The following out of this covenant, made by a disciple of Christ with a strong Church awareness, is marked and enlightened by the Constitutions as a characteristic reading of the Gospel. Rightly could Don Rua assert: "The Constitutions, coming from the fatherly heart of Don Bosco and approved by the Church, are for us the marrow of the Gospel, the way of perfection, the key to paradise, the pact of our covenant with God".²⁵

The Constitutions "a pledge of hope"

The results of a constant process of interior assimilation which leads us to live the Constitutions with zeal and reassurance of the covenant, make of them a "pledge of hope" (C 196). The members in fact, "placed at the heart of the Church" (C 6) become "through the action of the Spirit" (C 25), a "sign of the power of the resurrection" (C 63); the practice of the evangelical counsels helps them "to discern God's action in history" and transforms them into educators who proclaim to the young "new heavens and a new earth" (C 63). Furthermore the prospect of their perseverance which "is founded entirely on the fidelity of God", is daily made possible because "it is nourished by the grace of his consecration" (C 195): "I will run the way of your commands, because you give freedom to my heart" (Ps 119, 32).

The Constitutions become too, in the life of the members, a "pledge of hope" especially for the young.

The Church herself recognizes in the evangelical path they trace out "a special benefit for the whole People of God" (C 192). By the practice of the evangelical counsels the members become witnesses to a world to come, "awakening (in the young) hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise" (C 63); their consecrated life becomes in this way the most precious gift we can offer to the young" (C 25).

Don Bosco's apostolic plan in fact aims at leading the members "to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C 2).

The young can then feel that God loves them, and they will give joyful thanks to him every time they see that today's Salesians have become "for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope (C 196).

Marian aspect

As a conclusion to these brief introductory remarks, it will be useful to recall the Marian aspect of the present Constitutions.

²⁵D. RUA, Lettera 'osservanza Constitutions, December 1909, *Circulars*. p. 449

Don Bosco was convinced that his particular spiritual and apostolic experience was a gift that came to him through the motherly hands of the Madonna: "The Blessed Virgin is our foundress. She will also be our support".²⁶

Because of this the Constitutions display a certain Marian slant.

They assert in fact:

- that the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco "through the motherly intervention of Mary" (C 1);
- that the Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work, especially in the foundation of our Society" (C 8);
- that "under the guidance of Mary his teacher, Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the 'Preventive System" (C 20); that "Mary Immaculate, Help of Christians, leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord and gives us courage for the service of our brethren" (C 92).

Furthermore, the Constitutions explicitly proclaim the filial entrustment to Mary which characterizes every professed member (cf. C 8) and the whole Congregation as such (cf. C 9).

In fact, "led by Mary, we willingly accept the Constitutions as Don Bosco's will and testament, for us our book of life and for the poor and the little ones a pledge of hope" (C 196). She it is, the Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, who helps us in faith to make of this text a book of prayer and commitment: our "way that leads to Love" (C 196).

²⁶ BM VII, 197

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEXT

A synthetic presentation of the history of the text of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, from the first draft of 1858 to the approval of the renewed Constitutions after Vatican II in 1984, is equivalent to following in a certain perspective the life and work of Don Bosco and his Successors, the social and cultural vicissitudes over more than a century, and the ecclesiastical legislation enacted during the same period.

There are three components, so to speak, which affect the formation of the Constitutions of a religious institute:

1. The Founder, who brings the charisms he has received from God: he receives the divine call and determines the scope and spirit of his institute. This is the charismatic element which is proper to the Founder and which continues in the Congregation.
2. The Circumstances which made the divine will clear to the Founder and led him to start work. The historical elements specify the objective and have an effect on the legislative form. These circumstances of time and place could be called the human element.
3. Ecclesiastical legislation: the life of an institute, born in the Church and for the Church, needs the doctrinal and moral security which only the Apostolic See can guarantee. This is the juridical element.

Salesian life too had these components which gave life to a fruitful legislation. It is not possible within the space of a short chapter to provide a complete, systematic and exhaustive treatment of more than a hundred years of civil, religious and Salesian history. In view of the purpose of this Commentary, we shall limit ourselves to some remarks of a historical character which, by presenting the chief points in the history of the text we now have in our hands, will enable us to better understand its significance and appreciate its values. Detailed bibliography dealing with the same argument can readily be found.¹

If we consider as milestones on the road of the Salesian Constitutions the dates of 1874 (the year of approval of the Constitutions written by the Founder), 1923 (the year of approval of the text after it had been updated in the light of the Code of Canon Law of 1917, and 1984 (the year of the definitive approval of the renewed Constitutions after Vatican II), the history of our text can be divided into the following three periods or phases:

1. 1858-1875: the phase of the elaboration of the Constitutions through the work of Don Bosco himself.

¹ V. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE at the end of this Commentary.

more precise.

3. 1968-1984: the phase of revision and redrafting of the Constitutions after Vatican II.

1. THE DRAWING UP OF THE CONSTITUTIONS BY DON BOSCO HIMSELF (1858-1875)

In this first phase, which lasted seventeen years, the most important steps in the development of the constitutional text are marked by two dates:

1.1 1864: The issue of the "Decretum laudis" and the formulation of the first 13 "animadversiones" by the competent Roman Congregation.

1.2 1874: The approval of the Constitutions of the Founder.

1.1 1864: The "Decretum laudis" and the formulation of the "animadversiones"

The first constitutional text drawn up by Don Bosco, on the basis of precise literary sources and after consultation in person and by letter with various civil and religious authorities of the time, dates from 1858. From it all future versions are derived by successive additions and corrections.

Of the 58 articles which made up that first text, 21 referred to the vows, 14 to government, 5 to the purpose of the Congregation, and 4 to the acceptance of member. The chapter on the "form of the Society" also included some articles of a heterogeneous nature. In addition to the "Introduction" which expressed motivations of a general character, of particular importance was the first chapter on the origin of the Society. There in rapid synthesis was found an account of the catechistical vicissitudes of the Oratory of Valdocco from 1841 onwards, which in the eyes of the Salesians would have constituted the charismatic and normative experience which shaped their future.

That this however was no more than a provisional text is evident from the great lack of precision in juridical norms, notable lacunae concerning the relationship with religious authorities at diocesan and pontifical level, and the lack of indications concerning the prayer life of members of the Society. And so it happened that even before 18 December 1859 (the date of the formal birth of the Congregation of the Salesians), the first draft had already been modified by an addition to the objectives of the Society (the care of vocations), changes about the procedure for the election of councillors of the Rector Major, and the drafting of a chapter on the "practices of piety".

The revision of the text in the four years between the sending of the manuscript to the Archbishop of Turin and its transmission to the Holy See (1860-1864) already reflected the negotiations with the diocesan authorities concerning the opening of new houses and the official legislation of the Church, made known to everyone through the "Collectanea" of Bizzarri.² The number of articles rose from 58 to 107 distributed over 15 chapters, in addition to the short introductory chapter and the formula for religious profession which was placed at the end. Norms were added for the religious government of the Society, the election of the Rector Major, the practices of piety, the habit of the confreres, and the "external" members.

On 23 February 1864 the Roman Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued the "Decretum laudis" by which it officially recognized the existence of the new Society. The decree was accompanied by 13 "animadversiones" to be taken into account in preparing the Constitutions for future approval.

1.2 1864-1875: Approval of the Constitutions and their publication in two languages

In the decade following the "Decree of praise" Don Bosco carried out continuous direct and indirect negotiations with the religious authorities at both central and local level, with a view to getting the Constitutions of the Society approved.

As soon as he received the 13 "animadversiones" he set to work to conform the text to the requests made by Rome. Some of these requests he accepted unreservedly; in the case of others he expressed clearly motivated objections. In particular he did not share the perplexity expressed by the Roman Congregations concerning the articles which gave the Superior General the faculty to dispense from vows, to issue dimissorial letter for sacred ordinations, to alienate goods and contract debts without the consent of the Holy See, to open new houses and to take on the direction of seminaries with the simple permission of the Ordinary.

The new text, in Latin, which was presented in 1867 together with a petition for the "approval of the Institute and of its Constitutions", received in Rome exactly the same observations as that of 1864. The good offices of Bishops and Cardinals favourable to Don Bosco had no effect on the competent Roman authorities who, on the basis of critical observations made among others by the new Archbishop of Turin, emphasized the little reliability of the ecclesiastical formation given in Salesian house. Another point that met with strong opposition was the formulation of the vow of poverty which allowed the members to keep their property while giving up by rule its use and enjoyment. But the objections of the Roman Curia did not prevent the approval of the Congregation by the Bishop of Casale in 1868 and the pontifical approval which followed a year later.

² Until approx. 1860, Rome had left the numerous Congregations, that were springing up more or less everywhere in those years, a certain freedom in drawing up their own Statutes, reserving only the right to check them and suggest modifications if necessary; but in 1863 the "*Collectanea in usum Secretariae Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularum*". (Rome 1863) was issued, which contained common norms wherein Founders would have to model and inspiration.

This approval in 1869 marked an important point in the history of the Salesian Congregation, but there remained a further step to be taken: the definitive approval of the Constitutions.

Don Bosco took in hand once again the printed text of 1867, made some small modifications to it and with the backing of more than twenty Bishops presented it once more in person to the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who in turn passed it to a new consultor for examination. The latter made 38 observations, subsequently reduced by the Secretary to 28, most of which were included by Don Bosco in the new text of 1873. He asked nevertheless that some of the requests be toned down, while others he strongly opposed in both official "Declarations" and informal discussions during his visit to Rome at the beginning of 1874. On this occasion he took the opportunity to try to persuade Bishops and Cardinals not inclined to favour the definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions to change their minds, especially after the reception of an alarmist dossier of Mgr Gastaldi, in which he not only made precise criticisms about the religious and cultural formation of the Salesians but also asked that the Ordinary be given effective control over the communities of the Congregation.

Finally on 3 April 1874, with some further modifications, the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales were approved.

As compared with the first draft of 1858, and even that presented to Rome in 1864, the changes introduced were many and in some sectors quite radical. The increased number of juridical norms had obscured to some extent the basic inspiration of a spiritual nature that had characterized the first drafts. In particular, the foreword and the chapter on the history of the Congregation had been eliminated. The vows were to be triennial, before being renewed for a similar period or made in perpetuity. Admission to Orders "titulo Congregationis" would be possible only for members in perpetual vows. Norms were included for the convoking of the General Chapter and those who should take part in it, and for the election of members of the Superior Chapter. The articles on the VOW of poverty had been completely rewritten along the lines of the Constitutions of the Marist Fathers, approved the previous year. Two new chapters had been introduced, one on studies and the other on the novitiate (which was to last an entire year, under the guidance of a Master of Novices and in a house erected for the purpose).

The Constitutions thus amended comprise 137 articles in 15 chapters, made up as follows:

Chap.I	Purpose of the Society	6 articles
Chap.II	Form of the Society	8 articles
Chap.III	The vow of obedience	5 articles
Chap.IV	The vow of poverty	7 articles
Chap.V	The vow of chastity	6 articles
Chap.VI	Religious government	7 articles
Chap.VII	Internal government	8 articles
32 Chap.VIII	Election of the Rector Major	9 articles

Chap.IX	The other superiors	17 articles
Chap.X	The individual house	17 articles
Chap.XI	The acceptance of members	10 articles
Chap.XII	Studies	6 articles
Chap. XIII	Practices of piety	11 articles
Chap. XIV	The novitiate and master of novices	17 articles
Chap. XV	The habit	3 articles

The formula of profession and a "conclusion" on whether or not observance of the Constitutions was binding under pain of sin completed the manuscript text authenticated by the Apostolic sec.

On his return from Rome Don Bosco saw to the printing, in the very same year, of the text into which he himself, with Prof. Lanfranchi, had introduced some slight modifications. The so-called "amendments of style and language" (wrongly attributed to the Barnabite Innocenzo Gobio) amounted in fact to a toning down of some of the normative prescriptions and gave a particular emphasis to some of the points Don Bosco had originally wanted, and which had become obscured during the approval process.³

The following year (1875), in the Italian edition, Don Bosco again retouched some of the norms already approved and published in Latin, and brought back some of the dispositions that had got lost in the previous drafting phases — this in virtue of an indult "vivae vocis oraculo" given him by the Pope.⁴ Considerable modification was made in particular to the chapter dealing with the novitiate (reduced from 17 to 7 articles). An "Introduction" of a doctrinal and theological nature, compiled by Don Bosco and in part by Don Barberis, preceded the constitutional text in the printed edition, which would be used by the Salesians and remain unaltered for the next thirty years.

2. THE CONSTITUTIONS MADE MORE PRECISE: JURIDICAL REVISION AND AMPLIFICATION (1875-1968)

Immediately after the approval of the Constitutions, Don Bosco, as has already been said, amended them in virtue of the faculty given him "vivae vocis oraculo" by the Pope. In the course of the next eighty years the text underwent further modifications, and this despite the express intention of the Salesians to be faithful to Don Bosco and their almost instinctive fear of touching such venerable texts.

There were two main reasons which led to this. The first was the development of the Congregation: from a few dozen members living in Piedmont and Liguria in 1874, the Society grew by the 60's of the present century to more than 20,000, spread over

³The ~~is whole criteria underlying corrections~~ corrections to this text were presented by PROVERBIO in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane", n.4 (January-June 1984) pp. 93-109

⁴Cf. F. MOTTO, p. 20, with note 47

nearly one hundred countries in all five continents; different countries and different times meant situations quite different from those in which Don Bosco had lived and worked, and these called for enlargement and more detailed statements in some sectors of our code of life.

To the internal development of the Congregation there was soon added a second motive of an ecclesiastical and juridical nature: the promulgation by the Apostolic See of documents expressly requesting religious institutes to make changes in the text of their Constitutions so as to bring them up to date; we may note in particular the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901, and the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917.

The immediate instruments for bringing about the necessary legislative interventions were the General Chapters of the Society with the series of their deliberations. It is quite true to say, in fact, that during this period it is impossible to follow the history of the Constitutions without detailing, at least in part, the history of the General Chapters.

There are however three events of fundamental importance which mark the history of the constitutional text during these eighty years:

2.1 1905: approval by the Holy See of the "deliberations...which are to be considered organic in nature".

2.2 1923: approval of the Constitutions, modified so as to bring them into line with the Code of Canon Law of 1917.

2.3 1966: approval of the modifications made by the GC19 of 1965.

Reference will be made later (2.4) to the work of modifying the General Regulations, which went on in parallel with the successive revisions of the Constitutions.

2.1 1905: Approval of the "organic deliberations" to be inserted in the constitutional text of 1875.

On 1 September 1905 the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued a decree approving the "Deliberations of the General Charters of the Pious Salesian Society, to be considered organic", which the Procurator General at the time (Fr Giovannin Marengo) had presented together with the Acts of the GC10. Let us take a brief look at what had happened in the previous thirty years.⁵

⁵ A panorama of the historical evolution of the Constitutions from the first draft of 1858 to the death of Don Bosco (1888) is offered by P STELLA, "Le Costituzioni salesiane fino a/ 1888", in "Fedelta e rinnovamento. Studi sulle costituzioni salesiane", LAS - Roma, 1984, pp. 15-54. For the following period cf. in the same volume, the article by F. DESRAMAUT, "Le Costituzioni salesiane dal 1888 al 1966", pp 55-101

With the approval of the Constitutions in April 1874, the Salesian Congregation became fully entitled to its place in the list of religious families which were publicly and officially recognized. Riding high on the Founder's charisma and the enthusiasm generated by the approval that gave it "a firm, secure and, we may add, infallible basis",⁶ the Society grew rapidly in membership and extended in all directions in both Europe and Latin America. But such expansion, accompanied by an equally wonderful growth of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Salesian Cooperators, raised problems about its organization and consolidation. Even though very frequent, the verbal and written exhortations of Don Bosco, with which he took care to assist his Congregation in its early days, were no longer sufficient for the purpose.⁷ A regular process for the making of rules became imperative, and was in fact foreseen by the Constitutions: "In order to treat of things of greater moment, and to provide for all that the needs of the Society, the times and the places demand, a meeting of the General Chapter shall ordinarily be held once every three years" (chap. V, art. 3). "The General Chapter can furthermore propose any addition to the Constitutions, and any other such changes as it may consider to be desirable" (Chap. V, art. 4).

And so in 1877 the First General Chapter of the Salesian Society issued in the space of a month more than 300 "deliberations", which were published in the following year.⁸ They covered five sectors of Salesian life: study (5 chapters), common life (11 chapters), morality (4 chapters), economy (6 chapters) and regulations for provincials (4 chapters). Various appendices contained norms and regulations for the theatre, for rectors, for General Chapters, for the Association of Cooperators, and for the communities of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Three years later the GC2 re-examined all the previous legislation, both that emanating from the Chapters and that formulated in rectors' conferences". The collection of new deliberations (more than 400 in number), which would be printed in 1882⁹ still appeared in five distinct sections, i.e.. special regulations (for the General Chapter, the Superior Chapter, the provincial, the rector, etc.), common life, piety and morality, studies, economy.

A subsequent publication of chapter deliberations took place in 1887¹⁰ at the end of the GC4 (the GC3 lasted only seven days and produced no special documents): these deliberations dealt with new aspects, and developed others which had been merely touched on previously. Some one hundred deliberations included detailed

⁶ Cf. Don Bosco's introduction to the Constitutions approved in 1874.

⁷ ~~Until the GC1, life in salesian houses was regulated (in addition to the Constitutions) by the "Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales", published in several editions by thy "Regolamento per le Case della Societa de S. Francesco di Sales", printed in 1877 after several manuscript editions, and by the Deliberations wade in the so-called annual rectors' "conferences"~~

⁸ *"Deliberazioni del quinto Capitolo Generale Bella Pia Societa salesiana tenuto in Lanzo nel settembre 1877."* Tipografia e libreria salesiana, Torino 1878 (96 p.)

⁹ *"Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale dell Pia Societa salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880,"* Tipografia e salesiana, Torino 1882 (88 p.)

¹⁰ *"Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Societa salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-1886."* Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Cavese 1887 (28 p.)

regulations for parishes, and also norms for sacred ordinations, festive oratories, the Salesian Bulletin, the preservation of the religious spirit, and vocations among the coadjutors and artisans.

b. After the death of Don Bosco.

After the death of the Founder, the legislative activity of the Society continued under his successor, Fr Michael Rue. The small volume printed in 1890¹¹, which contained the collected decisions of the GC5 held in the preceding year, comprised 11 chapters with a total of 117 articles. They contained legislation for philosophical and theological studies, and for confreres on military service; there were norms for the autumn vacations, for the administration of property, for the prefect of arts and trades, and a relatively large space (40 articles) was dedicated to regulations for parishes.

A further four years were to pass before the production of a systematic presentation of Salesian law, in logical and detailed form, which would make possible the observance of the numerous decisions of the various General Chapters and coordinate them with the Constitutions. The work of the GC6, and of a commission that was occupied in the task for an entire year, led to the formulation of 712 "deliberations of the first six General Chapters", published both separately and also in a volume which contained the Constitutions of 1875 and Don Bosco's doctrinal "Introduction" as well.¹² As far as possible the order followed was that adopted by Don Bosco in the GC2, i.e.: Special regulations (art. 1-243); common life (art. 244-347); piety (art. 348-393); morality (art. 394-537); studies (art. 538-617); economy (art. 618-712).

The GC7 (1898) and GC8 (1898) made no special deliberations: the matters dealt with were those studied in previous Chapters and were published in the "Acts", so that the members (as Don Rua wrote in 1896) could be aware of the method of working of the capitular assembly, and be more rapidly informed of the decisions taken.¹³ Of importance for the history of the Constitutional text was the decision taken in the GC8 to proceed as soon as possible to a revision of the text of the Constitutions itself, on the basis of the text originally approved by the Holy See¹⁴, so as to insert in them some important deliberations of the General Chapters.

¹¹ *"Deliberazioni del quinto Capitolo generale della Pia Societa salesiana tenuto in Valsalice presso Torino nel settembre 1889."* Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1890 (36)

¹² *"Deliberazioni dei sei primi Capitoli generali della pia societa Salesiana dale Regole o Costituzioni della medesia"* Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1894 (384 p.)

¹³ *"De1iberazioni del settimo Capitolo generale della pia societa Salesians"*. Tipografia salesiana - S. Benigno Canavese 1896 (5 p.) It should be remembered that in all the chapters ample powers were given to the Rector major to enable him to revise, complete and put in order the decisions of the General Chapters. This caused delay in publication of the deliberations. In an analogous manner in the GC7 certain themes (e.g. the relationship between the provincial and the rector of the provincial house, between provincial and families of Sisters dependent on them, etc.) were entrusted to the study of the Rector Major, who proposed them some months later in experimental articles to be submitted for approval at the next General Chapter.

¹⁴ Cf. *"Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii"*. Ex officina asceterii salesiani. Augustae Taurinorum 1900, (54 p.) from 1903 onwards all editions of the Constitutions adopt exemplum hoc constitutionum ex earumdem codice autographo penes Congregationem "Episcoporum et Regularium asservato per quam diligentissime descriptum ac recognitum

which all the rectors took part, together with the delegates of the individual houses; they were to put in order the deliberations made in the past, and in particular were to modify the decisions that had been made about rectors being confessors of their subjects, in obedience to the decree of the Holy Office of 24 April 1901.

But notwithstanding the good intentions of the chapter members and the self-sacrificing labours of the commission appointed for the purpose, they were unsuccessful and in the course of 1901 another edition of the Constitutions and preceding Deliberations was published, with nothing more than a recomposition of the sheets containing articles touched on in the previous Decree.

And so we reach the GC10, a Chapter which was to assume great importance. To meet the desire expressed by the GC9¹⁵ and on the basis of the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901¹⁶, it had the task of reordering the entire body of earlier legislation, separating the deliberations of a general character and those complementing the Constitutions from others which merely expressed desires or simply provided guidelines. The work of the Chapter, which met from 23 August to 13 September of 1904, led to the publication of two texts fundamental for the history of the Society: the "organic" deliberations and the "preceptive" ones, both kinds being presented to the Holy See.

The first group, 111 in all, had been compiled and discussed in the Chapter's general assembly; they gained the approval of the Apostolic See and all became articles of the Constitutions.¹⁷ After being first published in a booklet of 50 pages,¹⁸ in 1907 they were translated into Latin and published in a single bilingual edition with

¹⁵ "Let the Rector Major set up a permanent Commission which will see to the tidying up of those deliberations of Previous General Chapters which are of a general character and complementary to our Constitutions, omitting those which are merely exhortative in character. The remaining deliberations chosen by the Commission must be submitted once again to the next General chapter before being sent to Rome for approval": GC 9, 1-5 September 1901, Torino (no date) p 9.

¹⁶ Faced with the ever growing number of religious Congregations seeking from Rome the approval of their constitutions, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the organ of the Holy See responsible for the approval of such institutes, drew up in the second half of nineteenth century a judicial procedure for approval, which in 1901 became institutionalized in the "Normae secundum quas S. Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedure solet in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium". The document provided a model with minute details for the drawing up of Constitutions for new Institutes. This facilitated interventions of a juridical and administrative nature by the Roman Congregations, but at the same time made possible a dangerous levelling down of constitutional texts to a general uniformity.

¹⁷ D. RUA, Circulars, p. 398. The term "organic", often used in the course of the General Chapters, and especially in the GC10, was never given by them a precise juridical meaning, but seems to have been considered synonymous with "constitutional": The synonym went back to the time of Don Bosco (cf. introduction to the deliberations of the GCI). The adjective in fact confirmed the concept already expressed in the noun to which it referred, i.e. "deliberation". The letter was to be considered as a constitutional article (Deliberation 33b). Very probably, in the mind of the legislators, the adjective was to be applied to those deliberations which added to or changed the constitutions, and received their force of law only after the approval of the Apostolic See. The remaining deliberations on the other hand, which were not meant to change or add anything to the Constitutions even though general and permanent in character, were to be considered "preceptive or "disciplinary" and were binding on all members as soon as they had been promulgated by the Rector-Major. The sole purpose of the "Regolamenti della Pia Societa di S. Francesco di Sales" (Torino-Tipografia salesiana 1906) was to coordinate the preceptive deliberations

¹⁸ "Deliberazioni dei Capitoli generali della Pia Societa salesiana ritenersi come organiche." Tipografia salesiana-Torino 1905 (50 P.)

the extra articles inserted at the foot of the page;¹⁹ an asterisk was used to indicate the 37 article of the Constitutions to which each deliberation referred.

All the chapters of the Constitutions, with the exception of chap. VIII (the election of the Rector Major), XII (studies) and XV (the habit) were amplified and enriched with further details and interpretations. In this way every aspect of salesian life underwent modification and integration at constitutional level. Here too should be emphasized some innovations which were to exert a noteworthy influence on future legislation in the Congregation. In chap. I two deliberations broadened the field of work open to the members to include the foreign missions (§1 h) and parishes (§6.4 "which as a rule we shall not accept"). In the chapters on the vows, details were given for a more rigorous separation between the community and externs, for a greater uniformity of life between the different houses, etc. In chapter VI were included precise regulations for General Chapters, and in chap. IX articles were inserted on the provinces and provincials, unknown before 1874.

The influence of the "Normae secundum quas" is clearly discernible, especially in the deliberations dealing with the vows, in quotations from ecclesial documents and in the Appendix to the edition of 1907, which carried the full text of the decrees 'Auctis admodum' and 'Romani Pontifices'.

2.2 1923: Approval of the Constitutions after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law

The promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 and the circular of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars of 26 August 1918, in which religious institutes were directed to bring their Constitutions into conformity with the Church's laws and present them for re-approval,²⁰ set salesian canonists to work. Hardly three years passed before Pope Benedict XV approved a "new" constitutional text made up of 240 articles. It brought together the 137 of the first Constitutions of Don Bosco and the 111 'organic' articles approved in 1905, which had been completed in the General Chapter of 1910 by the addition of two others: one on the Procurator General for dealings with the Holy See, and one concerning the Secretary of the Superior Chapter. The whole was enriched too with specific contributions from the Code.

Although the Rector Major, Fr Philip Rinaldi, in his letter of 24 September 1921 wrote that "no substantial changes" had been introduced, he acknowledged nevertheless that some of the modifications were not without considerable importance, e.g. those concerning the rendiconto, the manner of admitting candidates to profession and sacred orders, and administration.²¹

¹⁹ "Constitution of the ,Society of St. Francis of ,Sales preceded by an introduction written by the Founder Don John Bosco." Tipografia salesiana Torino 1907 (304 p.) English translation, Salesian Press, London 1907.

²⁰ "Ad normam Canonis 489 Codicis Juris Canonici `Regulae et particulares Constitutiones singularum religionum, canonibus Codicis non contrariae, vim suam servant; quae vero eisderm opponuntur, abrogatae sum' ac proinde earum textus emendandus AAS 1918, p. 290

²¹ ACS n.6,24 September 1921, p. 261

It should be noted that although the rapidity with which the requests of the Apostolic See were complied with bore witness to the immediate submission to the new indications of the Church and respect for the prescriptions of the new Code
38 of Canon Law on the other hand it meant that the result was far from perfect.

Only 16 months after the pontifical approval, we find the same Don Rinaldi writing: "(The edition of 1921) appears defective in several points: there is a lack of logical connection in the way the different items are arranged, and both partial and total repetitions occur with a certain frequency: defects which arose in the course of the work necessary to bring everything into line with the new Code. Moreover although the General Chapter had the authority to make changes other than those imposed by the Church, some articles have been allowed to remain in the Constitutions which have by now been rendered out of date in practice because of the overall organization of our Society."²²

The GC12. convoked in 1922, worked to eliminate these defects and was encouraged by a new declaration of the Sacred Congregation (26 October 1921) which advised legislative organisms of religious institutes to take the opportunity offered by the necessity of bringing the constitutional text into line with the new Code, to introduce also other changes that were thought useful. The results of the chapter's work, entrusted at the end to a special commission for a final polishing as regards language and style, led in fact to a complete revision of the Constitutions: It was a case of rearranging all the material in chapters according to the original division, of disposing the articles in logical fashion within the individual chapters, of eliminating repetitions, of correcting the literary form, and of introducing small modifications called for by the times and by the development of the Society.

Approved on 19 June 1923, the new text contained 201 articles (39 fewer than its predecessor), distribution in 17 chapters. Without going into a detailed analysis of the modifications made in the editing phase,²³ one may note:

a) the reorganization of chapters: two chapters of the original Constitutions have been joined up to make one (chap. VI: religious government; chap. VII: internal government); the articles with the "organic deliberations" on the General Chapter and on the provinces, formerly inserted among the heterogeneous articles, were given autonomy in two specific chapters: the Provinces (chap. IX), and the General Chapter (chap. XI). In this way the titles of the individual chapters acquired greater logical precision, more suited to their actual content;

b) a more explicit statement concerning the single concept of authority: a constitutional definition of the figure of the Provincial was given, by analogy with that of the Rector Major;

c) important interventions in the field of formation, and particularly with respect to the novitiate: there was an almost literal insertion of some statements of the

²² ACS n.17,6 January 1923, p. 42

²³ cf. F. DESRAMAUT, "Le Costituzioni salesiane", op. cit, pp. 80-96

Code, but attention was concentrated rather on the spiritual progress of the young confrere.

The principal options of the mission of the Society, of its work and of religious life were not changed in any way.

2.3 1966. Approval of the modifications made by the C-C19

In contrast with what happened in the case of the Regulations, which were revised at various times, the Constitutions approved in 1923 remained practically unchanged for something like forty years. The GC15 of 1938 suppressed an item concerning the participation of Vicars and Prefects Apostolic in the General Chapter. The GC16 (1947) raised the number of members of the Superior Chapter to five from the three that had been laid down in 1923. The edition of the Constitutions prepared in 1954 was a reprint of earlier editions, with some small modifications of no great importance.

Much greater significance, on the other hand, attaches to the GC19, held at Rome in the new buildings of the salesian Atheneum. This one could be seen as a link between previous General Chapters and the Special Chapter of 1971.

Viewed as a whole the legislative set-up of 1923 did not undergo any radical change but small revisions were numerous and sometimes of no little significance, especially as regards structures, reflecting as they did an opening up to the conciliar renewal already under way. It is important to recall in this connection the attention given by this Chapter to the figure of the salesian, the care for preserving unity of the Congregation in decentralization, the explicit recognition of the role of the General Chapter (to the Regulations for which considerable time was given), the particular importance given to the Cooperators, the increase in number of the members of the Superior Council (previously called Superior Chapter) by the addition of Regional Councillors, the new figures of Vice-provincial and Vice Rector, etc.

The modification to the Constitutions and Regulations introduced by the GC 19 were published under the following headings.²⁴

1. Substantial modifications of a definitive kind: the revision of 11 articles and the formulation of 2 new ones (one on the periodic publication of the 'Acts of the Superior Council and one on the election of the members of the Superior Council which was to take place at a certain length of time after the beginning of the General Chapter).
2. Experimental modifications: concerning the number of members of the Superior Council and a different structure within the Council itself
3. Juridical updating and revision (involving 7 articles).

²⁴ MC 244, January 1966, pp. 221-236

There were also some changes of a purely formal nature, while some other proposed variations (in 6 articles) were not approved.

But this was no more than a prelude: four months after the ending of the GC 19 the Counsel Fathers of Vatican II approved the decree "Perfectae caritatis", which called upon all religious institutes to make an "opportune renewal" by means of an "appropriate revision" of the Constitutions, Directories and other official books and codes in line with conciliar documents" (PC 3;4).

2.4 A note on the drawing up of the General Regulations

The legislative organs of the congregation did not limit their work to the Constitutions, which had to be revised in accordance with the laws of the Church and the development of the Society. They had also to make parallel interventions from another aspect, that of the General Regulations.

As we have already seen, a first systematic arrangement of salesian law came into effect in 1894 with the publication of the "Deliberazioni dei primi sei Capitoli generali della Pia Società Salesiana". In 1906, following the work of the GC10, an edition of the General Regulations was published, which brought together all the previous editions and also all the decisions of the General Chapters that had taken place up to that time.

A further important moment in the drawing up of the Regulations followed the GC12. The need to "1. eliminate everything considered useless or too cumbersome; 2. introduce the necessary modifications and additions; 3. arrange everything in the most logical way"²⁵ resulted in the reduction to 416 articles in the 1924 edition of the previous massive number of 1406 in the previous text. This codification remained practically unchanged in its main aspects until the Special General Chapter. The more substantial modifications were inserted in the editions of 1954 and 1966. The former included the collected deliberations of the GC15 and 1966. The former included the collected deliberations of the GC15, GC16 and GC17 referring especially to the houses of formation (aspirantate, novitiate, studentates and houses for further training of coadjutors), while the latter carried the decisions of the GC 19 relating to numerous articles. The themes most in need of adaptation to the evolution of times and places included those of formation, the practices of piety, the Union of Salesian Cooperators and the Pontifical Salesian Atheneum. But despite this the basic arrangement remained more or less unchanged.

3. THE READRAFTING AND DEFINITIVE APPROVAL OF THE CONSTITUTIONS (1968-1984)

The text of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society which we now possess received pontifical approval after a long period of reflection, study and decisions,

²⁵ D. RINALDI, Introduction to the *"Regolamenti della Società salesiana"*, Epifania del Signore, Torino 1924

which the entire Society, from individual confreres scattered around the world to chapter members gathered in representative assembly at the highest level, undertook in response to the guidelines given by Vatican II. The work took seventeen years, during which time the Congregation made a sustained effort of situational analysis and constitutional synthesis unmatched over the previous hundred years of life.

In this period there were three principal phases:

3.1 1968-1972: this was the most decisive phase of the renewal; it was centred around the Special General Chapter (GC20) and led to the renewed text of the Constitutions which was approved for an experimental period on 5 January 1972.

3.2 1977-1978: the GC21 began the revision of the preceding text.

3.3 1984: the GC22 brought the twelve years of experimentation to an end.

3.1 1971-1972 The Constitutions renewed experimentally by the SGC

The "reshaping" programmes outlined by the GC19 remained to some extent on paper. Six months after the decree "Perfectae caritatis" there appeared another document of great importance, "Ecclesiae Sanctae", a practical direct and authoritative application of some of the decrees of Vatican II, which prescribed that in the course of the next two or three years every religious institute should convoke a "special" General Chapter for the purpose of revising the Constitutions without prejudice to the scope, nature and character of the institute.²⁶

After being authorized by the Holy See to postpone its beginning (but not beyond the normal interval between Chapters of six years), in October 1968 the salesians started on the preparatory work for this Special Chapter which began in June 1971.

It should be noted that *Ecclesiae Sanctae* did not ask only for a simple updating of legislation in harmony with the needs of the times, and specify who bore the responsibility for such renewal. It also spelled out the elements that were to be brought together in the renewed text. It was a question, in fact, of making notable modifications to the very concept of religious constitutions and to their literary genre: from being primarily juridical as in the past, they had to be given a slant which respected, and even highlighted, the charismatic reality of the religious. The change of perspective becomes very clear, as was stated in the introduction,²⁷ from a comparison between the directives of the "normae secundum quas" and those of "Ecclesiae Sanctae".

The prescriptions of the Council were clear and the whole Congregation set about preparing for the celebration of the Special General Chapter with three years of work, at a basic level through the consultation and sensitization of every community, and at intermediate level through the convocation of two provincial chapters and

²⁶ ES II 3; 6

²⁷ Cf. General Introduction, p. 20-21

and proposals eventually reached the 202 members of the General Chapter which, through its own commissions and subcommissions, made a deep study of all the main themes regarding salesian identity and mission, and finished up (after nearly seven months of intense work and no fewer than 140 plenary assemblies) by approving a profoundly "renewed" constitutional text. Every chapter, every article, every phrase had been examined and corrected in a search for a precision of language, a brevity and clarity of expression which would highlight all the richness of the salesian vocation. Not for nothing was the true and final drafting of the text preceded by long theological, historical and pastoral reflection, with the purpose of throwing light on situations and perspectives and the consequent choices, even of an editorial nature. ²⁸

Here it will be sufficient to draw attention to some of the more salient points, leaving a complete analysis of the Chapter's work to more specific studies.²⁹

1. The general plan of the Constitutions remained more or less unchanged, though some topics were given greater space while others appeared for the first time at constitutional level: among the latter, for example, were the treatment of the Salesian Family, the salesian spirit, work for collective human advancement, a different approach to the parish as a salesian work, a more complete description of the complementary nature of the members (priest and brother), the educative community, a particular emphasis on collective poverty, on-going formation, principles and criteria for the organization of the Society, etc.

2. More than 150 article of the Constitutions of 1966 found expression in as many articles of the renewed Constitutions. Of the other 50, some 15 were suppressed, while 35 were transferred to the General Regulations in conformity with the directives of Ecclesiae Sanctae and the evolution of Canon Law. It should be noted, however, that although the total number of articles remained identical this was not true of their content, which was notably enriched in ecclesial and salesian doctrine.

3. Even a cursory examination reveals that there had been a retrieval in depth of the thought of Don Bosco and a century of salesian tradition: this was especially evident with regard to the unity of life of the Salesian ("inseparably apostolic and religious"); the values of communion, friendship and reciprocal trust; the fundamental elements of the salesian spirit which pervade the whole text. It was evident too from a literary standpoint in the frequent implicit and explicit quotations from the Constitutions as written by the Founder and from other sources which go back to Don Bosco and his first collaborators.

4. At a deeper level one may note that the perspective and theological structure underlying the new text of the Constitutions had changed, in harmony with the ecclesiology and doctrine on religious life of Vatican II.

²⁸"Special 20th General Chapter of the Salesian Society", Rome 1971 (658 p.). A brief history of the renewed Constitutions is given by J. AUBRY: "*Come sono nate le nuove costituzioni. Iter del lavori dal 1968 al 1972*" in *Fedelta e rinnovamento....*", LAS 1971, pp. 205-216

²⁹ibid. pp. 217-250

5. Finally the style of linguistic expression had been changed to meet the demands of
43 the conciliar renewal. But the vocabulary adopted did not always harmonize the

need to express new concepts and new realities with our traditional simplicity of style. One of the tasks of the following General Chapter would be to produce a stylistic redrafting for greater clarity of expression and simplicity of tone.

3.2 1977-1978: The beginning of the revision of the Constitutions and the work of the GC21

A fundamental task of the GC21 was to revise the Constitutions (and Regulations) approved experimentally by the SGC on 4 January 1972. At the end of the first six-year experimental period, provincial chapters and individual confreres had in fact sent to the general Chapter their observations and suggestions.

On the basis of precise working criteria, the observations expressed "requests for clarification of certain concepts or more precise terminology; they also suggested stylistic improvements in the text of the Constitutions. A limited number of proposals were made concerning more fundamental aspects of certain texts".³⁰

The GC21 noted the overall acceptance of the Constitutions by the confreres, but in the awareness too that the text had not yet become fully known, assimilated and tried out, it made the following decisions:

1. It confirmed the text approved by the SGC and extended the experimental period for a further six years.

2. It introduced some modifications considered necessary to fill lacunae or to make the text more precise and complete. In particular it introduced four new articles: one on the intellectual formation of the members, and three on the structure of "Delegations". Other modifications made concerned the laity who share responsibility in the salesian mission, the formula of profession, the role of the Superior in community discussions, the formation of young confreres in "formation communities", a better definition of the roles of three of the Councillors General (for formation, youth pastoral work, and the Salesian Family). Six other articles were made more precise from a juridical standpoint.

The GC21 also decided to pass the working documents drawn up by the "Commission for the revision of the Constitutions and Regulations" to the next General Chapter, which would prepare the revised text to be submitted for definitive approval.

Similar decisions were made in respect of the General Regulations.

3.3. 1984: Definitive approval of the new text of the Constitutions

³⁰ Declaration of the GC 21 in "Chapter Documents", Rome 1978, 371

The preparations for the next phase of work, with a view to the drafting of the definitive text, began as early as June 1978, when a "Constitutions Group" was set up with the task of highlighting the historical continuity of the renewed text with the

preceding editions, of emphasizing its charismatic and normative content, and of studying its doctrinal foundations.

Two volumes of aids were prepared,³¹ the first of which carried the document of the "Constitutions and Regulations" Commission of the GC21 and a synthesis of the points of greater importance which had come to light in the GC20 and GC21. These, together with the critical edition of the "Constitutions of Don Bosco" were made available both to provincial chapters and to the members of the new General Chapter. They provided an instrument which fostered continuity in the work of revision.

Considerable influence on the revision of the Constitutions was also exerted by the great texts of the magisterium and legislation of the Church (of which the last in chronological order was the Code of Canon Law published a few months before the GC22 began), of the GC21, of salesian directives (Acts of the Superior Council and aids prepared by various Departments), of studies carried out in the Congregation in widely different places by individual experts and by research groups.

The GC22, which opened on 14 January 1984, also had available two volumes of "Schemi precapitolari". A complete dossier of more than 1000 pages containing an orderly presentation of the contributions of provincial chapters and individual confreres, together with indications and proposals designed to make easier the work of revision for the members of the Chapter.

The fact that the text promulgated by the SGC had met with a very positive acceptance by the Congregation — this had been confirmed by the replies to a questionnaire completed by members of provincial chapters — made easier the work of the capitular assembly, which carried out its work in a perspective of continuity with the SGC and the text it had drawn up.

Through the general assemblies and commissions through which it works, and in continual contact with a central commission for the drafting of the text (which had the duty of correcting differences of style and language, and especially of suggesting general criteria for the work of revision), the GC22 first decided on the general structure of the text,³² and then proceeded to a careful analysis of each chapter and article, so as to reach eventually the approval of a definitive text. Approved too were some deliberations and practical guidelines, together with a small booklet "An Aid to the Constitutions and Regulations" which, while not involving the authority of the Chapter, had the purpose of making it easier for the confreres, in the period immediately following the GC22, to understand the new structure of the constitutional text, emphasizing the aspects that had been more deeply analysed, modified and reformulated.

³¹ *"Contributi di studio su Costituzioni Regolamenti SDB"* 1, 2. Rome 1982

³² Cf. chap. III of this commentary on the general structure of the text. p. 61 ff.

The work of the Chapter ended on 12 May, after having entrusted to the Rector Major and his Council a final literary revision of the text and its presentation to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for definitive approval.³³ Between the end of May and the end of November there were various meetings of the General Council and of the relevant organs of the competent Roman Congregation for a dialogue from which was to emerge the approved text.

On 25 November 1984, after modifications to some thirty articles which had taken place in the course of this dialogue (concerned mainly with greater juridical exactness), the text was definitively approved. On the following 8 December it was promulgated by the Rector Major. And so came to an end the process of redrafting the Constitutions which had kept the Congregation busy at every level for more than fifteen years.

³³ Already from 1834 the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had been using a process for approval similar to that in use at the present time, i.e. its first phase the level of consultors, followed by a second at the level of a "Congress of the Sacred Congregation", at which the best of approvals was decided on with the drawing up of the relevant decree

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

After reviewing the principal events in the history of our Constitutions so as to gather all their spiritual and salesian richness, it will be useful to look at the overall structure of the text, i.e. the general plan lying behind both the organization and distribution of the contents and the mode of presenting them, so as to make of them an authentic salesian Rule.

One may note at the outset that the question of structure was the object of deep and interesting analysis in the SGC and also in the GC22 which carried out the work of final revision. As was said earlier in the historical remarks, the SGC heeded the bidding of Vatican II, and opted for a profoundly renewed text, rooted in the inspired intuitions of Don Bosco as they were expressed in the Constitutions he wrote himself, but reconstructed according to the theology and ecclesiology of the Council. At the end of its work, the SGC itself declared: "The extent of the work undertaken made it necessary to divide up the material in a different way, so that one can now speak of a new text even though in large part it presents the substance of the former Constitutions, but in an up to date manner".¹ The SGC also had the task of deciding on the language and literary style considered most suitable for a true and stimulating Rule of life.

The GC22 too dedicated various capitular discussions to an examination of the general structure of the text, and if on the one hand it confirmed the line taken by the SGC as regards the doctrinal and charismatic presentation, on the other it made a deeper study of how the material should be distributed so as to produce a more organic and unified arrangement.

From this brief preamble, still historical in character, one can understand something of the significance of the structure of the text. In fact the manner of organizing and presenting the contents gives to the salesian apostolic project set out in the Constitutions the typical and strongly unified physiognomy which is characteristic of our Society.

We shall now dwell briefly on the criteria lying behind the drafting of the text, and on some elements concerning the organization of the material.

1. The criteria for drawing up the text of the Constitutions

For a clearer understanding of the general plan of our Rule, as it emerged from the General Chapter's revision, it is important to keep in mind the CRITERIA underlying the analysis of the contents and the entire work of revision.

¹ "Declaration of the Special General Chapter XX" in "Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales" 1972, pp. 11-12

These criteria follow substantially from the guidelines of Vatican II, but also to some extent from requests made by the confreres and hence coming from the experience of the Congregation itself.

As far as the documents of the Magisterium are concerned, it is well-known that Vatican II, and subsequently *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, had provided authoritative guidelines for the revision of the texts of Constitutions.² In particular the decree "Perfectae caritatis", while asking religious institutes to revise their Constitutions in the light of the Council documents, had indicated among the principles of the renewal of religious life to be kept in mind: "a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life", and hence "the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel"; a return to "the primitive inspiration of the institute" and "therefore the spirit and aims of each Founder should be faithfully accepted and retained, as indeed should each institute's sound traditions"; and finally "adaptation to the changed conditions of the times".³

These criteria, dictated by the Church's Magisterium, corresponded in fact to the requests put forward by confreres from different parts of the Congregation, precisely in view of the work of revision.

What was asked for essentially was that the text of the Constitutions should have a more explicit biblical, theological and ecclesial foundation, and that at the same time its salesian inspiration should be clearly evident, in fidelity to the spirit and purpose of our Founder and the traditions of our Society. It was also asked that the Constitutions should contain only those juridical norms which were of universal application and essential for preserving the unity of the Congregation, thus accepting the principles of flexibility and decentralization as an expression of adaptation to different times and places.⁴

Starting from the indications of the Council and the points made by the confreres, and in the light also of the Code of Canon Law, the GC22 formulated the fundamental criteria which guided the definitive revision and gave shape to the overall arrangement of the text.

A rapid review of them may prove useful:

— *The evangelical and ecclesial criterion:*

this judges whether the text respects the evangelical and theological principles of the religious life, its charismatic nature as the "sequel Christi" and its sharing in the mystery and mission of the Church.⁵

— *The historical and salesian criterion:*

² Cf. PC 2,3; ES II, 12-14

³ Cf. PC 2,3

⁴ Cf. "Radiografia della relazioni dei Capitoli ispettoriali speciali", Roma 1969, especially pp. 162-169

⁵ Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

this determines whether, in addition to passing historical expressions, there are present those values which constitute the spiritual "patrimony" of our Society.⁶

— *The juridical and normative criterion:*

this guarantees the presence and clear expression in the text of the essential juridical norms needed to define the Character, objective and means of the institute.⁷

As well as these and with reference to the content, other criteria concern the *literary style*, which calls for: simple and modern language, and concern for conciseness and an organic arrangement of the material.

A further criterion of a general character (*"differentiating criterion for normative text"*) judges whether a particular item forms part of the fundamental code (i.e. Constitutions), or should more properly belong to other texts or our "particular law" (General Regulations or Directories).

Finally, the importance should be kept in mind of the so-called "*criterion of experience*" which makes use of the rich experience gathered in twelve years of experiment and expressed by both provincial chapters and confreres.⁸

2. The ordering of the content of the text

We shall not delay at this point to examine to what extent the constitutional text conforms to these criteria; the commentary in its various parts and chapters will provide exhaustive evidence in this respect. But it will be useful to point out how the above criteria have shaped the overall structure.

In the first place it is quite easy to see, as was said in the brief historical excursus, that the general theological setting of the new constitutional text fully reflects the theology and ecclesiology of Vatican II.⁹ This is evident not only from the ample and constant references to conciliar and pontifical teaching (using the Council's theological terminology), but especially from the fact that the whole salesian apostolic project is presented against the background of the conciliar ecclesiology: in the Church, a people gathered together in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit", which is the "universal sacrament of salvation", the humble salesian Society which "came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C 1) is called to be a sacrament of salvation for youth ("signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" - C2).

Fidelity to the origins, i.e. to the evangelical patrimony of the Founder, is also evident throughout the constitutional text.

⁶ Cf. ES II, 12; GC21 371

⁷ Cf. ES 11, 12; GC21 371

⁸ Cf. ASS .305 (1982), p. 43

⁹ Cf. chap. II of this commentary: "A brief historic of the texts", pp. 54-57

of Don Bosco, but it is clear that the text is a description of the spiritual and apostolic experience of the Founder, continued by his sons. Salesian life at the present day is constantly presented and assessed in the light of Don Bosco, his sanctity and his charism as a Founder: in this way the Constitutions represent the vital continuity of the spirit and practice of Don Bosco in the activity of his disciples today.

Worth recalling too is the effort made all through the work of revision to maintain an opportune and duly proportioned blending of spiritual and juridical elements, as desired by Vatican II and by the Code of Canon Law itself.¹¹ One of the objectives kept carefully in mind by the General Chapters was that of making the Constitutions a real volume of Spiritual life: a book which provides an interior prompting to follow Jesus in the style of Don Bosco, a book of meditation and prayer (cf. C 196). And so the juridical norms in the text have been reduced to a minimum, leaving only those needed for a clear definition of the purpose of the Institute, the bonds which bind members to the Society, and the community structures necessary for the life and activity of the Society itself. Norms, even of universal application, which deal with the application of general principles expressed in the Constitutions, have been transferred to the Regulations.

These considerations help to the better understanding of the general plan governing the distribution and ordering of the contents in the renewed text.

While emphasizing, as has been said, the substantial continuity of the great themes which define the Salesian project in the various editions of the Rule (themes which can be grouped around certain key words: *mission, community, evangelical counsels, formation, service of authority*), one cannot fail to note the structural changes introduced by the SGC and later by the GC22. While in fact the Constitutions written by the Founder (and the subsequent editions until 1966) developed the themes of salesian religious life in successive chapters without further divisions, the Constitutions approved in 1984 contain *14 chapters distributed in four parts, as is clear from the general index*:¹²

FOREWORD

First part

THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN THE CHURCH

Chap. I – III: art. 1-25 (25 articles)

¹⁰In the text of the Constitutions there are 31 explicit quotations (often literal) of the words of Don Bosco (cf. Foreword, and articles 1. 4. 8. 13. 14. 15. 17. 18. 19. 26. 29. 34. 38. 3). 50. 52. 64. (5. 71. 72. 79. 81. 83. 85. 91). In addition there are 45 other explicit references to Don Bosco and his thought in gas many other articles

¹¹ Cf. CIC, can. 587,3

¹² Cf. *Constitutions of the .Society of St Francis de Sales 1984* pp. 340-341

Second part
SENT TO THE YOUNG — IN COMMUNITIES
FOLLOWING CHRIST
Chap. IV-VII: art. 26-95 (70 articles)

Third Part
FORMED FOR THE MISSION OF PASTORS AND EDUCATORS
Chap. VIII - IX: art. 96-119 (24 articles)

Fourth Part
THE SERVICE OF AUTHORITY IN OUR SOCIETY
Chap. X - XIV: art. 120-190 (71 articles)

CONCLUSION
Art. 191-196 (6 articles)

As can be seen, the four parts have been preceded by a FOREWORD and followed by a CONCLUSION.

On examining this General Index the question spontaneously arises: what was the FUNDAMENTAL IDEA which led the GC22 to arrange the contents of the Rule of life in this way? i.e what is the motivation underlying the structure of the text?

Such motivation, which became clear from the capitular discussions but which is also evident from an analysis of the text itself, is that of the *unity of our life of consecrated apostles*: that of unity of the salesian vocation, which the SGC speaks of as "*grace*" given us by the Spirit.¹³

This motive of the "unity" of the salesian vocation was certainly present in the original text written by our Founder: it is evident from the very first article which presents the "scope" of the salesian Society in its essential elements.

Concern for the unity of the salesian project was continually present in the SGC, which already gave some thought to the arrangement of the contents of the Rule, from which it followed that "by a unique call Christ invites us to follow him in his saving work and in the life of celibacy and poverty he chose for himself".¹⁴

In the GC22 and hence in the text finally approved by the Apostolic See, the unity of our life is shown even more clearly through the deeper analysis of our APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION.

¹³ Cf. SGC 127: "The Holy Spirit calls the salesian to an Option of Christian existence which is at the same time apostolic and religious. Thus he gives him the grace of unity to like the dynamism of apostolic action and the fullness of religious life in a single movement of charity towards God and his neighbour"

¹⁴ Cf. Constitutions 1972, 15 Cf. PC 5

Religious consecration, which has its deep roots in baptismal consecration of which it is a fuller expression,¹⁵ is presented in its original significance as an initiative of the love of God which invests all our life: God calls us, "consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young" (C 3). In this consecration is manifested the powerful action of grace which helps us to live the vocation as a gift of God for the Church and for the world, a gift which in our case passes through Don Bosco and his spirit. For our part the consecrated life, with the obligations we assume before God and the Church, becomes a single, free and total offering to God in Christ and through Christ, to work with him for the building of the Kingdom.

We shall see in greater detail, in the commentary on art. 3, how the deep unity of the different elements which constitute the response of our consecrated life is described: apostolic mission, fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels: they are lived in a single movement of love".

We can say that *the general plan of the Constitutions draws its inspiration from this basic third article*: the overall structure and the arrangement of the parts and chapters was chosen so as to provide an organic treatment which would make immediately clear the unity of our vocation.

Later we shall look at the development of the individual parts, but even at this stage we can make a synthetic appraisal of their fundamental significance.

After a brief FOREWORD of a historical nature, which shows from the outset the importance of the Rule for us in the thought of Don Bosco himself, the FIRST PART (which could be called *"introductive and foundational"*) traces out the basic outline of the salesian vocation with its distinguishing notes, and describes its place in the Salesian Family, in the Church and in the world. It is the function of this part too to highlight some essential traits which enter and characterize other parts of the text: in particular the "salesian spirit" (chap.II) and the profession of the salesian (chap.III).

Next comes the lengthy SECOND PART, which presents the *"central body"*, as it were, of the salesian religious project: it describes in detail the various "inseparable" elements of the salesian vocation: the apostolic mission, the fraternal community and evangelical life according to the counsels, dialogue with the Lord. It is especially in this second part that there appears very clearly that unity of the apostolic consecrated life of which we spoke above: the different aspects of our vocation, in fact, integrate and throw light on each other, and contribute together to outlining the physiognomy of the true Salesian.

The two parts which follow might seem at first sight to be less strongly linked with the vocational identity described in the first and second parts, but this is not really the case: although the themes dealt with are of a more practical character (and therefore call necessarily for more juridical elements) they integrate fully in the apostolic project traced out in the Constitutions as a whole.

¹⁵ Cf. PC 5

their initial and ongoing formation. The Congregation lives in its members and must offer them the means to develop the salesian charism and to acquire daily the necessary ability for the life and mission: this is the task of "formation".

The FOURTH PART is dedicated to a presentation of *the service of authority* with the structures necessary for the organization of the Society. Although our Congregation is charismatic in origin, it is made up of individuals gathered together in concrete communities and carrying out precise educational and pastoral tasks: like them Church, spiritual and juridical at the same time, it needs structures for its constitution and government, for efficacious activity and the maintaining of its vitality: this is the particular obligation of those who are called to exercise the service of authority.

The text ends with some articles placed as a CONCLUSION; if on the one hand they make more precise some juridical norms for the interpretation of the text, on the other they provide a stimulus to follow faithfully the way of Love, in a generous response to the Lord who has first loved us.

3. Some characteristics of the editing process

Before ending these reflections on the general structure of the Constitutions it may be useful to add a comment on some characteristics of the editing process which help to give to the text its particular and original appearance. We refer especially to the "titles" of the parts, chapters and individual articles, to the terminology and style, and to the biblical inspirational texts placed at the beginning of chapters and sections.

3.1 The "title" use in the text

Both the SGC and the GC22 made a careful choice of the titles for the various parts and chapters, so that they would correspond faithfully to the matters dealt with: an indication of the care taken is evidenced by the fact that although the titles were not to be voted on, they were nevertheless examined and discussed in the study commissions and in the general assembly of the Chapter.

It will be of use to point out the personal tone given to the titles of the different parts (and especially the first three) of the text as definitively approved: a reading of the titles in succession provides a synthesis of the path the salesian (individuals and communities) are called upon to follow so as to respond faithfully to their vocation: *"The Salesian of Don Bosco... sent to the young, in communities, following Christ ... firmed for the mission of pastors and educators."*

The subtitles attached to individual articles were an innovation introduced by the SGC: they provide brief and immediate indications, in the margin of each article, of its essential content and underlying idea, and enable a synthetic vision to be obtained of the succession of the material in the chapters. The titles therefore, whether of parts,

chapters or single articles, act as guides in the understanding of the text and the
53 committing of its contents to memory.

3.2 Style and terminology

As we have already said, among the requests that came from the confreres in view of the revision of the Constitutions was one for a language that would be simple and easily understood, but at the same time suitable for a legislative text adequate for the new requirements. The criteria laid down by both the SGC and the GC22 showed concern for simplicity of style combined with the need for the terminology to be in harmony with the conciliar doctrine and have the spiritual tone proper to a Rule of life.

It is quite easy to see from a reading of the text the effort that was made and the evident change of style that resulted, as compared with earlier editions.

This is evident right from the Foreword which begins: "*For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament*". There is an innovation here in the very first words. Earlier editions of the Constitutions were expressed in the third person: "The Society, the members..., the member...." And formulated norms in the imperative or exhortative form, expressed in the future or subjunctive tense: "The members will attend to the perfecting of themselves..... Let brotherly union be maintained... Let the time-table be so arranged that ..." The new text has quite a different and more stimulating tone; quite deliberately "we" has been used more often and the declaratory form of the present indicative has been preferred. Instead of saying: "the salesian will do this", or "let him do this", or "the salesian must do this", it is more generally expressed now in the form: "we do this", or "the salesian does this", where the sense is: "we have decided together to do this", "we accept that we should do this", "we loyally make the effort to do this". This kind of formulation does not in the least mean that the normative force of the Constitutions has been diminished, but rather implies the active intervention of conscience with respect to the law: it means that the Rule has been freely accepted by people who have said 'yes' to a plan of life and are united in its realization; it also expresses the fact that the salesians are in agreement about their identity, and that through their fidelity they feel their permanent and shared responsibility for the personal and community success of the mission God has entrusted to them.

4. The Bible and the Constitutions

A lengthy and more complete discussion would really be needed as regards the biblical quotations which are present in the constitutional text in abundance, and which in a certain way provide a biblical inspiration for reading and meditating with fruit on our Rule or life.

This is another innovation in the text renewed according to the Council's teaching: the great riches of the "Word of God" in it means that we are in contact with

a text totally based on the Gospel. We shall have abundant evidence of this in the commentary on the individual parts; here we shall do no more than make some reflections of a general character which will help us to better understand its value.

4.1 An act of fidelity to God, to the Church and to the Council

"In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them".¹⁶ This in brief is the real reason why Vatican 11 invites us "earnestly and insistently" to be "continually in touch with the Scriptures" so as to learn "the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ" (Phil 3,8).¹⁷

In faithful response to the Church and the Council, and drawing explicitly from its texts, the renewed Constitutions recall the primacy of the Word of the living God in gathering together God's people¹⁸ — which for us in practice means the salesian community — in so far as the Word is at once "a source of spiritual life, food for prayer, light to see God's will in the events of life, and strength to live our vocation faithfully" (C 87). From this follows the logical and necessary consequence that the Rule of salesian life must have a full and fruitful biblical inspiration: "With the Sacred Scriptures daily in hand (PC 6), we welcome the Word as Mary did and ponder it in our heart, so that it will bear fruit and we may proclaim it with Zeal" (C 87).

4.2 A substantial biblical thread

A strong biblical thread runs like a backbone all through the Constitutions of the Salesians; it may be simple in appearance but it is real and carefully woven: in this respect the Constitutions are true not only to a dictate of the Council, but also to a family legacy, as can be seen from the "Writings of Don Bosco" in the appendix to the Constitutions themselves.

Among these, by express desire of the GC22 a particularly meaningful place is occupied by those quotations deliberately placed at the beginning of each chapter or section. These are par excellence the biblical inspirations underlying the text, and to them we shall give special attention.

4.3 In the unity of the history of salvation and the action of the same spirit.

More important than a happy awareness of a precise biblical background is the ability to see the connection between the biblical quotations and the constitutional articles concerned. This connection is not only nominal and extrinsic, nor yet merely decorative and devotional, nor is it of a technical nature as though from the literal biblical sense one could directly deduce the salesian sense. The relationship is more

¹⁶ DV 21

¹⁷ Cf. DV 23

¹⁸ Cf. PO 4

complex than that, but only in this way can it be theologically correct and spiritually productive. _____

Faith teaches us that the historic plan of salvation is unique: it has its roots in the people of God of the Bible, with at the centre Jesus of Nazareth who died and rose again, the definitive word of God; it is manifested sacramentally in the
55 Church, through which it extends through the world until the second coming of

Christ. In this economy the one Spirit of God is at Work, the Holy Spirit who inspires and assists God's work, sealing with the charisma of a specific inspiration the events of the foundation of salvation codified in the Sacred Books. But his inspiration and assistance continue at the present day in repropounding the sacred "memory" of Jesus Christ (and of his disciples) (Jn 14, 26), and guaranteeing their application at the present day in the life of the Church.

In this way whatever is good and holy in the ecclesial community after Christ's Passover, is a true and vital development of the Word of God of the beginnings; in a certain way it is the biblical story which continues under other codes. It is thus in the case of the Constitutions approved officially by the Church, in the wake — it must be said of the recognition of the Founder, whose charism is always a perception of the Holy Spirit as a prolongation and application of the divine inspiration in a specific historical period (cf. C 1).

From this it follows that linking the biblical word with that of the Constitutions in no way renders useless or dependent the Word of God in the Bible, but rather by taking it from a narrow prescriptive role, its prophetic character is assured, a deep spiritual background against which the formulations of the Rule can be understood.

In practice it means the recognition that the Constitutions possess a sure guarantee of authenticity and carry a mystery of grace (it is the same Spirit of the Holy Book who proposes the living sense of the Constitutions); furthermore it means accepting the words of the Rule with the attitude due to the greater, richer and more radical Word expressed in Scripture: an attitude of attentive and faithful listening (cf. e.g. Deut 4-6; Mt 7, 24-26), in the joy that comes from the observance of the Word of God (Rome 15,4); it means drawing on the inspiration of the Bible when we are challenged, when we compare our actual conduct with God's design for us, when we have that feeling of crisis that the living Word of God produces (cf. Heb 4, 12-13) when it penetrates into us.

A deep spiritual sense, a call to conversion and at the same time a strengthening of hope: these are some of the interior resonant vibrations experienced by the salesian when he reads the Constitutions in the wider context of biblical memory.

In this vital process of interaction between the word of the Bible and the word of the Constitutions, the salesian carries out the double-barrelled process which alone guarantees a genuine and life-giving acceptance of the word of God: he learns to read the Constitutions in the light of the Bible, and at the same time read the Bible in the light of the Constitutions in the spirit of Don Bosco and salesian tradition. And so, while we recognize with the Church that in Scripture is found the source and origin of

the Word of God, we see in the Constitutions as a point of arrival the practical impact of the Word on ourselves, a meeting with the Father" who is in heaven and comes lovingly to meet his children and talk with them". It is a case therefore neither of identity nor of separation, but of substantial continuity in the one saving Mystery, even in the justifiable diversity of words.

4.4 As in a mirror

The extremely synthetic literary genre of the Constitutions, although situated in an environment totally animated by biblical inspiration, obviously does not allow of explicit reference to the scriptures except through emblematic "fragments", as a reflection of a broader picture. As can easily be verified, the biblical data is not falsely exploited but there remains the clear obligation to place each quotation in the wider homogeneous context from which it is taken.

A deeper study at a purely exegetical level, going from the Bible to the Constitutions, would not be sufficient. Because of the unity of divine action, through which (as Jesus says) both tree and fruit are vitally recognized (Mt 7, 16-19), it becomes necessary to remember some examples at least which seem to prompt some particular slant on our reading of Scripture (as for instance in art. 11 of the Constitutions). In this way the richness of the Word of truth, which God intends to make known to us through the evangelical experience of our spiritual Family, will appear with greater clarity.

THE "FOREWORD"

For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's Living testament. "If you have loved me in the past," he tells us, "continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions".¹

Fr. Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, reminds us: "When Don Bosco sent his first sons to America he had himself photographed in the act of handing Fr. John Cagliero, who headed the expedition, the book of Constitutions as though to say: 'I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place. Keep them as you would a precious treasure!' "²

¹ MB XVII, 258

² cf. DON RUA, Dec, 1909

The great "Rules" of the ancient religious Orders are frequently preceded by a Prologue or Foreword of a doctrinal and spiritual nature, with the purpose of creating a deeply evangelical atmosphere so as to induce the reader to meditate on and put into fruitful practice the book of life which is being proposed to him.

The religious Congregations of more recent origin also, especially some of those born in the nineteenth century, sometimes put at the head of their Constitutions an Introduction or Foreword, generally of a historical kind, so as to present the Congregation as it was in its origins and better preserve the memory of the Founder and the circumstances surrounding the foundation.

Don Bosco too wanted to premise the Text of the Constitutions he had written with an introduction, which we find in all the editions from the first draft of 1858 to that of 1873 (the second printed Latin text, after the representation of the Roman "animadversiones"). This introduction was made up of a Foreword on the importance of educating the young and a chapter headed "Origins of this Society" in which the Founder tried to emphasize the continuity between what had been going on in Turin since 1841 and the Salesian Society, for whose Constitutions the approval of the Holy See was being sought.¹

But the canonical practice of the time had changed and was against "introductions" of this kind, which preceded the true and normative part, and this frequently gave rise to the observation met by new texts: "Prologi expungantur" ("Cut out the Introduction"). We find in fact among the "animadversiones" made on the Constitutions of the Salesian Society as submitted by Don. Bosco, the following remark: "It is not the practice to approve in the Constitutions a foreword and a historical appraisal of the Institute; both should therefore be removed."

In conformity with the decision of the Roman congregation Don Bosco removed both the Foreword and the introductory historical chapter, with the result that the text

¹ Cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Societa di San Francesco di Sales*, 1858-1875, edited by F. MOTTO, pp. 58-71

approved in 1874 began immediately with the first chapter: "Societatis salesianae finis" ("Scope of the Society of St Francis de Sales")

It may be pointed out that subsequently the practice of the Roman congregations become even more demanding, to the extent of not even allowing the Founder's name to be mentioned in the Constitutions of religious institutes ("In general the Founder's name is not to be mentioned in the Constitutions, nor can quotations of his words be approved").² In the "Normae secundum quas" of 1901 this norm became codified as follows: "Constitutions should not contain any preface, introduction, foreword, historical information, letter of exhortation or commendation".³

Vatican II, as we have seen restored to the Constitutions of religious institutes their most authentic significance, and strongly emphasized that at their origin there is the spiritual experience of the Founder; it reopened the way for texts to highlight the archetypal inspiration of the particular charisma.

Against this background the Special General Chapter, having in mind the first draft of the Constitutions made by our Founder, decided to put in a "Foreword" as an introduction to the text. This Foreword was delicately spiritual in tone, being a brief but efficacious explanation of the sense of the Rule and an invitation to follow it with love.

But already in the GC21 and later during the preparation for the GC22 suggestions were made that the Foreword should be given a more historical slant and recall the living Presence of Don Bosco from the beginnings through the book of the Rule: the religious plan is manifested in the fact in a life of adherence to the spirit of the Founder.

The GC22 made its own some of the proposals that had been received, and decided to transfer to the end of the revised text the contents of the Foreword to the 1972 Constitutions, and to compose a new Foreword with an historical and spiritual flavour.

From a structural point of view the present Foreword is very simple: It is made up of two brief quotations, one from Don Bosco himself, and one from his first successor, Blessed Michael Rua. The same thought and consideration runs through both: fidelity to the Founder Don Bosco after his death or wherever he cannot be personally present is seen and manifested in the observance of the Constitutions.

The attention to the Founder, required by Vatican II in the revised texts of Constitutions, is thus made explicit from the very first works, which are immediately further imposed on the mind by the photograph of Don Bosco handing the book of the

² "In Constitutionibus generatim non fit mentio de Fundatore nec probari possunt verba", Normae secundum quas 26.1 his was one of the "animadeversiones" made to the Constitutions of the "Soeurs de St Joseph", Annecy, 12 May 1897, ad I

³ "Non admittantur in Constitutionibus praefationes, introductiones, prema, historicae, litterae hortatoriae vel laudatoriae". *Normae secundum quas*. n. 26

photograph is an integral part of the Foreword itself.

Let us look briefly at the two paragraphs of the text.

The opening quotation is taken from Don Bosco's moving "farewell letter" to his dear and beloved sons in Jesus Christ". The whole letter becomes part of the Fundamental document of salesian spirituality, pedagogy and practice to which tradition has given the name of the again in its incisive, clear-cut and very significant form, in the Appendix to the constitutional text.⁴

And so the living word of Don Bosco finds a place as an introduction to the entire Rule: "If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions".⁵ Their content and the position they occupy make of these words of our Father not only a beacon by whose light we shall be able to avoid falling into misunderstandings but also an effective key of discernment for understanding the sense and worth of the Constitutions.

The reality of the Salesian Congregation would in fact remain vague and indecipherable if the great doctrinal riches of the revised Constitutions were not wisely read as the expression of Don Bosco's will and of the charism to which through him the spirit has given rise. Without a relationship with Don Bosco, efficacious both in its institutional and juridical reality (observance of the Constitutions) and in its effective and spiritual nature ("If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me...."), the Salesians would have no foothold in the religious life, because they would have been cut off from their roots. The text expresses all this too by the significant statement: "For us Salesians our Rule Book is Don Bosco's living testament". How often did Don Bosco present the Rule as the living remembrance accompanying his sons: "Observe our holy rules; that is the greatest and dearest souvenir that your poor old father can leave you".⁶ "Consider every item of the rule as a memento of me", he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.⁷ And it has been the constant conviction in salesian tradition, that in the Constitutions there have been always present Don Bosco, his spirit and his sanctity. It is enough in this connection to recall the words of Fr Philip Rinaldi, who wrote: "The Constitutions, my dear conferrers, are the soul of our society and this was the moving spirit of all Don Bosco's life; and their story coincides with the life story of Don Bosco. We can even say that in the Constitutions we have the whole Don Bosco; they contain his single ideal of the salvation of souls; in them is found perfection through the holy vows; in them is his spirit of kindness that made him so much loved, of tolerance, of piety, of charity and of sacrifice...".⁸

⁴Cf. *Costituzioni* 1984, Appendix, pp. 267-270

From the time of Don Rua the "farewell letter" was always included in the volume "Practices of Piety for use in Salesian Houses"; after the SGC it was placed in the Appendix to the text of the Constitutions together with other extracts from the "spiritual testament" (cf. RSS, ear IV, 1985 N.1, p. 82)

⁵MB XVII, 258

⁶MB XVII, 296

⁷BM X, 293

⁸Cf. ASS, n. 23, 24 January 1924, p. 177

The second paragraph provides confirmation of this conviction through the testimony of Don Bosco's first successor. Don Rua recalls the touching episode of the

departure of the first missionaries and the significant gesture of the Father who handed the book of the Constitutions to the leader of the expedition, Fr John Cagliero. Don Rua himself gives us the explanation: "How many things Don Bosco expressed in that simple gesture! It was as though he was saying: You will cross the seas and oceans, you will find your way to unknown lands, you will have to deal with people of very different languages and customs, you may even be exposed to serious dangers. I would like to come with you myself to strengthen and console you, to protect you. But what I cannot do in person I shall do with this little book. "Keep it as you would a precious treasure".⁹ He could not have said more clearly that Don Bosco is truly present in the Rule, and at the side of anyone who wants to embark on the salesian adventure, to guide, encourage and support him.

It should be noted that Don Rua proposes observance of the Constitutions not only as an expression of attachment to Don Bosco, but also as evidence of obedience to his word: "Keep them as you would a precious treasure".⁹ Don Bosco himself asks us to preserve the spiritual treasure which the Lord has deigned to give to the Salesian Congregation: a treasure because God himself, with his Holy Mother, was their inspiration; a treasure because they are a gospel path of charity; a treasure because by their means numerous confreres have found the way to holiness. Don Rua, in the same circular in which he relates the above episode, adds: They are the book of life, the hope of salvation, the marrow of the Gospel, the road to perfection, the key of paradise, *the pact of our covenant with God.*"

In conclusion we may say that this brief Foreword gives us an immediate intuition of what it means to "*stay with Don Bosco*", being heirs of his spiritual testament. Don Rua's comments speak of a deep and affectionate communion in family cordiality with a Father always present amongst us, who guides stimulates, enlightens and intercedes for us, so that we may never cease, wherever we are and whatever we do, to be tireless and faithful "missionaries of the young" ¹⁰

⁹D. RUA, letter of 1.12.1909 in Lettere Circolari, p. 498

¹⁰Cf. E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of our Rule of life*, AGC 312, 1985, p. 22

FIRST PART

THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO IN THE CHURCH

The first part of the Constitutions must be seen as an *introduction* or *foundation* for the whole Rule of life: before details are given of the main principles and norms which govern the mission, community life, evangelical practice, formation etc., this first part sets out to "*define*" the Society and to *indicate its precise place* within the overall Salesian Family, in the church and in the world. It represents a "foundation", because it forms the basis of the whole salesian edifice and outlines the salient traits of our identity in the church.

It should be noted that this part has been entirely rethought in the two Chapters GC20 and GC22. The SGC had planned a first introductory chapter containing the basic elements descriptive of the physiognomy of the Salesian Congregation in the Church and before the world. The very title given to his chapter, "*the Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church*"(which has now become the title of the entire first part, and coincides with the title of the first document of the SGC), indicated the intention to outline in a general if rudimentary way the Congregation's identity: it corresponds substantially to what the former Constitution had presented under the heading "object and aim of the salesian Society."

The GC 22, adopting the overall plan of the constitutional text drawn up by the SGC, inserted in the first part two other chapters containing aspects of the salesian vocation which must be considered "fundamental" for the entire apostolic project of the Society: the characteristic traits of the salesian spirit (chap. II) and the vital commitment of the profession (chap III). In this way the first part gives the genuine salesian tone to the whole text. It presents a unified vision of our style of sanctification and apostolate, directing our attention immediately to the Founder as our model, so as to discover in the charisma he received from God and in his heart rich in pastoral charity the essence and unity of the salesian vocation.¹

From a structural point of view the first part is made up of three chapters, in which are successively defined:

- Chap. I: *the nature, purpose and mission of the society of St Francis de Sales*, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the world;
- Chap. II: the characteristic "*spirit*" which animates it and of which it is the bearer:

¹ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The renewed text of Rule of life*, 312, 1985, p. 22

- Chap. III: the *religious "profession"* which seals the encounter between the love of God and who calls and the personal response of each confrere who enters the Society and sets out on a path to holiness.

Taken as a whole, this first part is like the response to a series of questions for the reader to reflect upon. Who all are the Salesians? How did they arise? What is their place and purpose in the Church? What significance attaches to the phrase "of Don Bosco"? What is the commitment made freely and publicly by every salesian when he enters the Society? The resulting response, which emerges and forms the content of this part can rightly be called the "*identity card*" of our Society.²

These indications serve us as a guide in regarding the pages which follow. Every time we encounter in the text an expression like "*we, the Salesians of Don Bosco*" we think of the complexus of distinctive notes and the personal and public commitment which the first three chapters combine to highlight. The following parts will take up and develop more completely the concrete aspects of the life and mission of the salesian, but always in the light of that spirit which has been clearly outlined from the beginning.

² Ibid.

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

"I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.. I will set up over them one shepherd. He will feed them and be their shepherd" (Ezek 34. 11.23).

The quotation from Ezekiel at the beginning of the first chapter of the Constitutions is highly significant as a proclamation of the love of God manifested in Jesus the Good Shepherd, and in Don Bosco whose aim was to be a living image of the Good Shepherd.

The image of the shepherd as a 'guide' and 'leader' is a very ancient tradition in all the early Middle East. In Israel it was applied to God (e.g. Ps 23, 80), and to the king as a sign of God, and specifically to David (Ps 78). Ezekiel in chap. 34 provides a broad and strong picture of the shepherd, following a historical and salvific development embracing three aspects:

—the denunciation of faithless shepherds of the people of God, who maltreat the sick sheep and cause the dispersal of the flock (vv. 1-6);

—God's decision to take care of the sheep himself with a delicate love foreseeing their needs, but also providing a strong protection against evil-doers (vv. 7-22);

— the choice of an ideal and visible shepherd, who will begin a new covenant between God and his people, and through whom God will take specific and personal care of his flock (vv.23-31)

A Comparison with other texts (eg 2 Sam 7, 5-7; Is 9, 1-6; Jer 23, 1-6) makes clear the messianic character of our text. Jesus, in solemnly proclaiming himself the "Good Shepherd" (Jn 10), is declaring himself to be the eschatological fulfillment of the divine pronouncement. And it is in this role that he will appear in the quotation from Mk 6,34 in chap. IV of the Constitutions in connection with those whom our mission is directed. Those with a "shepherd's" role in the community shall be faithful to him as their exclusive model in fulfilling their ministry (cf. 1 Pet 5, 2-3, which is used as the inspirational text at the head of chap. XI).

The fact that Christ is the eschatological fulfillment brings an entirely new dimension to the role of Shepherd as presented in the New Covenant. He is the one true model of pastoral activity in the Church, with extremely original characteristics which call for courage and creativity in their realization.¹

Recalling the figure of Don Bosco to whom, right from his dream at the age of nine, the Lord revealed that his vocation was to be pastoral one, and who was a shepherd all his life (C 10), we can understand why there is placed at the head of the Constitutions the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, which in a certain sense constitutes the deep identity of the "Society of St Francis de Sales". All the following articles, permeated as they are with 'pastoral' connotations, will be understood as a faithful fulfillment of this prophecy.

* * *

¹Cf. AGC 316, (1986) pp. 15-18

Within the overall context of the first part, this chapter serves the purpose of presenting in synthesis the apostolic project of the Society of St Francis de Sales, making clear its charismatic origin and deep identity, and describing its specific mission in the Church: for the salvation of the young.

The arrangement of the chapter, which is that already desired by the SGC, is quite straight forward; it is organized around two series of articles: arts. 1-4, which aim at a precise definition of our Society in itself (origins, nature and mission, ecclesial form); and arts. 5-9 which try to define it in its relationship with an ever wider reality: the Salesian Family, the pilgrim Church, the contemporary world, the heavenly Jerusalem, and especially with her whom the Lord has given us as Mother and Helper.

If on the one hand the whole chapter is intended to be a development of the first article of the Constitutions written by our Founder on the 'object and aim of the Society', on the other hand the influence of Vatican II is evident in the organization of the material. The Church, according to the conciliar doctrine:

- is the first of all the result of *a free choice, calling and sanctification on the part of God*, which harks back to the presence in her of the Spirit of the risen Christ;
- is constitutionally a mystery of *communion*, i.e. of union of men with God and with each other, as a result of the Word and the Sacraments, of faith and charity;
- is essentially *missionary*, participating in the mission of Christ and his Spirit, and therefore sent out to the world;
- fulfils her mission in *service or ministry to mankind*, since she is the 'universal sacrament of salvation';
- knows that all her members are called to one and the same *holiness*, which consists in the perfection of charity, to be realized in various ministries and charismata, and in different forms of life;
- is the People of God, pilgrims in history, called to continual renewal and sustained by hope on their path to their eschatological conclusion; on this path she is accompanied by Mary, Virgin and Mother, and by the Saints.

The first chapter of the Constitutions defines the salesian Society y reference to the essential aspects of the mystery of the Church:

- it speaks of *the origin and divine vocation of the Congregation*: "we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God" (C1);
- it recalls the mystery of communion which unites the members with each other and with the Church: "We, the Salesians of Don Bosco *form a community* of the baptized" (C 2); "the salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church" (C 6);
- it shows the *missionary nature* of the Salesian Society. arts. 2 & 3 speak of "the Founder's apostolic plan" and of the "mission" (a participation in that of the Church) entrusted to the Salesians, emphasizing its "sacramental" nature: "to be in the Church

63 signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are

poor" (C 2);

- recalls that in the Society all the members *are called to holiness in a specific form of consecrated life* (C 2, 3);

— affirms that the salesian vocation, by calling us to be "evangelizers of the young", inserts us in the great "sacrament of salvation" for the world (C 6, 7), in union with other groups of the Salesian Family (C 5);

— recalls, the consequence, that the Salesian Society, a living part of the Church, is in her and with her as a pilgrim in time and going forward in hope: in this process it has at its side Mary, Mother and Helper, and the Saints who have been given to it as Patrons and Protectors (C 8, 9).

This scheme make it easier for us to understand how the contents of the chapter have been arranged:

- *The charismatic origin of our Society*

—God's action in the foundation and life of our Society: *art. 1*

- The identity of our Society

—at the level of being and action: *art. 2*

—at the ecclesial level: *art. 3*

—at the juridical and institutional level: *art. 4*

- *The position and role of our Society* —in the

service of the Salesian Family: *art. 5*

—in the service of the Church: *art. 6*

—in the service of the contemporary world: *art. 7*

- *Our Society in communion with the heavenly Jerusalem*

—the singular presence of Mary: *art. 8* —the

intercession of Patrons and Protectors: *art. 9*

We should add the further observation that in this chapter the attention is concentrated specifically on the Society of St. Francis de Sales in its community and ecclesial project; but it does never the less from a personal perspective, in the sense that its members after committing themselves by their profession feel that they are directly and individually involved. "we salesians of Don Bosco form... We of we are evangelizers... we are educators... we pay special attention... we proclaim... we contribute... we entrust ourselves... we hold in veneration....

We cannot fully understand many of the assertions in the text unless we look at them with the heart of Don Bosco and with the love he had for the Society, which he

knew was willed by God. The Congregation, he used to say, "took no step that had not been suggested by some. supernatural occurrence, and approved no change, improvement or expansion that was not prompted by God".² "When speaking to the salesians Don Bosco spoke as a prophet foretelling the future, using expressions he never used when speaking with others. In doing this he was concerned to link the problem of the individual with the collective problem of the Society. To be with Don Bosco was to be part of a divine plan".³

When in 1869 the Pious Society was definitively approved, Don Bosco said: "Our Congregation is approved; we are mutually bound to each other... God had accepted our services. We are no longer private individuals but a Society, a visible body: ... the whole world is watching us and the Church is entitled to our services".⁴

² BM XII, 52

³ P. STELLA, Don Bosco nella storia della religiosita cattolica, Vol II, PAS-Verlag 1969, p.379-382

⁴ BM IX, 267

ART. 1 GOD'S ACTION IN THE FOUNDATION AND LIFE OF OUR SOCIETY

With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God.¹ Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, "that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise" .²

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".³

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic projects, first among them our Society.

The Church has acknowledged God's hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our hope.

¹ cf. MO 16

² MB II, 45. BM II, 35

³ MB XVIII, 258

The first article of the Salesian Rule begins with an act of faith and of gratitude to God: it recognizes officially that the Congregation is a gift of the spirit "to contribute to the salvation of youth".

The five paragraphs describe aspects of this charismatic reality, but the main stress is on the recognition of the "active presence of the Holy Spirit" both at the origins of the Congregation and in its present life.

The initiative of God in the foundation of our Society

The Salesian, who reads the Constitutions with faith and "humble gratitude", believes that the Salesian Society cannot be explained merely as the result of human ingenuity and natural generosity. The Spirit of the Lord intervened to bring it to birth and give it a place in the movement of the history of salvation.

Don Bosco himself had this same conviction of faith. "The persuasion that he was under a quite particular divine pressure dominated the life of Don Bosco... He had a firm and deep belief that he was God's instrument for a unique mission... This was the foundation of his characteristic religious attitude of the 'biblical servant', of the 'prophet' who cannot escape from the divine will".¹ Typical is the reflection of Don Cafasso: He is a real mystery to me, but I am convinced that God alone is his guide".²

¹ P STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, II, PAS - Verlag 1969, p. 32

² BM IV, 411

Don Bosco himself said in a conference he gave to the rectors on 2 February 1876: "... let us say it here among ourselves — other religious congregations and orders have had inspirations, visions or supernatural happenings in their beginnings which gave a thrust to their start and secured their establishment, but for the most part they were limited to a single happening or, at best, just a few. With us the story is different. We may say that nothing has happened which was not known in advance".³

To express the charismatic nature of the Society the text uses the expression: "*by the initiative of God*". This refers to the action of the Trinity: it is to be understood, in fact, as a plan of the Father for the salvation of youth; as an action of the Son who, after calling John by name, told him to place himself at the head of the children in the dream;⁴ and as an intervention of the Holy Spirit who formed him as the "Father and teacher of the young".

We should note the expression "*to contribute to the salvation of youth*": the verb "contribute" indicates humbly but realistically how the work of Don Bosco and the salesians must be seen in the perspective of God, "without whom we can do nothing", and in the light of our collaboration with the Church whose pastoral activity includes numerous other strengths as well: we give our contribution.

It should be noted too that the "salvation" mentioned here, as will be explained at greater length further on in the Constitutions, is not only the salvation of the soul but the salvation of the youngster in his totality, with which is connected the improvement of society itself.

All this can be well summed up in the words of Pius IX to Don Bosco in the audience of 21 January 1877: believe it is a secret I am disclosing to you. I am convinced that God has raised up your Congregation in these times to reveal his power. I am certain that God has deliberately kept this important secret hidden until the present, a secret unknown to ages past and to many a bygone congregation. Your Congregation is the first of a new kind of religious order, born in this age, whose style makes it possible for it to be both religious and secular. It has the vow of poverty and keeps personal ownership at one and the same time; it shares both world and monastery, and its members are both religious and secular, cloistered and yet free citizens. The Lord has revealed this in our day and I disclose it to you now Your Congregation has been raised up ... in order that the world may give glory to God. It has been raised up so that all may see that there is a way of giving to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's".⁵

Don Bosco, a Founder raised up and formed by the Spirit

³ BM XII, 52

⁴ Cf. BM 1, 95 95

⁵ BM XIII, 62

The Spirit's action is shown first and foremost in Don Bosco. The articles gives prominence to three aspects of this intervention of the Spirit at the beginnings of the Congregation.

He "*raises up*" a man who dedicates himself completely to the good of the young "that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise". It is the Spirit of the Lord who acts, but from the start the Constitutions emphasize the motherly presence of Mary: "I will give you a Teacher, under whose guidance you will learn".⁶

He "*forms*" in him the qualities needed for the mission he has been called to carry out: (God gave him a heart as great as the sands of the seashore".⁷ the heart of a "father and teacher",⁸ "capable of total self-giving". In this process of formation the dynamic sense of Don Bosco, who let himself be moulded, is evident.

He "*inspires him to initiate...*", i.e. guides him to be the "Founder" of various apostolic projects. The power for the Spirit reveals one of the ways in which is expressed in history the inexhaustible creativity of the "soul of the Church". Don Bosco the Founder, docile to the Spirit, took on a mission which he would carry out faithfully: the personal charism became transformed into a charism for the service of the Church. This meant that he became a man of the Church, so that he is not our exclusive property but belongs to the "Church's patrimony".

Don Bosco's response to this voice of the Spirit is well synthesized in his own words by which he expressed his unconditional assent: "*I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys*",⁹ words through which shine the deep fatherly love of Don Bosco and his total dedication.

The various apostolic forces to which Don Bosco gave rise

By raising up Don Bosco, the Holy Spirit is at the origin of a number of apostolic forces, first among them the Salesian Society, which work for the salvation of youth.

This is the first reference to the salesian "Movement" and "Family" (cf. C 5), whose purpose is to "prolong in the future" what Don Bosco began in his own lifetime.

The Founder is the bearer of a plan of life to be realized not only in his own time but also in the future.¹⁰ He looks out on wide horizons, he is convinced that the plans of God, of which he has caught a glimpse, are sure and certain: "The Lord expects great things from you. I see them clearly and distinctly in all their phases and could

⁶ BM I, 95

⁷ Entrance antiphon of the former liturgy in honour of St John Bosco

⁸ From the collect of the old Mass of St John Bosco

⁹ MB XVIII, 258

¹⁰ Cf. MR 11: "The 'charism of the Founders' (ET I 1) appears as an 'experience of the Spirit transmitted to their followers to be lived them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth"

tell you of them one by one"¹¹ "The field is wide open",¹² the horizons will extend with the passage of time "not only in this century, but in the next and other centuries yet to come".¹³

In the Church and for the Church

The Church has recognized by a double act this presence of the divine both in Don Bosco and in his work: by the approval of the Constitutions and through the canonization of the Founder.

The approval of the Rule by ecclesiastical authority proved to be neither rapid nor easy for the Founder. "The difficulties continued for no less than 16 years, and had it not been for the special assistance of heaven he would never have overcome them".¹⁴ But when approval came, Don Bosco could say: "We should welcome this fact as among the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that, in observing our rules, we rest upon a firm, secure and I may add, infallible basis".¹⁵

Recognition by the Church of the sanctity of the Founder was not long in coming: the People of God esteemed him as a saint and Pope Pius XI solemnly canonized him on Easter Sunday 1934. The Catholic world rejoiced at the proclamation, and doors opened to the Congregation on every side. The Founder is the incarnation of the Rule and the Rule sets out the pact of our covenant with God: Don Bosco, the Saint, becomes the model for our own sanctity, and his Rule is the signpost on our path to holiness. Both the one and the other are treasures to be offered to the particular Churches.

The Holy Spirit was present not only at the beginnings, but his presence continues now and always

The Salesians, whom the Spirit has called to work with Don Bosco, receive continually from the same Spirit the necessary energy to prolong faithfully his work and his sanctity. The Congregation is a charismatic reality: in the Spirit she has the one who was responsible for the origins, and in him she continues to have the responsible Protagonist of her mission in history, to the extent that she remains attentive and docile to his incentives.

In this perspective emphasis must be laid on the fundamental spiritual attitude for a Society which recognizes in itself the active presence of the Holy Spirit: docility to the Spirit's voice. God's action is evidently not consistent with a passive approach;

¹¹ BM XII, 64

¹² BM IX, 334

¹³ BM XI I, 338

¹⁴ D. RINALDI, ASC 23, 24 January 1924, p. 180

¹⁵ D. BOSCO, Introduction to the Constitutions, 15 August 1875; cf. appendix to the Constitutions, 1984, p. 227

rather does it increase our responsibility, and our daily collaboration with him becomes all the more necessary.

The Rule reminds us that faith in the "active presence" of the Spirit gives rise to two very positive attitudes: hope and fidelity:

— In the first place the Salesian Society does not intend to rely on itself , its own resources and its successes, but on God who sustains it: and so *it is nourished by hope*; hope it is that fosters its apostolic commitment and that the salesian is called to radiate among the young (cf. C 17.62).

—The Salesian Society knows that it will be faithful to Don Bosco in the measure that it is faithful to the Spirit who raised up Don Bosco; for this reason *it constantly seeks nourishment for its fidelity* at the fountains of Love.

*Father, in your infinite goodness
you have always called men
to collaborate in your work of salvation.
We thank you for raising up Don Bosco;
you gave him the heart of a father and apostle
and guided him, through the motherly assistance of Mary,
in the foundation of our Society.
Grant also to us,
who have been called to continue the same mission,
the strength and joy of the Holy Spirit,
so that like Don Bosco
we may be able to give ourselves entirely
to young people and to you,
Through Christ our Lord.*

ART. 2 NATURE AND MISSION OF OUR SOCIETY

We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor.

By carrying out this mission we find our way to holiness.

To the question: "Who are the Salesians?", the Constitutions give the following reply:

- we are a community of the baptized, docile to the voice of the Spirit;
- we live a specific form of religious life;
- we intend to carry out Don Bosco's plan: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor;
- we find our way to holiness by fulfilling this mission.

Here is expressed in more modern language the substance of the former first article which spoke of the "object and aim of the Society" (or "scope of the Society" as Don Bosco expressed it). The Society is defined according to its nature of a community which willingly listens to the voice of the Spirit with reference to the objectives it intends to pursue.

It is in fact impossible to say what the Society is without specifying to whom it is sent and for what purpose. This is expressed by the term 'mission' which we meet here in the Constitutions for a second time, and which is one of the key words of the vocabulary of the SGC;¹ it implies various elements: Someone who sends; someone who is sent; those to whom the one sent (the 'missionary') is directed; the service he is sent to carry out; in what way and by what means this is to be done. All this is expressed in condensed form in art. 2 and will be amply illustrated in chapter IV.

We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB): who we are

—We are a community of the baptized, submissive to the bidding of the Spirit.

Our Society is defined as a "community": the Congregation is a community, the Province (or Vice-Province) is a community, the local nucleus (or "house") operating in a particular territory is a community.

¹Cf. SGC, 23-30

The community unites at various levels living individuals, on the basis of human life, baptism and salesian profession. Don Bosco expressed this reality in some well chosen words which he wrote on a separate sheet included with the letter he sent on 12 February 1864 to Pius IX seeking approval of the Constitutions. The sheet was headed: "Things that should be noted concerning the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales: "The purpose of this Society, considered in its members, is simply an invitation to unite in spirit to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, prompted by the saying of St Augustine: 'the most divine of all divine things is to work to save souls'".²

Such union is brought about by the Holy Spirit (cf. C 1): he it was who brought us in contact with a vocation or calling; and he sustains communion by his "inspirations". And we want to be docile to his voice.

—*Our intention is to carry out Don Bosco's plan in the Church.*

The apostolic plan is contained in the calling we have received and which has brought us together in unity. Here is expressed in different terms what Don Bosco wrote: "every spiritual and corporal work of charity directed to the young, especially those who are poor".³

The new text of the Constitutions sees the Congregation as part of the "Church-Sacrament" and defines the plan in that sense. In fact, when the Council was defining the "nature and universal mission of the Church" in the Constitution "Lumen Gentium", it had recourse to the broad notion of "sacrament" which included the double reality of a clear sign and efficacious means. The Church is there defined as the visible sign which bears witness to Christ living in the midst of the world and an instrument in his hands for realizing his plan of salvation: the communion of all men with the Father and with each other.⁴

In this sense our Society, as a living part of the Church, is defined as participating in the sacramental nature of the Church for young people and especially for those who are poor: Salesians are called to be signs and witnesses of the risen Christ (the text says 'of God', but God is revealed through his Son Jesus Christ), and active bearers of his intensely salvific love at the present day.

"To be signs and bearers of the love of God for young people": this is a wonderful definition, and the Constitutions use it several times:⁵ but it is also a very demanding obligation, because it requires the whole of each individual member, all his life and all the activity of the Salesians, detaching them from themselves so as to centre them at the same time on the two poles of the living Christ and of youth, and on the meeting of the two in love. It obliges the Salesian to a double service: to Christ who sends them and to the young to whom they are sent, to reveal to them the loving call of Christ and

²MB VII, 622

³Constituzioni 1875, I,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 73)

⁴Cf. LG, 1. 9. 48

⁵Cf. C 8. 14. 20. 49. 61. 81. 195

their "spiritual and corporal works of charity"!

—In a specific firm of religious

The salesian apostolic plan, the plan of Don Bosco himself, is lived in the *totality and radicality that belongs to religious consecration*. From the outset, the Constitutions make it clear that the coherence of the salesian community at every level depends on a triple commitment: to agree on the salesian apostolic plan, to intend to carry it out together, and to adhere to it fully with the availability created in us by obedience, poverty and evangelical chastity. None of these three aspects can be left aside: art. 3 which follows and the whole of the second part will explain this principle at length.

There are other "salesian" groups, among the "various apostolic projects" referred to in art. 1, which are called to carry out Don Bosco's plan without religious consecration, e.g. the Salesian Cooperators: we are distinguished from them) by the manner and degree of commitment, even though we are solid in the objective to be attained and the spirit to which we bear witness.

Our way to holiness in the realization of our mission

"By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness". "Sanctification" (rather than "sanctity") indicates a path of progressive growth, which implies of and exertion. A path like this of sanctification, Or growth in charity, was formulated in the old Constitutions as follows: "... its members, while striving to attain christian perfection shall be engaged in works of charity on behalf of the young".⁶

The salesian is always face to face with these two commitments: service of the young and his own personal sanctification, two goals which are inseparable. Theological and spiritual writing before the Council was satisfied to analyse, not without subtle distinctions, the difference between primary and secondary ends, with the risk of opposing one to the other and so producing distortions in the soul of the religious.

The conciliar doctrine sets aside such distinctions and is set out in a much simpler and more concordant manner: the two goals (personal holiness and missionary commitment) are equally important and cannot be separated: neither of them is simply a "means" for attaining the other. In practice every apostle achieves his own personal sanctification by fulfilling his mission; each one lives out his love of God and neighbour through the practice of his daily duty.

The theology of the religious life is insistent nowadays on this characteristic spirituality of institutes of active life, which is called *apostolic spirituality* and has its root in the *"grace of unity"*,⁷ which is sustained and nourished by it.

⁶Constitutions 1966, art. 1

⁷Cf. SGC, 127; PC 8; PO 13-14; cf. Mt 25; 1 in 3,16-17

The salesian therefore grows in holiness and charity to the extent to which he carries out authentic works of charity, and it must be emphasized that they must

indeed be "authentic". The text of the Constitutions has been formulated to reflect this perspective: the salesian attains his personal aim by achieving his apostolic aim: he finds his own holiness by fulfilling his mission in the Church.

In the first draft of the Constitutions of 1858, Don Bosco expressed his thought as follows: "The purpose of this Society is to gather together its members ... to perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Saviour, especially in charity to poor youth".⁸ This was what the Saint had already advised Dominic Savio: "The first thing he was advised to do in order to become a saint was to try to win souls to God."⁹

*Father,
attentive to the voice of your Spirit,
we want to be in the Church, like our Founder,
signs and bearers of your love for the young,
and especially for the poor among them. Grant
that in the fulfilment of this mission we may
find our own sure path to holiness, for the
glory of your Name.
Through Christ our Lord.*

⁸ *Costituzioni 1858*, 1,1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 72)

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Turin 1858, p. 53 (OE vol XL 203)

ART. 3 OUR APOSTOLIC CONSECRATION

We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us' through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young.

Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom. Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers.

Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families.

¹ cf. LG 44

The second article presented the nature and mission of the Salesian Society against the broad background of the Church seen as the "sacrament of salvation"; this third article takes us more deeply into the salesian vocation, at both individual and community level, and considers it in the light of "religious consecration".

The reality of religious consecration, an essential element of our identity as apostolic religious, is introduced by the Rule at this point with a precise global meaning. We know, in fact, that in the period that has followed the Council the concept of consecration, in the sense of a consecrating action on the part of God through the mediation of the Church, has become progressively clearer: to it there corresponds the free commitment of the religious, who offers all his person and his life to God and the Kingdom. Celebration of profession implies these two inseparable aspects, which are the expression of the covenant pact between the Lord and the disciple.

Understood in this sense, the consecration highlights the unity of our existence, enveloped as it is in a gift of God: it affects every aspect and every moment of our life. It has therefore an all-embracing significance, like that of baptismal consecration, of which it is a full and radical expression.

We shall make a detailed examination of the various elements offered us by the Rule.

"Consecration", a gift of the Lord

In the Constitutions as they came from the pen of Don Bosco the word "consecration" does not occur, even though its reality is certainly present; but the line taken by Vatican II and the consequent development of theology of the religious life have turned to full account the idea of consecration, which has thus entered the text of the Constitutions. Art. 3, in fact, in presenting our life as a "grace of the Father who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit", makes explicit reference to the text of the

Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium", which speaks of the religious as being "consecrated by God to his service in a more thoroughgoing way".¹

The GC22 made a clear choice: by making its own the Council's doctrine on religious consecration, the Chapter intended to emphasize primarily the initiative of God, who is at the origin of our salesian vocation and continually sustains us by the grace of his Spirit. Strictly speaking, in fact, "consecration" is an act which of its nature is reserved to God: he it is who chooses, calls and "sets aside" an individual or a group, to constitute it in a stable relationship to himself for the purpose of his divine plans. In the words of the Rector Major, he "blesses us and takes us entirely for himself, pledging himself to protect us and give us his daily help and guidance so that we may move forward on the gospel path we have professed. The object for the reception of the benefits flowing from the divine action is our own professed person, in so far as in reply to his call we offer ourselves totally to him, so that our whole existence becomes a 'consecrated life' ".²

Understood in this sense, consecration is an adequate expression of the theological dimension of our life, which is subjected entirely to the action of God who has called us and set us aside for a particular participation in the Church's mission.

To the initiative of God, who calls and consecrates, the Salesian responds by his profession, offering himself and his life to God and the Kingdom: having been placed in a "consecrated" state he dedicates himself by vow to the entire service of Him who has chosen him.

One cannot emphasize too strongly the global and all-embracing character of religious consecration: it covers every aspect of life. When the conciliar texts speak of "consecrated" persons, they say that their self-donation is made by profession of the evangelical counsels: this is the common denominator to all forms of consecrated life. But in speaking of institutes "dedicated to apostolic works", the Council declares that the very apostolic activity and works of charity carried out as a sacred mission received from God, are "of the very nature of religious life".³

In this way "*Salesian religious consecration*", understood in its proper and global sense, shows forth the unity of our whole existence. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the Salesian offers his whole life, planned according to the apostolic design set out in the Rule. And so every element and every aspect of life are submissive to the action of God, and this is very important in our concrete practice.

Two further reflections will not be out of place.

In the first place it must be remembered that religious consecration, in its deepest meaning, strongly recalls the basis of the fundamental option of faith made in baptism. According to the conciliar texts, in fact, religious consecration brings about a more radical interior foundation ("intimius consecratur", "intimius radicatur") and a

¹ Cf. LG 44. In connection with the doctrine of the Constitution "*Lumen Gentium*" on consecration, v. also the references made by the Rector Major in his closing address to the GC22 (GC22 *Documents*, 63)

² E. VIGANO, "The renewed text of our Rule of life", ACC 312 (1985) pp. 22-23

³ Cf. PC 8

78 richer exterior expression ("plenius exprimit") of the baptismal consecration.⁴ We

shall take up this idea again when speaking of life according to the counsels (cf. C 60).

Secondly, the particular character of consecration should be noted as the meeting of two loves, two freedoms which merge and combine: the "Father who consecrates us" and we who "offer ourselves totally to him". In this fusion of friendship the initiative for the Covenant comes from God, but is confirmed by our free response: he it is who has called us and helped us to respond, but we on our side give ourselves. He it is who consecrates us, envelops us with his Spirit, who captures us for himself and makes us become entirely his, floods us with grace so as to bring all our resources to bear on his great plan for the salvation of the world; but it is we who centre ourselves on him, we listen to him and bear witness to him. All this gives rise in us to a very close and characteristic relationship with him, one which fills our psychology or inner being as "consecrated persons", which becomes the subject of our contemplation, the object of our affections and the mainspring which unleashes our tireless exertions.⁵

The three constituent elements of the unity of profession

To the call of God we respond by offering ourselves and all our life. By our profession to live according to the "evangelical counsels" we commit ourselves to the "apostolic mission" and to the "common life". The second paragraph explains at greater length the unity of our life under the sign of religious consecration.

The Salesian Society exists in virtue of the meeting together of three "*inseparable elements*": it is a "*community*" — "*of consecrated persons*" — "*sent on a mission*". It cannot lose sight of any of these three characteristics without at the same time losing its physiognomy.

We live these three realities in the practical unity of our life dedicated to the young. They are correlative and mutually enrich each other. Our community finds the strength of cohesion in its common consecration and apostolic zeal; the following of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ is realized in practice in charity towards God and our neighbour, and especially the young; and finally our mission in the Church is strengthened by community solidarity and from availability in a life which is fundamentally evangelical.⁶

Analysis separates the different elements, but life unites them: and it is well for us to affirm this unity and be aware of it! With one and the same call Christ invites us to follow him in his of work salvation and in the kind of virginal and poor life that he chose for himself;⁷ and we, in a single response of love and the grace of the Holy Spirit,

⁴Cf. LG 44, PC 5, ET 7, RD 7

⁵Cf. AGC 312 (1985) pp. 32-33

⁶The profound unity of the fundamental elements of our life is well expressed in the formula of profession (C 24); cf. also C 44, 50, 61 which show clearly the correlation between mission, community and the practice of the evangelical counsels

⁷Cf. LG 46

following the example of the apostles, willingly leave everything (cf. Lk 5,11; Mt 19,27) and join together in community, the better to work for him and for the Kingdom. The consecration of Salesians is therefore one and undivided: it is inseparably apostolic and religious.

The text of the Rule expresses all this by saying that the three above mentioned elements are lived "in a single movement of love". Don Albera explains it this way: Don Bosco wanted in his sons so ardent a charity as would unite the active and contemplative lives, the life of the Apostles with that of the Angels (cf. Const. FMA), religious perfection with the apostolate.⁸

The perfect model of this unity of life is Christ whom we set out to follow. He was "consecrated and sent" by the Spirit of the Father to proclaim the Gospel (Lk 4,18) and carry out his work of salvation. But at the same time, in order to be totally available for this service of the Father, he "chose a virginal and poor style of life" and a community of apostles.

The splendour of the Salesian vocation arises precisely from its radical extension: it is at the same time "evangelical", "apostolic" and "community based".

The element which specifies Salesian life: the mission

The mission requires in us a deep sense of God and his Kingdom: everything comes from him who sends us and animates us, and everything is directed towards him whose will it is "to unite all things in Christ" (Eph 1,10). Our radical commitment as religious to the "God we love above all things",⁹ serves to purify and enrich our apostolic service. This religious spirit animates and gives energy to our active life as sons and priests of the Father, to whose glory our whole life becomes a liturgy.¹⁰

After establishing the fundamental unity of our consecrated life, the Constitutions deal with the special role the mission plays in our lives as apostolic religious: the mission "specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families".

Our novel character and the reason for our existence derive from the mission God has entrusted to us: to go to young people, and especially the poor, with the Salesian spirit.

An original physiognomy of this kind has not merely the effect of identifying us in the eyes of others: it also affects our whole life, in its community and religious aspects, to give it a deep unity and its specific "tenor".

Obedience, chastity, poverty, prayer and ascetical practices etc. are not lived by us in an abstract fashion or in separation one from another; they are all immediately

⁸ Cf. P. ALBERA, Letter of 18 October 1920, in Circular Letters, pp. 365-366

⁹ Cf. KG 44

¹⁰ These expressions were contained in art. 70 of the Constitutions of 1972

coloured by our mission to poor and abandoned youth, they are apostolic and salesian.

In this sense one can quite correctly speak of "*Salesian apostolic consecration*". "The mission is seen as the focal point of our whole vocation. From it go out initiatives and creativity for a true increase in fidelity to our calling... It is here we find the parameter of our identity, secure and well-defined".¹¹

We may conclude by listening once again to the words of our Father Don Bosco, who reminds us of the deep sense of our consecration, emphasizing the central place of the love of God, the essential motive from which all our existence draws its inspiration: "The members (of the Society) should have recourse to their head, their true master, the one who will give them their reward, to God; it should be for love of him that each member joins the Society; for love of him that we work, obey, and leave behind all we possess in the world, so that at the end of our life we can say to the Saviour whom we have chosen as our model: To, we have left everything and followed you...' (Mt 19,27)".¹²

*Father,
we give you thanks
for having called us and consecrated us
by the gift of your Spirit
and for sending us to the young
as bearers of the Gospel
of your Son Jesus Christ.
With the day of our profession in mind
we now renew the complete offering of ourselves to you,
so that we may follow Christ
and work with him for the coming of your Kingdom.
Grant that our daily life
may be a single movement of love as we seek your glory
and the salvation of our fellow men.
Through Christ our Lord.*

¹¹ Cf. SGC, pp. xv-xvi

¹² D. BOSCO, Circular letter 9.6.1867, Collected Letters I, pp. 473-475

ART. 4 THE FORM OF OUR SOCIETY

Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen who complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation.

We are recognized in the Church as a clerical religious institute of pontifical right, "dedicated to apostolic works"¹

Inspired by the goodness and zeal of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco called us Salesian² and gave us a programme of life in the motto: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".³

¹ cf. PC 8; GIG, can 675,1

² cf. MB V, 9; BM V,8

³ cf. MB XVII, 365, 366, 280

This article completes the two preceding ones. It continues to "define" the Society, but it does so from a more institutional point of view: that of its public "form" in the Church. It is a response to the further questions: how and by whom is our Society "formed"? on what principles and traditions is it based?

By "*form*" is meant here the sum total of the visible and concrete elements which characterize our Congregation, shape it as a Society, and indicate its manner of life and activity and the structures it has in the Church. It is a question of concrete elements and society aspects which have also juridical implications, intended especially to manifest and defend its charismatic originality, i.e. the kind of Congregation desired by the Founder.

It is desirable that the identity traits which "form" the Society should be precisely expressed, because they are elements which are neither arbitrary nor capable of change; they are the institutional expression of an original experience in the Church and ensure the linkage between charismatic qualities and the corresponding constitutive elements of the "particular law".

Between "charism" and "institution", between consecrated life and its canonical state, between the reality as lived and as codified, there is no separation or distance, but rather a vital union with interchange of values; the charism is manifested in the juridical structure and the structure is the guarantee of the charism's permanence, and together they are a visible sign of an original kind of spirituality. The union of the spiritual and juridical elements (as we saw) is necessary to give a stable foundation to the Institute's fundamental texts.¹

A discussion of these elements is precisely what is implied when we speak of the "form".

¹ Cf. ES II, 13

Salesian form of the Society

The article begins with the fundamental assertion: "*Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen*". It has an original physiognomy in the Church, one which is 'both religious and secular', as Pius IX put it;² it has its own manner of life and action, and a "form" suited to modern times and to the mission to be carried out.

The "form" of the Society is given its juridical classification in the next paragraph, which gives a precise and basic statement of its character as lived and transmitted in the Congregation, a hard fact of our community charism: it is made up of clerics and laymen, who (in Don Bosco's words) "form a single heart and soul, and live a common life...".³

The new text says they "complement each other as brothers in living out the same vocation". It is not therefore a question of complementing each other in a general kind of way, but of an "organic complementarity"⁴ which calls for a measure of fusion between the lay and priestly components, a fusion which is not static but open to a continual process of redress, revision, conversion and adaptation.

It is the concrete manner in which clerics (priests and aspirants to the priesthood) and laymen lived the same vocation, united around Don Bosco in the first Oratory, in close collaboration for the salvation of the young. This "experience of the Holy Spirit" of the Founder, recognized and accepted by the Church as a gift of the Lord (i.e. "charisma")⁵ is a basic element of the "form" of the Congregation.

The phrase of the constitutional article is pregnant with meaning and will be taken up again in more detail in later parts (cf. C 44-45); but it needs to be said here at once that the "same vocation" and the words "complement each other as brothers" demand full equality of all members in the religious life, an essential reciprocal relationship between clerical and lay members, and an adequate formation for this mutual and live correlation between priests, deacons and brothers.

Such a requirement is evident from the overall constitutional text. Nevertheless it will be well to go into greater detail about two aspects and consequences that follow from what we have said about the "form" of Society.

— In the first place one must have a proper understanding of what is implied by a "*complementarity*" that is both real and deeply felt. It is an original trait of the Salesian vocation deriving from the very mission of the Society, which Don Bosco wanted to be both 'religious and secular', "bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order" (C 31). As the Rector Major said in his closing address to the GC22, the originality of the salesian vocation does not imply the extrinsic summation of two dimensions (clerical and lay), each belonging to groups of confreres distinct from each other, but requires a particular formation of the personality of each confrere, so that in the heart of each

² Cf. BM XIII, 62; cf. ASC 300 (1981) pp. 14-15

³ Costituzioni 1875, ii, 1 (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 83)

⁴ GC21, 196

⁵ Cf. MR 11

the lay dimension of the community, and in the heart of each lay Salesian in turn there is the same feeling in respect of the community's priestly dimension. It is the whole Salesian community, in each of its members, which fosters harmony between sensitivities which are at the same time both 'priestly' and lay'. We must be able to bring to maturity in our communities this characteristic Salesian awareness; it will exclude from the Congregation any kind of mentality that smacks of 'clericalism' or 'laicism' and which leads only to bitterness and the perverting of our specific community mode of action.⁶

Because of this the community takes on a role of primary importance, as an indispensable condition for the two dimensions (priestly and lay) to be able to properly interact. An obligation arises for every confrere to be sensitive to the significance of complementarity.

—A related significance, which cannot be overlooked in these considerations about "form", attaches to the "*service of authority*" which is proper to our Society.

The complementarity between clerics and laymen is certainly confirmed and strengthened by the service of authority directly linked with the kind of mission entrusted to each member.

Art. 121 explains that this is a service which in a Salesian community is confided to a member who is a priest, so as to ensure the pastoral standpoint in all our works and activities. Every community is called, in fact, to be a kind of "mission station" for young people. The one who guides the community must have the discernment and sensitivity of a "shepherd", so as to give to the common mission a particular ecclesial slant.

But it is also the task of the one who guides and animates the community to ensure that there is a proper proportion between the community's two components (priestly and lay), in the light of the widely differing circumstances in which our provincial and local communities find themselves working. The distribution will be flexible, in view not only of the varying social and cultural situation, but also of the practical differences which are evident, for instance, between a community responsible for a parish and another responsible for technical school.

The Salesian community, therefore, takes up in a vital manner and in rich and original cohesion the two fundamental kinds of ecclesial existence: the laity and the hierarchical ministry. The Society would no longer be the one founded by Don Bosco if one of these two complementary elements were to disappear.

The institutional and juridical form of the Congregation in the Church

The second paragraph adds some specific juridical details concerning the public figure of the Society in the Church.

⁶E. VIGANO, GC22, 80

—*We are a "religious institute".*

The "religious institutes" are characterized, among the various forms of consecrated life, by the profession of public vows received by the Church and by a stable state of life lived together in community and in accordance with an approved Rule.

Religious institutes are distinguished from secular institutes (in which the profession of the evangelical counsels is lived not in community form but remaining in the world), and from societies of apostolic life (in which the members live in community but without the stable bond of public vows).

—*We are a "clerical" institute.*

The term is taken directly from the Code of Canon Law and means that the service of government of the communities, by reason of lawful tradition, is entrusted at every level to a member who is a priest.⁷ In the Church various kinds of "clerical" institutes are to be found; our own Founder gave to his Congregation a physiognomy of strong communion in a "family spirit".

The specific tradition of our Society will be described more fully in art. 121 as has been said already. Here it is pointed out only that this characteristic of the Society in no way contradicts the specific and high value given to the lay component, which is characteristically involved in the mission, in line with the complementarity spoken of earlier.

—*We are an institute of "pontifical right".*

The institute is not simply of diocesan right. Official recognition by the Apostolic See bears witness to the universal quality of the Salesian charisma. In the terms of Canon Law our Society, as such, depends not on a Bishop or an Episcopal Conference but on the Apostolic See itself.

In this perspective our "*exemption*" finds its meaning (even if the text does not make express mention of it). Rather than being considered a "privilege" in the Church, exemption should be considered as availability for the Church's service. From a theological point of view indicated by Vatican II,⁸ exemption from the jurisdiction of the local Bishop corresponds to the two ecclesial function expressed in our article:

- for the good of the universal and particular Churches, it fosters the unity of the Institute's charism and spirit, by giving the responsibility for this to the Superiors under the authority of Peter's Successor. This enables local communities or individual religious to be inserted in the pastoral work of the particular Church in different ways;

⁷ CIC, can. 588, 2

⁸ Cf. 1, G 45: Religious institutes are "established all over the world for building up the Kingdom of Christ, and should develop and flourish in accordance with the spirit of their founders. With a view to providing better for the needs of the Lord's flock and for the sake of the general good, the Pope, as primate over the entire Church, can exempt any institute of Christian perfection and its individual members from the jurisdiction of local Ordinaries..."

□ it emphasizes the particular availability of the Institute for the service of the universal Church, for specific Episcopal Conference and for the needs of particular Churches.

In connection with institutes "of pontifical right", it should be noted that as a consequence of this the Society as such is of the "Latin" rite" (and is in fact linked with the Latin universal law); but this does not rule out the possibility for individual confreres (or even whole communities and provinces) of *different rites* becoming members of the Society: such confreres will continue to practise their own rite, for the benefit of the faithful and of the Congregation itself.

— *We are an Institute "dedicated to apostolic works"*.

Our ministry is entrusted to us by the Church. The Society is numbered among the "Institutes of active life" or, as Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law put it, among "the Institutes dedicated to various works of the apostolate", in which (as already said) "apostolic activity and works of charity enter into the very nature of religious life".⁹

The name and the motto

The name of "*Salesians*" was chosen by Don Bosco because he wanted his sons to draw their inspiration from "the charity and zeal of St. Francis de Sales".

The Biographical Memoirs relate: "On the evening of 26 January 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco's room. Present were Don Bosco, Rocchiotti, Artiglia, Cagliero and Rua. Don Bosco suggested that with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales, we should first test ourselves by performing deeds of charity towards our neighbour, then bind ourselves by a promise and later, if possible and desirable, make a formal vow to God. From that evening onwards those who agreed — or would later agree — to this were called 'Salesian' ".¹⁰

In this significant extract attention should be directed not only to its historical value, but also to the doctrinal content. It is really the expression of a kind of "fourth vow" which Don Ronald called "bonta" (kindness of heart) which is characteristic of our style of sanctification.

Our Founder, inspired by the captivating charity of St. Francis de Sales, doctor of God's love, wanted us to take the name of "Salesians" so that our whole being and activity would be marked by kindness.

*Lord our God,
you ask all of us, clerics and laymen alike, to
express in different and complementary forms*

⁹ Cf. PC 8; CIC, can. 675

¹⁰ BM V,8

*the richness of the one Salesian vocation, by
living united with one another as your family;
grant that in our brotherhood
we may be able to make our charisma bear fruit
for the service of your holy Church.*

*Help us to bear abundant witness to you
by the zeal and kindness
of our Patron, St. Francis de Saks,
so that the programme given to us by our Founder
may be spread efficaciously throughout the world:
"Da mihi animas, cetera tolle".*

ART. 5 OUR SOCIETY IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Don Bosco inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young.

He himself founded not only the Society of St. Francis de Sales but also the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators. These live in communion with each other, share the same spirit and, with specifically distinct vocations, continue the mission he began. Together with these groups and with others born later we make up the Salesian Family.¹

Within this family, by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness.

Our past pupils are also members by reason of the education they have received, and the bonds are closer when they commit themselves to take an active part in the Salesian mission in the world.

¹cf. ASC Progetto GC1, ms DB; MB XVII, 25

After describing the essential elements of the nature and mission of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Constitutions invite us to consider the Society in its relationship to those "various apostolic projects", which from the first article have been presented as heirs of Don Bosco's charisma.

The article speaks first of a "vast movement of persons" working in the mission to young people, which takes its inspiration from Don Bosco. Within this movement the Founder brought into being the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators, i.e. the first basic groups of the Salesian Family, to which others will be added later.

The Salesian, are invited to reflect on Don Bosco's desire concerning the unity and collaboration in dialogue of the whole Salesian Family for the common mission.

The Salesian "movement"

With the passage of time there have grown up around Don Bosco and his works individuals and groups with widely differing relationships: benefactors, priest and lay collaborators, pupils, past-pupils, friends, parents, and members of oratories, parishes, camping groups, etc.

They represent a reality extending from at one end those who take up Don Bosco's apostolic project and on it base their own life-plan, to those at the other end who merely feel a certain interest in Salesian work and collaborate in it in some way. It is a reality which does not lend itself to easy classification without levelling down or confusing the different relationships.

By adopting the term "*movement*" the GC22 recognized that there are various ways of belonging to this Salesian reality.

There are some, in fact, who discern in themselves a divine call to collaborate, in a group, in Don Bosco's own mission, and to carry it out in his spirit in a variety of apostolic forms and activities. And there are others who, although they feel attracted by Don Bosco and united with him in some way, do not feel like taking part in combined activities as members of one or other of the above mentioned Groups. A deep concern for the young and for educational ideals and methods can be expressed in "specifically distinct vocations".

The most explicit indication of the first paragraphs, with the social overtones contained in the idea of a movement, concerns pastoral action: with their eyes on Don Bosco many people foster activity aimed at the salvation of the young: the Saint of youth inspires them to imitate him "in different ways". In this sense he has become part of the patrimony not only of the Salesians but of the entire Church.

In actual fact the "movement", although in itself a part of the Church's dynamics, can embrace various realities, not all of them homogeneous, with differing kinds of organization, diverse interests in human advancement and social concern, and collaboration with non-Christians and even at times with non-believers. In other words it is possible to find gathered around Don Bosco and his ideal "men of good will", even though they be not fully aware of the cardinal points in Salesian education, which are reason, religion and loving kindness.

The "Salesian Family"

Within this "movement" Don Bosco has given life to certain currents of energy which, starting from a vocational awareness, are specifically committed to his mission for the salvation of youth. He himself, as the Rule reminds us, founded the first groups of the *Salesian Family*: our own Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators. These three groups should not be thought of as parallel realities, but rather as the same reality expressed in concentric circles: none of them has ever existed apart from the others.

Around Don Bosco and his successors the Family has grown, even by the addition of new Groups, and has continued to live in unity, even though there have been some difficult moments when there was a risk of its charismatic unity becoming less evident.

After being relaunched during the SGC in the form of a new project¹, the Salesian Family has given a marked impetus to pastoral activity. It has given rise to initiatives, mobilized forces, and rediscovered all the riches of its particular spiritual

¹SAC, 151-157

the specific vocation, participation in the mission to the young and the poor, the sharing in the Salesian spirit and in the pastoral and educational plan, adherence to the preventive system, and a family style of acting together. ³

The charismatic reality of the Salesian Family is shown in elements which *distinguish* the Groups one from another, and in elements they have in *common*. The very variety in the ecclesial circumstances of those the Spirit has called to be members (religious, consecrated seculars, priests and lay people) makes us reflect on the responsibility shared by so many people in the genuine living out of the Salesian charisma: with them in fact "we make up the Salesian Family". And we in particular are reminded by the SGC: "The Salesians cannot fully rethink their vocation in the Church without reference to those who share with them in carrying out their Founder's will".⁴

- The *distinguishing element* is the specific manner in which each Group makes its own the charism of Don Bosco.

It is important to have a sound knowledge of the different Groups and of the specific way they live the Salesian mission. Here there is space only to recall a few of the Groups which make up the Salesian Family: the Salesian (SDB) and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), both of them religious institutes, and the Salesian Cooperators, an Association made up in large part of lay people. These were the Groups founded by Don Bosco himself, and to them have since been added the Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV) who are consecrated women belonging to a Secular Institute, and various other religious congregations of women;⁵ and if it be God's will, still other different groups may appear.

- The *elements common* to all the Groups⁶ are the following:

- the call to share the 'charism' given to Don Bosco and his Family, in some important aspect of the human and supernatural experience of the Saint;

- the apostolic mission to the young and the poor;

- the style of life and activity (Salesian spirit);

- reference to the Founder of the Family and to his successors as the centre of unity.

²The *relaunching of the Salesian Family* led some groups of the salesian "movement" to call themselves members of this Family, so that the term "Salesian Family" was sometimes used to include some other aspects of the "movement" in addition to the Groups committed to it by vocation

³ Cf. ASC 304 (1982), p. 61 ff.

⁴ SGC, 151

⁵ The Groups of the Salesian Family officially recognized by the Rector Major with his Council at the date of publication of this Commentary are the following:

- Institute of the "Daughters of the Sacred. Heart" of Bogota (11.01.1982) Institute of the "Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart" (24.12.1983)

- Institute of the "Sister Apostles of the Holy Family" (Christmas 1984)

- Institute of the "Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki" (3 I .01.1986)

- Institute of the "Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians", Shillong (8.07.1986)

⁶ Cf. ASC 304 (1982), loc.cit.

The SGC declared: "In the mind and heart of Don Bosco the Salesian Family is one. The original unity of this family has its root in the existence of a common

spirit and mission of total service to the young and to working class people. Thus it shows itself to be at the higher level a real community in which all the members are integrated according to their proper qualities and specific functions and in the different forms of life possible in the Church".⁷ A deeper analysis of the reality of the Salesian Family, of its mission and unifying force, has been given by the Rector Major, Fr. Egidio Vigano', in a circular which well repays meditation.⁸

Finally, let us not forget that a "bond of union" between the various Groups of the Salesian Family is provided by the Salesian Bulletin (cf. R 41).

The Society of St. Francis de Sales in the Salesian Family

The article's third paragraph specifies the role of the Salesians (SDB) in the Family, indicating the "particular responsibilities" they have. Already in the first "Regulations of the Cooperation" of 1876, it was said: "This Salesian Congregation, being definitively approved by the Church (1874), can serve as a sure and stable bond for the Salesian Cooperators".⁹

The Salesian Family did not appear in the Church as though almost without the knowledge of the Founder, but by his express wish. One has only to recall how the Salesian (SDB) and the Cooperators were closely linked in the first manuscript drafts of the Constitutions of the Society; one need only think of the close bond with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The idea of unity was one that Don Bosco had always had in mind (the "union of good people", he called it).¹⁰ The preservation of this unity is one of the prime obligations of the Salesian Society, a duty devoid of all pretension; it is a service and a duty laid on us by Don Bosco.¹¹

But it should be noted that our responsibility, rather than being merely juridical, is of the charismatic, spiritual and pastoral order.

According to the Constitutions we are obliged:

— *to preserve unity of spirit*: it is not said that the Salesians will always be the ones who best practise the spirit of the Founder (desirable though that might be!), but those who especially by their fatherly presence and through the directives of the Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco, will be guarantors of the common fidelity to the same spirit;

— *"to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration"*: a living unity cannot exist without this mutual exchange of views.

⁷ SGC, 739

⁸ E. Vigano, *The Salesian Family*, ASC 304 (1982), pp. 3-48; cf. also *Costruire insieme la Famiglia Salesiana*, ed. M. MIDALI, LAS Rome, 1983

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators* 1876, ch. II

¹⁰ Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1877

¹¹ Cf. SGC, 173. 189; GC21, 75. 79. 588

Two benefits are indicated which result from this kind of exchange: one for the groups themselves — the reciprocal enrichment of their salesian features; the other for those to whom their apostolate is directed — a greater apostolic effectiveness.¹²

Our General Regulations specify in greater detail how the Salesian community is to be the "animating nucleus" of the Family: "The community, in agreement with those responsible for the various groups, with respect for their autonomy and in a spirit of service, offers them spiritual assistance, promotes meetings, encourages collaboration and initiatives in the educational and pastoral fields, and cultivates the common commitment for vocations" (R 36).

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians too, and to the other Institutes, "in response to their requests and as far as lies within our power ... we offer our fraternal help and our priestly ministry. We collaborate with them in deepening our understanding of Don Bosco's spirituality and pedagogy, and particularly in keeping alive the Marian dimension of the Salesian charism" (R 37).

We also promote the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator and collaborate in the formation of the members (cf. R 38), remembering Don Bosco's words: "The same harvest is proposed for Salesian Cooperators as for the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, with which they want to be associated".¹³

The Past Pupils

The Past Pupils' Association is another Group which belongs to the Salesian Family for a specific reason.

First of all we must ask: Who constitute the Group of Past Pupils? And the answer is: all those who through frequenting for some time a Salesian work (community, school, hostel, oratory, youth centre, etc.) have acquired an education and formation according to Don Bosco's principles, and adhere to the corresponding Association or feel themselves represented by it.

The reference here to the Association is important, because according to an indication given by the Rector Major during the GC21, one does not belong to the Salesian Family as an individual but only through some group: the Salesian Family is made up of groups, but not just any old groups; they must be properly constituted groups, for which official recognition is needed"¹⁴

The article says that Past Pupils are members of the Salesian Family by reason of "*the education they have received*", and adds that the bonds are closer "*when they commit themselves to take an active part in the Salesian mission*". A comment on the two expressions will not be out of place.

¹²The Acts of the SGC develop these perspectives: cf. SGC, 174-177

¹³D. BOSCO , *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, ch. IV

¹⁴GC21, 516

— *"The education they have received"*: this implies a complexus of human and Christian values which have an effect on the past pupil's personality and which enter (even from a purely human aspect in certain religious situations) into the objectives of Salesian educational activity. The 'education received' can be later expressed in various commitments in the vast mission of Don Bosco, whether in the educational field, the many cultural areas, or in tasks specifically linked (albeit at various levels) with the values of the preventive system. It is important to notice that both educational commitments and the assimilation of the pedagogical values of the preventive system are integral parts of Don Bosco's charism.

— The further expression: *"when they commit themselves to take an active part in the Salesian mission in the world"*, implies that past pupils are particularly prepared, precisely because of the education they have received, to assume a responsibility in collaborating for the attainment of the objectives inherent in the Salesian plan.

In the GC21 reference was made to past pupils who have made "the choice of the Gospel".¹⁵ It should be emphasized that this choice is not an alternative to the title of "education received," but rather a special expression of it: it is not therefore a separate title applicable to a kind of new group. Rightly did the Rector Major observe that past pupils of this kind do not form an officially constituted group on their own. If they want to be considered a living part of the Association of Past Pupils, the formal reason for their membership will not be their 'choice of the Gospel' but will remain that of the 'education received', which certainly does not exclude apostolic work (indeed it requires it in virtue of the education received if the latter was deeply Christian and ecclesial in character).¹⁶

In this way the article of the Constitutions emphasizes that the education received should lead to the conscious choice to collaborate in the common mission to youth. Such a commitment can be carried out at various levels and with different degrees of intensity. It is easy to understand the exhortation made by the SGC (which has been incorporated in art. 39 of the General Regulations): "It is to be hoped that within the movement of the past pupils, ... those who are inclined and gifted that way should become organized as Cooperators or members of apostolic groups so as to participate in the spirit and activity of the Salesian Family".¹⁷

And here there comes spontaneously to mind a thought pregnant with implications for the future, concerning the nature and role of the "Cooperators' Association" in the Salesian Family. The Rector Major wrote: "There exists an outstanding Association, that of the Salesian Cooperators. From the point of view of the vocation of the lay person in our Family, this must be considered the centre of reference for all such possibilities, because it is not an alternative to other associations but rather aims at animating those others. The Cooperators are not an association which, as such, organizes works and specific initiatives; the Association is

¹⁵ GC21, 69

¹⁶ Cf. GC21, 517

¹⁷ SGC, 157

aware that it shares responsibility with us in preserving in all its members and in our Family vitality of Don Bosco's plan, bringing to it the riches of its own secular condition. In doing this it retains the possibility of offering animators for the identity of any other group or association whose specific nature needs to be known and appreciated, without prejudice to its autonomy".¹⁸

It is readily understandable therefore why our Catholic Past Pupils, naturally prepared as they are the better to take on apostolic commitments, are invited to enrol as Cooperators;¹⁹ and on the other hand one can easily see what a valuable contribution such Past Pupil-Cooperators can make to their own Association.

In any case it is a specific duty of the Salesians to follow up and animate the Past Pupils; the General Regulations ask the confreres and communities to fulfill their obligations in this sector (cf. R 39)

*God our Father,
you have willed to entrust the Salesian mission
to different groups in a single great Family.
Pour out upon us your Spirit
so that in our brotherly union
and in the sincere sharing of our gifts
of nature and of grace,
we may all be able to collaborate
with true efficacy
in the evangelization of the young and the poor.
Through Christ our Lord*

¹⁸ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The lay person in the Salesian Family*, AGC (1986), p. 19 20

¹⁹ This was the thought of Don Bosco, who nevertheless always distinguished clearly between Cooperators and Past Pupils; cf. BM XIII, 582

ART. 6 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CHURCH

The Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission.

Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations; we are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication; we proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it.

In this way we contribute to building up the Church as the Body of Christ, so that also through us she may appear to the world as the "universal sacrament of salvatio^d.¹

¹LG 48; GS 45

It is quite noticeable how insistently the Constitutions speak of the Church.

The entire first part is headed "*The Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church*"; "We are recognized in the Church", says art. 4; and this present article carries the title: "Our Society in the Church" and asserts: "the Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission"; it goes on: "...we contribute to building up the Church". Later the Constitutions will speak of our "desire to work with the Church and in her name" (C 7); they will refer to our "authentic understanding of the Church" (C 13) to our sharing in the life and mission of the Church (C 24), to the fact that our community "expresses in a visible manner the mystery of the Church" (C 85) and becomes for both young and old "a living experience of Church" (C 47). All this comes down to the fact that to live as Salesians is a way of "being Church".

Our Founder and our Society are gifts of the Spirit to the whole People of God, to enrich its holiness and make it apostolically efficacious.¹ Our vocation, therefore, while putting us entirely at the service of the Church's mission, asks us to take care that characteristic experience of the Spirit" of our charism be faithfully preserved and "constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth".²

The statements in this article are embryonic but of great importance because they summarize in connection with the Church's mission what Don Bosco called the "aims" or "purposes" of the Congregation.

At the heart of the Church and at her service

"The Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church".

¹ Cf. PC 1; MR 10

² MR 11

The reference here is not to the Church seen merely as a law-making society, but to the Church as "mystery", the People of God, the Body of Christ, the sacrament of salvation. Both the SGC and the GC22 presented the Salesian Society as being in the Church, with the Church and for the Church.

The simple image used ("*at the heart*") harks back to two statements of the Council.

— In the first place it recalls a text of "Lumen Gentium", where it is said that the state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels belongs undeniably to the Church's life and holiness.³ Religious life is a particular sign of the love of the Church for Christ her Lord; for this reason the religious lives for the Church; in the words of the Council: "The bonds of consecration, by which he pledges himself to the practice of the counsels, show forth the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his bride the Church". But because "the evangelical counsels unite those who practise them to the Church and her mystery in a special way, it follows that the spiritual life of such Christians should be dedicated also to the welfare of the entire Church".⁴

— Secondly, there is an allusion to a passage from the decree "Perfectae caritatis", in which it is stated that religious of active life receive their apostolic mission from the Church and carry it out in her name: "(In religious communities) the very nature of the religious life requires apostolic action and services, since a sacred ministry and a special work of charity have been consigned to them by the Church and must be discharged in her name."⁵

Our situation "at the heart of the Church" evidently excludes any idea of triumphalism and every form of parallelism. Being Salesians is our intensive way of being Church. Any kind of dualism between Salesian life and the life of the particular or universal Church unthinkable. The same Spirit who animates and unifies the Church has inspired our Salesian vocation.

This is why the Rule adds: "*The Salesian vocation puts us entirely at the service of her (the Church's) mission*".

Aware as we are that the salesian mission is a sharing in the mission of the Church itself, it should be impossible for us to think of carrying out our activity in a closed circle, without relationships with all the other members of the ecclesial body. The adverb "entirely", which qualifies our conduct as sons of Don Bosco, is significant!

The four principal objectives of the Salesian mission

Don Bosco has pointed out very clearly the *specific and priority areas* in which the Congregation is to carry out its apostolic service in the Church's mission.

³ Cf. LG; 44

⁴ LG 44; cf. RD 14

⁵ PC 8

These sectors were not just a response to spasmodic circumstances of the time calling for emergency measures, but the result of the influence of the Spirit who moved the Founder from within to make certain lasting choices. They are therefore evidently up to date and of constant interest to the Church and society.

Sensitivity, flexibility and creativity, as the Constitutions will tell us in due course, must certainly characterize our spirit in the wide panorama of a mission which is typical of a pilgrim Church. Situations change, and so do the ways and means with which we carry out our activity.

But the mission remains substantially unaltered and prescriptive. The Congregation will not limit its attention to urgent situations which arise, to the provision of "first aid" remedies for new circumstances with the risk of a generalized levelling down which would destroy or deform its identity. It will keep its eye firmly fixed, in its apostolic service, on the priority sectors assigned to it by Don Bosco and approved by the Church.

This article of the Constitutions enumerates the sectors which belong essentially to this category: for us they are of great interest, wide ranging and always up to date. The text draws its inspiration directly from the first chapter of the Constitutions as written by the Founder, where he speaks explicitly of the scope of the Congregation.⁶

— *"We are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor."*

This is an ever present sector in a Church which brings to birth and forms the children of God, but in which we feel ever more urgently the need for "Missionaries of the young", as Pope John Paul II has called us.⁷

The evangelizing dimension, as the Constitutions will tell us in developing the theme of the mission, is the basic criterion for our educational pastoral work.

— *"We pay special attention to apostolic vocations".*

The problem of vocations has always been of fundamental importance in the Church and is still so at the present day:⁸ Don Bosco wanted the Salesians to be in all circumstances guides, educators, encouragers and animators of apostolic vocations (consecrated, religious, priestly or lay).

— *"We are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication".*

⁶ In the Constitutions written by the Founder (1875 edtn.), the mission to the young (I, 3.4), commitment to vocations (I,5) and the care of the working classes (I,6) are expressly mentioned. Don Bosco does not yet speak of "mission" (the term is found in the Constitution from 1904), but he nevertheless launches the Society on the missionary venture

⁷ Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22: GC22, 13

⁸ In his homily for the inauguration of the Second International Congress on Vocations (Rome, 10 May 1981), John Paul II said: "The problem of priestly vocations-and also of religious vocations among both men and women - is, and I say it very clearly, *the fundamental problem of the Church*"

We are called to be "educators" of Christian faith and culture, in appropriate language, among young people and the working classes, who are often defenceless against atheism and irreligion.

We are "communicators of the Word" in a simple and attractive manner in all possible ways (expression by the written and spoken word, audio-visuals etc.) and in fact by all the means of social communication offered us by the mass media. This is a task with enormous implications, and one prophetically assigned to us by Don Bosco!

We are therefore called to be up to the minute apostles of social communication among youngsters and the ordinary people, adapting ourselves to the ever new ways of developing the faith in every kind of culture.

— *"We proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it".*

For Don Bosco the missions were the heart and driving force which gave strength and tone to the Congregation. He wanted the Salesians to be proclaimers of the Kingdom among peoples not yet evangelized. His passion of "da mihi animas" allowed of no frontiers; the overwhelming desire for the evangelization of all peoples is for the Salesian a motive for personal growth, and for the Congregation an instigation to a universal outlook.

All these sectors of our mission will be further developed in later parts of the constitutional text.

The Church appears to the world, also through us, as the "universal sacrament of salvation"

As a conclusion to this article, emphasis is laid once again on the importance of feeling oneself involved in the mystery of the Church. For the salvation of men Christ calls them to himself making them Church, which becomes not only a "community at once human and divine", but also the "universal sacrament of salvation".

We said that our characteristic vocation "puts us entirely at the service" of the Church's needs, with particular attention to the most delicate part of the People of God, which is youth.

As Church we feel that we have been "saved" by the goodness of Christ, but we also feel that we share responsibility for the salvation of others, and especially of young people; we set out to renew ourselves, always in the knowledge that we are a sign of God's love for the young.

As Salesians we feel ourselves inserted in the mystery of the Church, we cooperate in her mission with all our strength, we pass on to others our spirit and our educational and pastoral method as gifts we have received for distribution; we become bearers of our special charisma throughout the world.

Our way of living our membership of the Church and of contributing to its construction consists in being genuine and faithful Salesians, i.e. in being ever more

ourselves. The decree "perfectae caritatis" says, in fact: "It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own proper characters and functions".⁹

In this way we help to build up the Church "as the Body of Christ": in it we are a precise organism, a living member, and our apostolic activity helps it to grow (think, for instance, of our activity in the fields of education, missions, parishes, catechetics, vocations etc.).

But we contribute too, in a humble way, to showing it forth as the universal sacrament of salvation and freedom: the sacrament of the saving love of God for the young, and especially those who are poor.

*God our Father,
help us to understand
that our Salesian vocation
places us at the heart of the Church
for the service of her divine mission.*

*Grant us complete generosity
in making the contribution of our charisma, in
accordance with the plan you inspired in Don Bosco, so
that we may be true missionaries of the young" and
efficacious bearers of the Gospel of your Son.*

*Grant also that in every circumstance
we may use all the means your Providence provides
to collaborate in the building of the Church itself, the
Mystical Body of Christ
and the universal sacrament of salvation.*

Through Christ our Lord.

⁹ PC2

ART. 7 OUR SOCIETY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history.¹ Open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel.

The needs of the young and of working- class areas, the desire to work with the Church and in her name, inspire and shape our concrete pastoral activity so as to bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ.

¹ cf. GS 1

The title of this article brings to mind the great pastoral Constitution of Vatican II "The Church in the Modern World", and in this way manifests the desire of the Salesian Society to enter into the perspective of the present-day Church. At the same time it provides a first explanation of our relationship with the world: we are a living organism of the Church, we must contribute to making it present in the world to which it is sent "to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to Judge, to serve and not to be served".¹

The presence of the Church in the world is justified as a service to humanity: "a Church and a Council turned towards man, not turned aside towards man",² said Paul VI; in a similar but much more humble way, the Salesian Congregation feels that it is turned towards the young, even though not turned aside in that direction.

This article affirms the relationship between evangelization and culture on the attitude to be adopted by the Salesians so as to respond to the challenges of the present day: "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time".³

Intimately solid with the world and its history

Our membership of the Church and our salesian vocation call us to make ourselves friends, and even "servants", of youth and of working-class areas, just as Christ became the servant of the least of his brethren.

The characteristic form of our relationship with the world is solidarity with the young in so far as they are inserted in the world and its history. The text refers explicitly to the first article of "Gaudium et Spes" which say: "They joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time are (those) of the followers of Christ as

¹ CS 3

² Cf. *Concluding address at the 4th session of the Council*, 7 December 1965

³ EN 20

well.... Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history".⁴

This solidarity for the salvation of the young means that we must:

— foster our sympathy for the countries in which we work, carefully study the social reality of the places where we live, and take an interest in their problems;

—be open to the local cultures, make the effort to fully understand them, and accept their values and pluriformity;

—work to incarnate in these cultures the Gospel of Christ ("enculturation" of the Gospel);

— bring up to date in them the salesian method of kindness.

Don Bosco did not want to make us monks or conventual friars but religious of a new kind, close to all men as their brothers and at their service. Many of our activities (think, for instance, of our many educational services and social communication) have a character which in themselves are profane, to the extent that of their nature they are inserted in the reality and social problems of the people.⁵

Such a character, however, is not at variance with the demands of religious consecration, nor with the objectives of our mission, nor with the need to oppose the deviations of a world which does not accept Christ and his Gospel. We can indeed bear witness to the truth of Christ who sets man free by living the problems of our time, sharing its rhythm and its "human" enterprises, its joys and sorrows; leaving aside at the same time everything in thought, word or deed that would make us irrelevant to others or not acceptable to them. Here we find once again an aspect of the characteristic humanism of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco.

Open to cultural values so as to incarnate in them the message of Gospel.

The Constitutions emphasize this aspect: our particular commitment to evangelization means that we must be open to cultural values, to an understanding of them and to their acceptance. A flexible and creative attitude is indispensable at a time when all cultures are undergoing great evolution. We are says "Gaudium et Spes"⁶ — on the threshold of a new era in history in which is being born an intensive human interrelationship, which implies a kind of "super culture", which links human relations with exchanges and creates bonds of communion. It is a call to make ourselves more universal, to live in harmony with universal human growth, and to be attentive to the intercultural dialogue which is now taking place at world level.

⁴ GS I

⁵ The constitution indicate that our mission, sharing in that of the Church, links with the commitment to evangelization that of the development of the temporal order. (cf. C 31). Cf. also the document "*Religious and Human Promotion*" (CRIS, Rome 1980), which speaks of the promotional tasks which the Church entrusts to religious

⁶ Cf. GS 54 ff.

apostolic anxiety which moved the apostle Paul to travel the earth to take everywhere the Gospel message, a message which is able to "make every people fruitful, as it were from within, to strengthen, perfect and restore them in Christ":⁷ the journeys of the Pope and his teaching show very clearly the special role which Providence entrusts to the apostles at the present time with the Spirit's assistance.

Within our own modest salesian environment to the enculturation of Don Bosco's charisma makes indispensable a great attention to both the signs of the times and the mediations of the individual cultures, to strengthen the identity and unity of the Congregation, by the acceptance of a pluriformity of means which at the same time exclude both uniformity and nationalisms.

Our pastoral viewpoint: from the salesian "mission" to "pastoral" action

Don Bosco believed in the social implications of his work (cf. C 33), directed as it was to the overall advancement of the young, to the service of mankind and hence to the advent of a new society where justice and brotherhood in Christ could reign; "From the good or poor education of youngsters depends the happy or melancholy future of society's customs".⁸

After glancing at the vast and complex character of the salesian mission in relation to the modern world, the text concentrates attention on the indispensable "*pastoral outlook*"⁹ needed to translate the mission into concrete pastoral interventions of many kinds.¹⁰ This kind of outlook is expressed in the Rule as "the desire to work with the Church and in her name" so as to give direction to all activity and at the same time prevent our indispensable commitment to human advancement from degenerating to a merely temporal level. The salesian pastoral outlook makes us examine with a positive approach the reality in which we live and leads us to a discernment of the real "needs of the young and of working-class areas" so as to advance towards what Paul VI called the civilization of love".

Our Founder has insistently exhorted us to give great attention to the pastoral aspect of our commitment for humanity, with activity entrusted to us by the Church, always inspired and motivated by the intention "to preserve the faith and sound customs in that section of young people who, because they are poor, are exposed to grater dangers to their eternal salvation".¹¹

Concern about the pastoral viewpoint ("*working with the Church and in her name*") helps us, when responding to urgent social needs, to avoid the very real dangers arising from ideological deviations and prevailing current ideas; it recalls to

⁷ Cf. GS 58 _____

⁸ Cf. *Proemio delle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 1858 (F. MOTTO, p. 58)

⁹ Cf. Message of John Paul II to the GC22. GC22, 13

¹⁰ The SGC, while affirming the unity of the salesian mission, points out the indispensable need to put it into practice through a variety of pastoral activities linked to the different social and cultural realities (cf. SGC, 30)

¹¹ Cf. *Proemio alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 1858 (F. MOTTO, p.60)

our minds how careful Don Bosco was to avoid adopting fixed political and partisan attitudes; it helps us to make preferential options indicated by the salesian

mission, in harmony with the local Churches.

Here we are interpreting from a salesian standpoint what "Gaudium et Spes" says about the "signs of the times". At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task... so as to be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask"¹². "The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith it tries to discern in the events, the needs and the longings which it shares with other men of our time, what may be genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God".¹³

In every country to which we may be sent we want to be intensively present in the cultural, social and political life of the people, and in particular of young people in working-class areas: this is the only way to discover their real "needs", their hunger for bread, for knowledge, for human dignity, for truth, for beauty and, at the foundation of it all, their hunger for Jesus "Christ. Don Bosco never used any other method!

In this way we hope, through our educational and apostolic commitment, to contribute to the world's progress. But what kind of progress? What kind of world are we dreaming about? And what kind of human society do we want to promote? The text discreetly implies that we contest every dehumanizing element of the present world and in particular the prominence given to profit; we want to contribute the building of "a more just world and one of greater brotherhood" inspired by Christ and the principles of his Gospel.

The same theme will be taken up again and at greater length in article 33

*Lord our God,
you have called us to serve you in our fellow men and
to be solid with those to whom you have sent us.*

*Grant that we may share with sincerity
the hopes and anxieties of men of our time,
and accept with an open heart
the values of the cultures in which you insert us,
willingly sharing the needs of poor youth;
so that being in the world without being of the world
we may be instrumental in bringing to it
a new experience of your justice and your love.*

Through Christ our Lord.

¹² GS 4

¹³ GS 11

ART. 8 THE PRESENCE OF MARY IN OUR SOCIETY

The Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work,¹ especially in the foundation of our Society.

We believe that Mary is present among us and continues her "mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians".²

We entrust ourselves to her, the humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things,³ that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love.

¹ MB VII, 334; XVII, 258; XVIII, 439; BM VII, 197

² DON BOSCO, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, Turin 1858, p. 45 (OE XX, 237)

³ cf. Lk 1, 48-49

In the first part of the Constitutions, which forms their foundation, this article on the "presence of Mary in our Society" presents our Lady as being strictly linked with both the foundation of the Society and the Salesian vocation. The Marian dimension, in fact, is an essential part of both the history and the life of the Salesian Society.

The Mother of God, as cooperator in the work of redemption, has shared actively in the birth and development of the various religious institutes in the Church: "One may say that Mary most holy has been the foundress and mother of every Congregation, from the Cenacle down to the present day".¹

In particular Don Bosco says in our own case: "Mary is the Mother and support of our Congregation".²

The article sets out to illustrate this reality which, while ensuring us of the motherly gaze that the Blessed Virgin turns on the Salesian Society, makes clear her enduring and operative presence in the life and activity of the Church. As the Council says: "Taken up to heaven ... (Mary) continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ... and cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home".³

Mary present at the foundation of the Society

The article begins with solemn affirmation of the presence and role of Mary in the vocation of Don Bosco and at the start of his work. Mary, the Mother of God, who is also the Mother of the young, has shown a special concern for them: in John Bosco's dream at the age of nine and repeated more than once in later year, she

¹ MB IX, 347

² MB XVII, 258

³ LG 62

herself pointed to the young as his field of activity, and to kindness as the pastoral method to be used.

Don Bosco, thinking back later to the birth and development of his work, once said: "We cannot go wrong: Mary herself is leading us".⁴

The text of the Constitutions refers to the many ways in which the Blessed Virgin was the "constant guide and support" of Don Bosco.

— As his *"inspirer and guide"* she accompanied him with visible signs of benevolence and protection in the foundation and development of the Congregation and the whole Salesian Family. "It is all Our Lady's work", he used to say; "she is the founders and support of our works", our unfailing guide.⁵

— As *"mother and teacher"* She supported Don Bosco with the thoughtful kindness ⁶ she had once shown at Cana (cf. Jn 2), and with a clear and universally valid educational plan for the formation of the young: the preventive system (cf. C 20)

— It can therefore be truly said that "the growth, multiplication and extension of the Salesian Society can and must be attributed to Mary most holy".⁷ Our Founder used to say: "The Congregation is led by God and protected by Mary most holy".⁸

Speaking to his first followers in 1867 of the future of the young Congregation, Don Bosco narrated his dream of the pergola of roses and introduced it as follows: "I have already told you of several things I saw as in a dream. From them we can infer how much Our Mary loves and helps us. But now that we are alone together, I am going to tell you not just another dream, but something that Our Lady herself graciously showed me. I am doing this so that each of us may be convinced that it is Our Lady herself who wants our Congregation. This should spur us on to work ever harder for God's greater glory. She wants us to place all our trust in her".⁹

In this perspective we can understand the words of the Rector Major at the end of the GC 21: "The Congregation was born and developed through the intervention of Mary, and it will be renewed only to the extent that Mary returns to occupy the place that belongs to her in our charism".¹⁰

Mary present in our vocation

Our trust in Mary's active presence among us to continue her "mission" must never fail. We believe with Don Bosco that she is our mother and teacher, in a certain

⁴ MB XVIII, 439

⁵ Cf. BM VII, 197; MB XVIII, 439

⁶ Cf. BM VII, 406

⁷ BM VI, 183

⁸ MB XVIII, 531

⁹ BM III, 25

¹⁰ GC21, 589

sense the one who instructs us in the manner of taking the Gospel to present day youth.

In the second paragraph is noticeable the special emphasis laid on the ecclesia and Catholic openness of Bosco's devotion to our Lady. "She wants us", he said, "to honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians"¹¹, a very appropriate title, particularly in the time of great difficulty and great hopes through which we are livings.¹²

She "has continued from the heaven, and even more efficaciously, the mission of Mother of the Church and Help of Christians which she had begun on earth".¹³

This quotation from Don Bosco which brings together the two titles of "Mother of the Church and Help of Christians" is of particular significance at the present time, after Paul VI officially proclaimed her "Mother of the Church" at the end of the third session of the Vatican Council. ¹⁴

Mary is the gift and property of the whole Church. The Constitution "Lumen Gentium" and the Apostolic Exhortation "Marialis Cultus" have described her prophetic role and her function in the Church; we can reach a better understanding of her figure by more attentive reflection on the way she serves God, her brethren and the community, by a greater sensitivity to the requirements of ecumenism, and by a closer study of Christology and ecclesiology.

Mary is not only Mother of the Church; she is also the Church's image. To renew the difficult dialogue between youth and the Church, this Mother must be found again. "If we want to get back to the truth about Jesus Christ, about the Church and about man, we must turn to Mary".¹⁵ Mary wants a Church that courageously puts itself at the service of the world, of the young, of the poor and the working-class, of cultural requirements, but also a Church full of motherly kindness.

We should always link the title of Mother of the Church with that of Mary Help of Christians, As disciples of the Lord, we are Church: its difficulties, anxieties and plans are ours too; as followers of Christ we feel ourselves to be participants in the Marian mission of "Help of Christians" and "Mother of the Church".

As educators we note in particular Mary's role in the education of Christians. "The figure of Mary", we read in *Marialis Cultus*, "offers to men of our time the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim to the city which is heavenly and eternal, the disciple who works for the justice which sets free the oppressed and for the charity which

¹¹ BM VII, 197

¹² Cf. E. VIGANO, *Mary renews the Salesian Family*, ASC 289 (1978)

¹³ D. BOSCO *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin 1868, p. 45 (OE vol XX p. 237)

¹⁴ Cf. Paul VI, *Closing address of the third session of Vatican II*, 21 November 1964

¹⁵ John Paul II, 1979

assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts".¹⁶

We believe that Mary is indeed the helper in the formation of Christians in this way; the Helper in the titanic struggle between good and evil, life and death, light and the darkness of sin; the Helper of the young in overcoming their little personal fears and the great universal fears that afflict them.

Don Bosco tells us: "Call her the Help of Christians. She greatly enjoys helping us".¹⁷ She is "the Help of parents, the Help of children, the Help of friends."¹⁸

We entrust ourselves to Mary

Because of their participation in the vicissitudes of the Church and their responsibility to youth, the Salesians entrust themselves to Mary in their apostolic enterprise: "Entrusted as we are to her protection, we shall be able to embark on great undertakings".¹⁹

This entrustment was renewed by the Congregation in a solemn act on 14 January 1984 at the beginning of the GC22, and is repeated daily by every Salesian on his own account.

We are quite certain in fact that "the Blessed Virgin will certainly continue to protect our Congregation and our salesian works if we maintain our trust in her and promote devotion to her".²⁰

The term "entrustment" is of recent origin but is a very significant one. It takes the place of the formerly used "consecration" which, as we have seen, is properly used to express an action of God.

Entrustment of oneself to Mary is a filial gesture which reveals sure trust, unmixed love and complete belonging. It had also been suggested by Don Bosco in 1869 when he proposed an "Act of affiliation by which we take the Virgin Mary as our mother".²¹

To entrust oneself to Mary is to begin an affective relationship of self-donation, of availability, of belonging, of depending on the patronage of May, Christ's co-worker.²²

The Constitutions say that we salesians entrust ourselves to Mary so as to be bearers of a youthful spirituality, to construct a pedagogy of living witness to youthful

¹⁶ MC 37

¹⁷ MB XVI, 269

¹⁸ MB XVI, 212

¹⁹ P. ALBERA, Letter of 31.3.1918, Circulars, p. 286

²⁰ D. BOSCO, Spiritual Testament, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 268

²¹ D. BOSCO, Catholic Readings 1869, p. 57

²² John Paul. II, 8 December 1981, commemorating the Council of Ephesus, "entrusted" to Mary the entire human family

sanctity, i.e. to "become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love": this is the mission indicated from the beginning by our Rule (cf. C 2).

We entrust ourselves to the Mother of the Church, i.e. to a Mother who is active and ever solicitous over the outcome of the vicissitudes of every century. Mary is the Mother of young people and vocations.

We entrust ourselves to the Helper of the Pope, the Bishops and all Christian people.

We entrust ourselves to the "humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things". This reference to the Magnificent opens up vast horizons in which appear in rapid sequence the tortured history of mankind and the fatherly intervention of God who made of his humble servant the starting point for the renewal of humanity: the whole story of salvation is an invitation to trust in her.

We Salesians have the responsibility of preserving and promoting devotion to Mary among the ordinary working class people, and of fostering among the young a deeper knowledge of her, the Mother and Helper, which will lead to love and imitation.

*Lord Jesus,
you gave to Don Bosco
your own most holy Mother
to be his Mother, Teacher and Helper;
and through her you showed him his field of work
and inspired him to found our Society.*

*Continue to look kindly on this your Family, and
grant that we may always be aware amongst us of
the living and active presence of Mary,
"Mother of the Church and Help of Christians".*

*Entrusted as we are to her and under her
guidance may we always be for young people
witnesses of your unbounded love.*

ART. 9 PATRONS AND PROTECTORS OF OUR SOCIETY

As member of the pilgrim Church, we are conscious of our fellowship with our brothers in the heavenly kingdom and feel the need of their help.¹

Don Bosco entrusted our Society in a special way to Mary, whom he made its principal patroness.² as well as to St Joseph and to St Francis de Sales, the zealous pastor and doctor of charity.

We hold in veneration as special protectors St. Dominic Savio, a sign of the wonder that grace can achieve in adolescents, and the other glorified members of our family.

¹ cf. LG 49

² cf. C 1875, V,6

Our society is a living part of the pilgrim Church, and is in communication with the Church in heaven, already basking in the vision of its Lord. "All indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit from one Church and in Christ cleave together".¹

In this last article of the first chapter the Constitutions remind us of the special relationship we enjoy with our glorified confreres, whom we invoke as patrons and protectors: our union with them is not broken by death, but consolidated in the communication of spiritual goods.

This article of the Rule takes us into the kind of atmosphere that was conjured up in one of Don Bosco's "Good Nights" to his sons: "Let everyone think of heaven, where some of you have brothers or sisters, friends or companions, superiors or subjects, a father or mother, who are enjoying the reward of their virtuous lives... If they became saints, why cannot you?"... I assure you that the Lord will help you... All you lack is a small dose of good will... Ask the Lord for it ask insistently and he will grant it. And if your prayers prove insufficient, turn to the Saints and especially to the Blessed Virgin, who... Are ready to help you in every way. Ask them to obtain for you an ardent and constant love of God, and the Lord will grant through the prayers of so many saints what your prayers were unable to obtains".²

We are members of the pilgrim Church, in communion with our brothers in the heavenly kingdom

The Church in which we are working is not one which is disembodied and outside time. It is living dynamically in history: it is a "pilgrim" Church, a Church on the way.

The image emphasizes our intention to respond to the needs of the Church here on earth, with our eyes fixed on what she plans for the future.

¹LG 49

²BM XII, 407

The Constitutions "Lumen Gentium" speaks of a prophetic, royal and priestly people; and the decree "perfectae caritatis" urges religious to take part in the life of the Church in various fields: "biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social matters".³ This supposes that we promote a Church which is ever more authentic and evangelical, in a world in process of secularization: a serving and poor Church, which is looking for a new kind of presence and action, which will be all things to all men, which will heed the cry of the poor, find a place in cultures and lead men to see in her the living Christ.

Such a Church bears witness to the future City and unhesitatingly points out the way to perfect union with Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem.

In this pilgrim Church *"we feel the need for the help of our brothers in the heavenly kingdom"*; with them, who collaborated in the building of the Church, we keep alive the communion which unites us with the glorified Church of heaven: the Saints still intervene in our history to help us in building the Body of Christ: "by their brotherly concern, our weakness is greatly helped".⁴

We are members of a Society entrusted to Mary, St. Joseph and to St Francis de Sales

Among the Saints we venerate in a special way those who have been given to us as patrons and protectors, who intercede for us and intervene to sustain us in our mission.

— Of the *Virgin Mary* the Constitutions have already spoken in the preceding article; but here they tell us that Don Bosco entrusted the Congregation to her in a special way and made her its *"principal patroness"*.

It is not a question here of an official act performed just once, but rather of an habitual attitude of our Founder: "I never shrink from any undertaking which I know is good and necessary, no matter what the difficulties... But first I recite a Hail Mary ..., then come what may, I do my best and leave the rest to the Lord". Don Bosco said this to Don Cagliero just before a difficult meeting with the Minister for the Interior, Farini.⁵

To his first boys and to the salesians he would often say: "A great advantage of ours that we do not sufficiently appreciate is the Virgin Mary's protection and the effectiveness of praying to her. Repeat often "Hail Mary!", and you will see how wonderfully effective this invocation is".⁶

³ Cf. PC 2

⁴ LG 49; cf. LG 50

⁵ BM VI, 384

⁶ BM VI, 58

with all truth and conviction: "The Blessed Virgin is my protectress and my treasurer".⁸

—*St Joseph*

The article does not say explicitly why Don Bosco included St Joseph among the patrons of the Congregation. We know that he started up "St Joseph's Sodality";⁹ in every church he built he had an altar dedicated to St Joseph; after a month's preparation his feast was celebrated on 19 March as a solemnity when all should abstain from work, even though at the time it was no longer a holy day of obligation in Piedmont,¹⁰ he presented him as a model and protector for the artisans and young workers; he looked upon him as a model also of trust in God, Protector of the universal Church, and patron for a happy death. He used to tell his boys and confreres: "I want all of you to put yourselves under St Joseph's protection: if you pray earnestly to him, he will obtain any spiritual or temporal favour you need."¹¹

—*St Francis de Sales*

Of St Francis de Sales, the patron and titular of the Society, two qualities are expressly mentioned in the Constitutions, "*zealous pastor and doctor of charity*", which have made him our model and our author of predilection for the deepening of pastoral charity.

Don Bosco chose him as his protector from the very beginnings of his priesthood; one of his resolutions at that moment was: "The charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales are to be my guide in everything".¹² He chose him as the titular of his first Oratory in Valdocco, and sometimes had him as a guide in his dreams.¹³ His biographer writes: "Don Bosco believed that the spirit of St Francis de Sales was the best suited at the time to the education and upbringing of the working classes".¹⁴ When he began the Missions, he said: "With the gentleness of St Francis de Sales the Salesians will draw the peoples of America to Jesus Christ".¹⁵ The great spiritual writings of St Francis de Sales guided the formation of the first Salesians.

Our patrons watch over us; we venerate them and invoke their aid in the difficulties of our mission and make them known to the young.

As a Society we venerate as protectors our glorified members

⁷ Cf. SGC, 86-87

⁸ BM IV, 175

⁹ Cf. BM VI, 103

¹⁰ Cf. BM VI, 104

¹¹ BM VII, 382

¹² BM I, 385

¹³ Cf. BM IX, 84

¹⁴ BM II, 197

¹⁵ MB XVI, 394

Here the salesian vocation finds its fullest expression. As well as our patrons,
111 we have as intercessors and supporters in our mission also protectors like St

Dominic Savio and the other Saints of our Family. They are a confirmation that the spirit of the Lord is present among us.

This opens up the theme of the holiness of the Salesian Family in which, around Don Bosco, there is a splendid crown of his canonized and beatified sons and daughters.

St Dominic Savio, "a sign of the wonders that grace can achieve in adolescents" is put forward by us educators as a motive for hope, as a proof of God's interest in the young, as an example of apostolic zeal and contemplation, and as a guideline for our own educational work which starts youngsters off towards simple and joyful holiness. And with Dominic we can also recall his companions in glory, like *Zeferino Namuncura*, *Laura Vicuna* and others.

Among the glorified members of the Family we recall brothers and sisters who imitated Don Bosco in their way of life: *St Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, prepared first by God and then guided by Don Bosco in the realization of God's plan for girls: *Blessed Michael Rua*, First successor of Don Bosco and model of salesian fidelity; our first martyrs, *Saints Luigi Versiglia and Callixtus Caravario*; and then *Fr Philip Rinaldi*, *Fr Andrew Beltrami*, *Fr Augustus Czartoryski*, *Fr Vincent Cimatti*, *Simon Srugi*, *Artemides Zatti*, and so many others.¹⁶

"We venerate them": which means that we look on them as friends, we trust in their intercession, we seek their advice, we invoke them on our daily path to the goal which is Christ. Don Bosco insisted: "I shall be waiting for you all in Paradise".¹⁷

The patrimony of salesian holiness has become a spiritual current, a sign of God's love for the young. It shone forth in the Founder, but that was only the beginning of it.

Our Saints are living that covenant with God which they began when in our midst with the practice of charity which they developed through the grace of the Spirit; their activity is not limited by time, but continues through generations and centuries.

In this way our youngsters can admire concrete examples of what the Spirit has done by us making known to them Jesus Christ, the true Lord of history.

¹⁶ On the "School of sanctity" that flourished around Don Bosco, v. Letter of Rector in AGC 319 (1986)

¹⁷ Cf. MB XVIII, 550

*Among your Saints, O Lord,
you have included our brothers and sisters
who are full of solicitude for us.*

*Through the particular intercession
of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
of St Joseph her husband,
of St Francis de Sales from whom we take our name,
of Don Bosco our Father and Founder,
of Dominic Savio an outstanding sign of your grace,
and of all the other glorified members of our Family,
grant that we may work efficaciously at our own holiness
in the building up of your kingdom.*

CHAPTER II

THE SALESIAN SPIRIT

"What you have / earned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4,9)

When Paul wrote to his Christians he liked to talk about himself: it is a graceful sign of a loving interpersonal relationship (fatherhood) and at the same time a vigilant awareness of the need for concrete and credible models for Christians who are a prey to confusion and misunderstanding (cf. 1 Thess 4,1; 1 Cor 4,16).

In the case of the Philippian community this happened because opposing groups were upsetting the community by spreading a Gospel and a spirit which were not those of Paul, the authentic apostle of Christ. Hence his forceful denunciation (3,15-21) made in the first person which includes a polemical note and a serious warning. With a few well chosen words and in positive and practical terms, Paul points out on the one hand the authoritative nature of his testimony and teaching, and on the other the vital and close experience of it made by the disciples; he then goes on to emphasize the indispensable need to accept the "Tradition" of which he is the mediator, so as to follow after the God of Jesus Christ. Only in this way will God's peace and the fullness of messianic blessings surround the community (cf. Rom 15,33; 1 Cor 14,33).

We recall that the letter to the Philippians is quoted in the Constitutions no less than five times,¹ two of them on the lips of Don Bosco himself.

It is evident that we have here a reminder, at once affectionate but deeply felt, of fidelity to Don Bosco as the primary and authentic source of the salesian spirit, in so far as he himself, like Paul, was a first genuine imitator of the Gospel of Christ and hence our authoritative and indispensable model. For this reason, in every article but one of this chapter (10-21), the figure of Don Bosco is always to the fore, as the one who passes on to us the various aspects of his spirit.

* * *

In presenting the general principles of the renewal of religious life, the decree "Perfectae caritatis" asserts: "It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own proper characters and functions. Therefore the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully accepted and retained..."²

It is no easy matter to define the "spirit" of a religious institute. All those baptized in Christ have the same Gospel and are led by the same Spirit, but there are

¹ Cf. chap. VI, chip. IX and C 17, 71, 100

² PC 2; cf. also MR 11

different paths for following the same Lord, and stress can be laid in different ways on the evangelical aspects of the way of perfect charity. To speak of the "spirit" of a religious institute means in fact to refer to the complexus of qualities and of gospel and ecclesial aspects to which members of the institute, following the example of their Founder and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are particularly sensitive, in both their interior attitude and their external activity.

The SGC, whose analysis gave rise to a first constitutional description of our spirit, defined it as our own style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, in putting into operation the specific vocation and the mission which the Holy Spirit does not cease to give us".³ It is well to remember that the SGC based its statement on a wealth of experience. In 16 splendid pages of the "Annals of the Society"⁴ Fr Ceria had already condensed the main features of the spirit lived in Don Bosco's houses; the SGC was able to draw too on the ample testimony of confreres of every province: the unanimous feeling of so many Salesians of different ages, environment, nationalities and cultures is certainly a very significant indication of the Society's unity of spirit. Subsequent General Chapters, the GC21 and especially the GC22, further enriched the synthesis made by the SGC, and helped to produce a more organic presentation of what is without doubt the most characteristic element of our "salesianity": salesians, in fact, are recognized not only from what they do (there are others who concern themselves with youth), but from the way they do it!

When it introduced the discussion on the "salesian spirit", the SGC made it clear that the primary reference was to its foundation and source, which is the "spirit of Don Bosco" (his vocation, life, work and teaching); but it included also the spirit as shared and lived since then in his Family, i.e. the way in which the spirit of Don Bosco is realized in practice in the history and life of the Congregation and the Salesian Family (the life and sanctity of the Salesians).⁵

It should be noted that the Constitutions speak of salesian "spirit" rather than salesian "spirituality": while the latter refers more properly to an overall consideration of the relationship between the Salesian and God, the spirit involves the complexes of his style of life and action, as a living evangelical dynamism lived and passed on as a mode of daily life. Rather than a conceptual analysis of the qualities of Don Bosco's spiritual experience, it is a question of identifying the characteristic features of his physiognomy which his sons have imitated and made their own.⁶ The "spirit" is life, i.e. it belongs to the existential order.

Considered in its widest significance, the salesian spirit:

³ SGC, 86

⁴ E. CERIA, *Annali della Societa Salesiana* pp. 720-735

⁵ Cf. SGC, 87

⁶ In the letter to the Cooperators the Rector Major wrote: "When the Regulations speak of "salesian spirit" they are describing the characteristic features of the gospel experience tested in the school of Don Bosco as an original style of life, a synthesis of criteria of judgement and of methodology of action. It is not a conceptual analysis of relationships with God and one's neighbour, and neither is it the doctrinal presentation of the spirituality of a state or description of the spiritual features which identify the salesian vocation". ministry, but the description of the spiritual features which identify the salesian vocation". cf. AGC 318 1986, p. 28

- is the soul of the interior and exterior life of the salesian;
- is the vital and proper "forma mentis et cordis" which characterizes the style of sanctification, common life and apostolate;
- is the foundation of our unity and renewal, and that of all the groups of the Salesian Family;⁷
- pervades and animates the whole life of the salesian: the virtues of the covenant with God (faith, hope and charity) apostolic consecration, activities of the mission, life of communion, practice of the evangelical counsels, formation, animation and government;
- and is, in brief, "a fundamental feature of our salesian identity".⁸

It should not be forgotten that the salesian spirit is a treasury of spiritual wisdom received not only for the Salesian but to be widely deployed for the benefit of youth in general. We Salesians of Don Bosco, as is said in art. 5 of the Constitutions, have particular responsibility for "preserving unity of spirit" in the Family. Don Bosco says: "We must have friends, benefactors, people who while fully practising the spirit of the Salesians live in their own families, as do the Salesian Cooperators".⁹ The present General Regulations refer to this in connection with the service we must render to the Salesian Family (R 36-40). The purpose of the Salesian Bulletin is to "spread knowledge of salesian spirit and activity" (R 41).

Coming now to the organization of the contents of chapter II, we see that they are grouped around certain key ideas:¹⁰

1. Some basic attitudes which animate the Salesian

—Starting from the *most fundamental level*, it is stated that "the salesian spirit is summed up and centred in *pastoral charity* drawn from the heart of Christ, apostle of the Father, and from his Gospel: this is the source of our spirit and its justification (art. 10, 1 1).

— At the *level of personal experience* the secret of growth in pastoral charity and in fidelity to the salesian spirit is to be found in personal "*union with God*", in being able to convert work into "prayer", with the powerful support of the sacraments.

The constant cultivation of a vision of faith facilitates a permanent commitment of hope in daily life (art. 12).

—At the *ecclesial level* the identity of our spirit and pastoral charity are expressed in a renewed "*sense of the Church*", of fidelity to the Pope, of communion with the Bishops and of commitment to the building of the Church wherever we are working (art. 13).

⁷ Cf. SGC, 86-87

⁸ GC21, 97

⁹ *Progetto di "deliberato" per il Capitolo generale I, 1877*, manuscript of Don Bosco

¹⁰ The guiding concepts here presented are taken from the "Sussidi alle Costituzioni e Regolamenti", prepared by the GC22, p. 27-28

2. The salesian spirit marks our style of relationships

The style which imbues our pastoral relationships with "salesianity" is shown particularly:

— in a *love of predilection for the young*, which is the expression of a gift of God (art. 14);

— in *loving kindness*, an expression of "spiritual fatherhood" and the bearer of a message of purity, which is born of our chastity, as a practical and objective concern for the formation of young people for love (art. 15);

—in the "*homely, family atmosphere*", which helps in sharing and forgiving (art. 16);

—in a victorious *optimism* and contagious *joy* (art. 17).

3. The salesian spirit permeates our pastoral work of education

At the level of apostolic activity the salesian spirit is expressed:

— in *work*, i.e. in untiring industry combined with ascetic realism proper to educator-apostles, who collaborate in the construction of the Kingdom of God: the coupled concept characteristic of Don Bosco "work and temperance" is the austere and well balanced incarnation of the salesian spirit in daily practice (art. 18);

— in the *creative and flexible readiness* to respond to urgent local needs (art. 19).

The synthesis of this kind of commitment is the preventive system, in which coalesce the virtues which give a characteristic and original physiognomy to the salesian who works among young people for the Kingdom: It is a self-donating love inspired by the love of God (art. 19, 20).

4. Don Bosco the model

To sum up: *Don Bosco is presented as the concrete model* of the salesian spirit and of the pastoral charity which animates us (art. 21). It should be noted that other elements of the salesian spirit are scattered here and there in the text of the Constitutions, especially as regards sacramental piety, trust in Mary and some characteristic features of our pedagogy; these aspects should be kept in mind for a comprehensive knowledge of our spirit.

ART. 10 PASTORAL CHARITY THE CENTRE OF OUR SPIRIT

Under the inspiration of God, Don Bosco lived and handed on to us an original style of life and action: the salesian spirit.

It is summed up and centred in pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone.

The whole chapter deals with the characteristics of the salesian spirit, but already in this first article we find its soul or central element, because the "spirit" is a living and organic reality which explains all the other elements of the salesian life, animates them and renders them deeply consistent. Here we are given an indication of the "organizing inspiration",¹ the animating nucleus, which is "pastoral charity".

The Constitutions refer to charity in many articles.² Charity is the name of the love of God (cf. 1 Jn 4,8) and the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples (Jn 13,35): it is the centre of all Christian life, and therefore of all apostolic life. Art. 10 speaks in particular of salesian "pastoral charity", and helps to reveal the specifications of charity as lived in the life of the salesian.

Don Bosco has passed on to us an original style of life and activity centred on charity

As we have already said, to understand the "original" nature of the salesian spirit and subsequently apply it to salesian life and activity, it is essential to refer back to Don Bosco who lived it so intensively that he has become a true model (C 21). To make this spirit properly understood, he himself taught it to the first Salesians, a handful of young men who became fired by his zeal and worked wonders amongst boys.

It is in the context of Don Bosco and the first Salesians that the Constitutions tell us that the heart of his spirit, and hence of the spirit which animates his sons, is charity. Our Father said the same thing in a conference of 11 March 1869 when, in reply to the question: "What spirit must animate this body?", he replied: "Charity, my sons; charity". He was speaking of the charity which had already attracted him when he was a boy, in the face of the reserved attitude of priests of the time; he had then said to his mother: "If I were a priest I would act differently. I would look for boys and get them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and desire their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare."³ In 1877, very much later, when Don Bosco was explaining his educational system at Nizza, he spoke again of charity, referring back to

¹SGC, 88

²Cf. C 3. 14. 15. 20. 25. 29. 41. 50. 92. 95

³BM 1, 170

the hymn of praise to it sung by the apostle Paul: "Love is patient and kind ... hopes all things, endures all things".⁴

In the famous letter from Rome of 10 May 1884, a real "hymn to salesian charity", Don Bosco spoke of the Oratory of the early days quoting it as an example which serves as inspiration for an educational system, and spiritual testimony in which the salesian spirit is shown forth in all its brilliance.

This internal driving force of love for youth was expressed in a ready intuition of youngsters' needs and in the characteristic experience which, in the light of his mysterious dreams, he was able to translate into wonderfully flexible pedagogical norms, into continual prayer for his boys, and into an ever creative and dynamic dedication of himself for their benefit.

In other words, to pass on his spirit to every confrere Don Bosco says: "Watch how I do things: all you have to do is imitate me".

Pastoral charity, the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit

The centre of salesian spirit, says the Rule, is "pastoral charity, characterized by the youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus...". These expressions depict a charity on the move, one which needs to be active and find realization in a practical and vehement way: a true "apostolic passion, lit up by youthful ardour", as the SGC put it.⁵

All religious institutes dedicated to the apostolate have apostolic charity as a basic element. With us this charity has a special tone: it is a burning ardour, a "fire", an irrepressible zeal; it is a fervent, generous, joyful and dynamic charity; a charity which has all the best characteristics of our youngsters to whom it is chiefly directed. We may recall that Don Bosco's charity led a lot of people to think him utopian, puzzling, and not a little mad!⁶

Pastoral charity, a sharing in the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd, finds expression in its two essential dimensions: love of Father whose Kingdom we want to serve, and love of our fellow men to whom we want to bring the good news of salvation. Well does the collect of the Mass in honour of St John Bosco sum up charity in the definition: an apostolic impulse which makes us "*seek souls and serve God alone*".

It is important to have a proper understanding of the internal dynamism of these two poles of pastoral charity: God (Jesus Christ) and our neighbour (the young). We have two principles which sustain the whole of our spirit. The first principle is that the love of God is always the cause and source of our love of our neighbour. The second is that from a methodological standpoint, i.e. in our daily activities, charity is

⁴ Cf. BM XIII, 87-88. The quotation from St Paul is found in Don Bosco's small treatise on "*The preventive system in the education of the young*": cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 248

⁵ SGC, 89

⁶ Cf. J. AUBRY, *Lo spirito salesiano, Edizione Cooperatori salesiani* 1972, p. 33

that leads to God's love. This is how Jesus himself loved us!

It may be well at this point to call to mind the Congregation's coat of arms which carries the bust of St Francis de Sales and a heart from which flames are bursting forth: an indication of the zeal of St Francis de Sales which was recalled in art. 4. Apostolic charity, which is at the centre of our spirit, corresponds exactly to what our Patron called (in the language of the time) "devotion". In the "Introduction to the Devout Life" we read: "Devotion adds to charity only the flame which renders it ready, active and diligent, not only in the observance of the divine commandments but also in the practice of the counsels and heavenly inspirations".

To live the salesian spirit means allowing oneself to be inspired always and at every moment by the Spirit of Pentecost, and to be moved by its powerful wind and tongues of fire. Mediocrity and weakness are quite incompatible with such a spirit. It is a case of giving absolutely everything in a joyful outpouring, because "God loves a cheerful giver".

From the active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength and support to enable us to do all this (cf. C 1).

*Lord Jesus,
you have loved us
even to the extent of giving yourself completely for us;
you animate our life
with the same burning pastoral charity
with which you filled Don Bosco and his first disciples.*

*Help us to grow in apostolic fervour
so that we may live authentically our salesian vocation
to seek souls and serve you alone.*

ART. 11 CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL THE SOURCE OF OUR SPIRIT

The salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father.¹

Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to all men; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion.

¹ cf. LG 3; AG 3

The spirit of Don Bosco, *"through a special divine disposition, draws its nature and strength from the Gospel"*¹

To understand the central element of our spirit, we must go beyond the person of Don Bosco and reach the Source from which he himself drew; the very person of Christ, and especially his "Heart", i.e. Christ in his capacity as the full revelation of divine charity.

Reflection on the life of Don Bosco allows us to verify to what point our Founder drew conscious inspiration from the charity of Christ. Already in his dream at the age of nine he was told of his mission by Christ the Good Shepherd; at the end of his life he spent his last strength and efforts in building a basilica in Rome dedicated to the Heart of Christ. In the first article of the Constitutions of 1858 he had written: "The object and aim of his Society is to gather its members together... for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Saviour, especially in works of charity for those who are young and poor".² The letter from Rome of 10 May 1884 makes insistent reference to Christ "master of the familiar approach ... your model".³

This article of the Rule helps us to penetrate more deeply into this fundamental truth.

Christ, the model and source of pastoral charity

In an effort to present our spirit in its relationship with the Saviour, the Constitutions speak of Christ under two complementary aspects: as a "model" and as a "source".

As a *"model"* we seek and study him in his life on earth as we find it presented in the New Testament. But the mystery of Christ is unfathomable (Eph 3,18) and the

¹ PAUL VI, Motu proprio "Magisterium", 24 May 1973, raising the Salesian Atheneum to the rank of a University: cf. ASC 272 (1973), p. 70

² MB V, 933

³ MB XVII, 111

120 fertile riches of his Gospel are inexhaustible. Consequently we can penetrate only

some aspects of his mystery: we study his life to draw from it some indication for a particular service in the Church. Nevertheless we are not imitating just a virtue (obedience, poverty, chastity) nor an activity (education, the missions etc.); we are following a Person whom we want to imitate in all his fullness, and a Gospel that we want to live in all its implications.

To look on Christ as a model means to have in mind that the path to sanctification to which we are called (cf. C 25) means that we have to "put on Christ" (Eph 4,19 ff). As Paul expresses it: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20).

As a "source", we must go back to his Risen life as Head of the Church, which he animates by sending to it his Spirit of love. Christ is called the "apostle of the Father", because here he is seen as the Master who teaches "apostolic" charity (cf. Heb 3,1) in the Joannine perspective of the "One sent" by the Father.

The Spirit consecrates us in Christ, conforms our life to Christ's, helps us to penetrate his mystery, opens us to an experience of communion with him, leads us to immerse ourselves in him, the "Good Shepherd", who desires the salvation of the young.

In this way we are first led to a total overall experience of Christ and full adherence to his Gospel, before considering his particular features in the second paragraph.

Aspects of the Lord's figure to which the salesian tries to conform

The gospel insights⁴ relived in the salesian spirit are here listed; they represent particular aspects from which we read the mystery of Christ.

We know that the Gospel is one and the same for everyone, but it is also true that it can be "*read through salesian spectacles*", from which derives a salesian manner of living it. Don Bosco looked at Christ so as to try to copy in himself those features which corresponded more closely to his own providential mission and to the spirit which must animate it.

Art. 11 sets out what may be called the aspects or gospel insights, or better still the gospel roots or components, of the salesian spirit. The elements here presented by the Rule are certainly lived also by other religious institutes, but what we have in mind is the characteristic way in which we Salesians incarnate them in our own lives; living the salesian spirit is our way of living the Gospel, in line with the vocation we have received.

The person of Jesus is proposed to us in respect of some attitudes to which Don Bosco was very sensitive and which therefore are a particular stimulus to our

⁴Cf. SGC, 90-95

imitation. There is no question of a complete list, but just of some traits of the figure of Christ the prophet, priest and shepherd, which we read in the light of the Founder's experience. The strict linkage between them and the person of Christ with regard to the "charity" of the Good Shepherd, should be noted.

Here then are the features of the Lord's figure which, according to the Rule, we find more outstanding in our spirit.

—*Gratitude*, trust and praise of the infinite goodness of the Father, who calls us to himself, looks on each youngster as a son, and gives to all men a divine calling: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little ones" (Lk 10,21).

The figure is of *Christ the "Priest"*, the model of perfect consecration and capacity for "eucaristia", i.e. of thanksgiving towards the Father; it is the source of a deep and sincere filial piety, full of trust in the merciful kindness of God.

This gives rise to the joy of the salesian in feeling himself to be a son of God, and the optimism which is able to discern the good to be found in creation and history. The salesian's zeal too and his way of approaching young people take their inspiration from this sense of the fatherly love of God.

—*Solicitude in preaching, in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom, in healing and in saving*: "He saw a great throng", says the Gospel, "and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6,34). Concern of this kind Don Bosco called "zeal".

Here we discern the figure of *Christ the "Prophet"*, which arouses so much enthusiasm among youth, of Christ the "Missionary" of the Father, who travelled the roads of Palestine preaching the good news of the Kingdom, "teaching and healing" (Mt 4,23). Don Bosco's interior life is an imitation and prolongation, especially for the benefit of the young, of the apostolic zeal displayed by Christ in his public life. In the words of his first Successor: "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young and the good of souls: 'da mihi animas'" (cf. C 21). And he himself declared: "If I were as anxious to save my own soul as I am in trying to save the souls of others, I would be sure of my salvation".⁵

— "*Predilection for the little ones and the poor*", for young people in need and for the working classes: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mk 9,37); "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Mk 10,14).

Here we have the figure of *Christ the "Shepherd"*, sent for all men but who goes especially in search of the abandoned and those given least consideration, and who allows himself to be drawn by preference to the 'little ones' and to the 'poor'.

Don Bosco, like Jesus, felt himself called to the poor and little ones, towards the most needy of the young. That you are young", he used to say, is enough to make me love you very much". And he urged his sons to see Jesus in their youngsters: "Let us

⁵BM VII, 153

college".⁶ It is "pure and patient charity which fights against our two most common and fearsome passions: concupiscence and irascibility":⁷ these are the two obstacles to our life and apostolate which the preventive system helps to overcome, drawing its inspiration from the charity of Christ.

—The preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who *wins hearts by gentleness* (salesian kindness) and *self-giving* (the daily carrying of the cross): "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10,1 1); "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11,29).

This is a reminder of the kindness and gentleness characteristic of our spirit, even at the cost of self-denial.

From the time of his dream at the age of nine Don Bosco had learned from Christ the Good Shepherd the secret of educational success: "Not by blows but by love and gentleness must you win friends...".⁸ Fr Ceria recalls the beautiful testimony of one person who said, after meeting Don Bosco: "I thought to myself: Don Bosco is the living image of Jesus of Nazareth: amiable, meek, kind, humble, modest. So must Jesus have impressed others!"⁹

Salesian self-denial is expressed in self-giving, which implies renunciation and mortification. The thorns on the ground (in the pergola of roses) stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his true goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and hinder his progress and heavenly harvest".¹⁰

—*The desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion* and to gather all men into the one fold: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13,34).

This is the new commandment which Jesus gave to his disciples, the fruit of his redeeming sacrifice: that men should learn to love one another, to build a single family, in the unity of the Father and the Son: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17,21).

The words of Jesus are echoed in those of Don Bosco: "Let us be charitable to one another, bearing with faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God".¹¹ Concern for communion, as we shall see later, is a trait which must distinguish the salesian superior in particular.¹²

⁶ MB XI V, 846-847

⁷ D. VESPIGNANI, *Circulars*, part III, p. 124

⁸ MO, p. 23

⁹ BM XIV, 373

¹⁰ BM III, 27

¹¹ BM IX, 168. The words of Don Bosco quoted here and taken from an instruction he preached in a retreat at Trofarello in 1868; v. also "*Souvenir to Missionaries*", n.13, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 266

¹² Cf. C 121, 126, 161, 176

For the salesian, living the Gospel means in practice living these attitudes 124 which we have enumerated. By following Christ in this kind of life the confrere

finds the "precious pearl" which enables him to discover in young people Christ himself, to be served, to be assisted and to be loved.

In this way we come to understand how our vocation is a continuation of Christ's mission, in preaching, education and service. By continually drawing on this fundamental evangelical inspiration, i.e. the person of Christ, we go back to the source of pastoral charity and reach the centre of the salesian spirit.

We note in conclusion that the gospel qualities which inspire our personal, community and apostolic life, are not only a statement of our own identity, but they also distinguish us from other religious institutes; and this not in any sense of opposition between ourselves and others, but rather in living correlation so that with our different gifts we may be able to form together the one mystical Body of Christ.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the source and model
of our pastoral charity.*

*Grant that in our own lives
we may imitate your own unconditional dedication
to the saving will of the Father,
your loving concern as the Good Shepherd
for the good of mankind,
especially the poor and the little ones,
and your desire to gather your disciples
into the unity of fraternal communion.*

*Through the grace of your Spirit
grant that these evangelical qualities
may invigorate our spiritual life and
our apostolic commitment.*

ART. 12 UNION WITH GOD

As he works for the salvation of the young, the salesian experiences the fatherhood of God and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work "Apart from me you can do nothing".¹

He cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand. Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love he becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action.

¹Jn 15,5

Don Rinaldi's definition of our spirit has become well known among us: "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God" (cf. C 95). It means that the salesian acts with a true "apostolic sense", in the awareness of "the divine dimension of his work". It is a case of living his baptismal priesthood so as to make of his whole life an oblation to God, offering him spiritual veneration, and celebrating in the trials of daily living the great "liturgy of life" (C 95).

From the article we can discern the action of the three divine Persons in the life of the salesian:

—the Father, the Creator, whose fatherhood and mercy to man the salesian experiences day by day;

—The Son, the Saviour, with whom he converses from the heart concerning the salvation of the young, and listens to his Word;

— The Spirit, the Sanctifier, always present in the Church's life and in the vicissitudes of history; from him he draws the strength to be faithful, support for his hope (cf. C 1), and grace for his sanctification (cf. C 25).

The text emphasizes three aspects of the salesian's union with God:

—our absolute need of Christ in our apostolic work;

— the simple and continuous dialogue that we maintain in Christ with the Father;

—the importance of living in the Spirit's presence, doing everything for the love of God.

The reference here is to the "contemplative dimension", which must be so deeply rooted in the salesian as to permeate and imbue his every activity.

To plumb the depths of the kind of union with God, we must hark to that "grace of unity", of which we spoke in connection with our vocation.¹ It is not found primarily in activity, nor even in the "practices of piety", but in the interior of a person of whom

¹V. commentary on general structure of the text (p. 67-69) and arts. 2 & 3 (p. 97 ff.); cf. also SGC, 127

it pervades the whole being; before finding expression in activity or in praying; it is a kind of "spiritual dynamism", in so far as it is a conscious participation in the very love of God through self-donation in practical availability for the work of salvation. It is an interior attitude of charity directed towards apostolic activity, in which it becomes concrete, is made manifest, grows and becomes perfected. In this sense apostolic industry is an expression of interior spirituality!

We must keep in mind what is said in the document on *"The contemplative dimension of religious life"*: The very nature of apostolic and charitable activity contains its own riches which nourish union with God. It is necessary to cultivate every day an awareness and deepening of it. Being conscious of this, religious will so sanctify their activities as to transform them into sources of union with God, to whose service they are dedicated by a new and special title".² The same document later emphasizes that "the religious community is itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation; of its nature it is the place where the experience of God should be able in a special way to reach its fullness and be communicated to others".³

In this way the salesian, sustained by the spirit of Don Bosco and the evangelical richness of his community, can express in every circumstance the contemplative dimension of his life and grow in it. In his 'Treatise on the love of God', St Francis de Sales has well explained the "ecstasy of life and activity" as an authentic expression of the pastoral charity of one who puts all he has into his daily commitments, even exceeding himself and his natural inclinations".⁴

Art. 12 sets out to explain some aspects of this important fact.

The salesian, while engaged in work for the salvation of the young, feels his need of God

The salesian is shown a way for savouring the "depths of God" (1 Cor 2,10) in every circumstance of his life, from youth to maturity, in activity and lack of it, from dawn to dusk: it is a concrete compenetration of action and contemplation in the spirit of "da mihi animas".

He is invited to discover and reinvigorate the "divine dimension" of his activity.

It should be noted that it is not simply a question of material or professional work detached from the mission confided to the community, but of the daily work done in accordance with God's will. In our educational, charitable and pastoral activity, we are sent by God and guided by his Spirit: we are his collaborators (cf. 1 Cor 3,9); it is God we serve in the poor and the little ones; it is for his glory and Kingdom that we work.

² "The contemplative dimension of religious life", CRIS, 1980, n. 6 *ibid.* n. 15

³ *ibid.* n. 15

⁴ Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *"Treatise on the Love of God,"* book 7, chap. 7 *Opera Omnia* V, 29-32

And when we become aware of this presence of God, we recognize our absolute need to remain in him. "Apart from me you can do nothing!"—a peremptory statement that comes from Jesus himself (Jn 5,5). Launched as we are into a life of pastoral activity among youth, with a keen desire to be of use to them and to the world, we cannot fail to reflect on this stark assertion, which finds frequent endorsement in other parts of Scripture: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour ... In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest, you who toil for the bread you eat: when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber" (Ps 126/127). All toil is in vain if the Lord is not present. "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. For we are God's field, God's building" (cf. 1 Cor 3,7.9).

The Rule invites us to "experience" God, i.e. not only to live an interior and spiritual life but to have a conscious awareness that we are in relationship with God in our daily life.

The salesian way of living in the intimate presence of God is the way Don Bosco lived it. His "experience" of God was extraordinarily fervent and is still an example for us even at the present day. Evidently such experience does not have to be the same for everyone: it will be felt in a different way in the life of each salesian, be he priest or brother or member of the Salesian Family.

All this calls for a continual reminder of the "divine dimension of our activity".

The salesian dialogues with God continuously and with simplicity

The manner in which the salesian dialogues with God is described in the text by two typical terms: it is simple and continuous.

He is not a monk but an apostle of tireless industry, as has been already said, an apostle among the poor and the little ones; his prayer is simple, without exaggerations, made up of essential elements, based on the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation; he continues it in generous and joyful dynamism in a youthful and trusting style which is pleasing alike to God and young people (cf. C 86).

The first draft of the Constitutions of 1858 carried a statement which remained in the official text until 1972. It said: "The active life, towards which the Society more especially tends, renders its members unable to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore supply for these by giving one another good example, and by fulfilling perfectly the general duties of a good christian",⁵ where the word "perfectly" should be noted.

Nevertheless the Rule, echoing the words of Jesus (cf. Lk 18,1), says that the salesian feels the need to pray "without ceasing". This coincides with Fr Piccollo's

⁵BM V, 644

testimony concerning Don Bosco: "He always prayed. In him, union with God was uninterrupted".⁶ How was it possible in a life so crammed with activity?

In the constitutional text of 1864 Don Bosco had already said that the salesian prevented from making mental prayer by some urgent call of the sacred ministry "will make up for the deficiency by more frequent ejaculations, and by directing to God with fervour and devotion those particular labours which are thus hindering him from the ordinary exercises of piety".⁷

On closer examination it will be found that in the life of the salesian, as was the case in that of the Founder, prayer and activity form part of a single movement of the heart; prayer leads naturally to action and becomes a "spirit of prayer", with the result that the activity becomes permeated by prayer. For the salesian, God the Father, Christ and the Spirit are the great "presences" in his life: despite appearances he feels their presence and sees and meets them always and everywhere. And so what happens is that during the work itself, spontaneous and informal prayer fills his heart and also rises to his lips, especially in the form of ejaculations specifically recommended by Don Bosco, following the teaching of St Francis de Sales.⁸ These humble invocations springing to the lips constitute the "simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand" and with the Spirit of whose presence he is aware.

The apostolic activity itself, as has been already said, provokes and nourishes this dialogue: it leads the salesian to thank God for the good and fine things he sees, to call for help in time of suffering, to seek his pardon at once should he fall into sin, and to ask for his support and for success for the efforts he makes. Since charity is the soul of every apostolate, it follows that the apostolate becomes the soul of the salesian's prayer.

And so union with God keeps us united with our Source; it maintains our heart and spirit at the level of "mystery" in which we are committed, and obviates the danger of activity degenerating into mere activism.

Doing everything for the love of God, the salesian becomes a contemplative in action

The expression "contemplative in action" may evoke the concept of a spirituality which is not salesian in origin; the phrase "in action" too may seem to limit the field of contemplation to those who are actually working, excluding the sick and handicapped etc.; but the addition of the words "like Don Bosco" helps us to arrive at the correct interpretation of the article from a salesian standpoint.

The dynamics of contemplation in Don Bosco, so intense that he was defined as "union with God", are to be found in the motto "da mihi animas, cetera toile" lived out

⁶BM II, 266

⁷MB VII, 884

⁸Cf. SGC, 550

and other members of the Salesian Family. Don Bosco was defined as "union with God" not only because he was united with God at the explicit moments of prayer, which was that of a consecrated apostle, but because he was accustomed to fill every moment and every aspect of daily life with thanksgiving to God, with filial trust in Providence, and with conversation with Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church and of youth.

The salesian also "does everything for God's love", i.e. he adopts the method of a vigorous apostolic integrity which rejects any temptation to work for himself and his own interests, or to gain esteem: "everything for the love of God and for souls!" And so his activity becomes a real means of sanctification.

The Rule invites us to make of our existence an attitude of faith which fixes our mind and heart on God, to adore and participate in his saving love. This is the supreme expression of our vocation: to seek constantly our union with God, imitating Don Bosco who had no interest in his heart other than souls".⁹ We can understand why it is that the Church teaches, when addressing apostolic religious: In these days of renewal of the apostolate—as at any time in any missionary engagement—a privileged place must be given to the contemplation of God".¹⁰ Contemplation, a theological act of faith, hope and charity, becomes for us "the highest and fullest act of the spirit, an act which at the present day can still arrange the immense pyramid of human activity in hierarchical order".¹¹

*Lord, you said to your apostles:
"Apart from me you can do nothing".
Render all our activity fruitful,
by a constant and living union
with you and with your Father,
so that, becoming like Don Bosco
"contemplatives in action",
we may find in trusting and cordial dialogue
the strength to do everything for your love,
and to preserve until death
in our total self-donation for your Kingdom.*

⁹Cf. D. RUA, Letter of 24.8.1894, cf. Circular letters p. 130

¹⁰MR 16

¹¹PAUL VI, Address at concluding session of Council. 7 December 1965

ART. 13 SENSE OF THE CHURCH

Our love for Christ necessarily gives rise to our love for his Church, the People of God, the centre of unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom.

We feel ourselves a living part of her, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity.

We educate young Christians to an authentic understanding of the Church and we work assiduously for its growth. Don Bosco tells us: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".¹

¹ MB V, 577; BM V, 383

Actively present in the mystery of the Church is the mystery too of God the Father who loves all his children, of the Son the Redeemer, and of the Spirit the Sanctifier. From the heart of the Church comes forth a pastoral dynamism which makes it the sacrament of unity: "It pleased God to call men to share in his life, and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together";¹ he also made it "the universal sacrament of salvation, at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men".²

This is true without any doubt of the universal Church, both in respect of its sacramental nature, as a sign and efficacious means of salvation, as also of its ministry of communion between the various vocations, charismata and ministries, and as regards the mission it carries out in the world; but it is true as well of the particular Churches, i.e. the local Churches in which we find ourselves inserted in practice.

One of the characteristics of the salesian spirit is precisely its *ecclesial aspect*, which the Mother of the Church and its Helper committed to Don Bosco and his Institute for a specialist service.

The article we are now studying says that the salesian loves the Church, works for its growth, and educates youngsters to the same kind of love. Many of these attitudes are true of everyone who is baptized; but the Rule insists on a special propensity of the salesian in his love for the Church: he is particularly attentive to its unity and growth ("centre of unity", "communion of forces", "efforts to live in communion"); today more than ever the problem of unity is of great importance.

This article should be linked with art. 6 which speaks of the "Salesian Society in the Church" and described our commitments in the Church, whereas the present article is concerned with the style and spirit with which the salesian works in the Church and for the Church.

¹ AG 2

² GS 45; cf. LG 48

The salesian loves the Church because he loves Christ

We have inherited from our Founder a particular sensitivity in respect of that aspect of the Church which is its ability to build "unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom".

The Church is seen as the People of God, the mystery of the "communion" of all its members, an active communion and dynamic centre for the service of unity among all the forces (the men of good will) which work silently in the world for the good of their fellow men. This is the vision of faith which sustains the salesian in his love for the Church, and is in fact the doctrine of Vatican II on the Church as the sacrament of salvation: "The messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, is however a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all. ... All those who in faith look towards Jesus God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity".³

But the fundamental reason for which we love the Church is that it is willed and loved by Christ the Saviour: he, the Man-God, gathers all creatures to himself and reunites them to the Father (cf. Rom 8,21). To save man Christ incorporated him to Himself making him the Church, and in this way the latter becomes a "communion both human and divine" and at the same time the "sacrament of salvation" for humanity.

The whole of the first paragraph of this article is an echo of the appeal made to religious by Pope John Paul II: "Through everything that you do, and especially through everything that you are, may the truth be proclaimed and reconfirmed that 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her': the truth that is at the basis of the whole economy of the Redemption. *From Christ, the Redeemer of the world, may the inexhaustible source of your love for the Church pour forth!*"⁴

The salesian expresses his love for the Church in "filial loyalty to Peter's successor" and in collaboration and communion with the "bishops, clergy, religious and laity".

We feel ourselves a living part of the Church: we are, in fact, a concrete response to its needs; it is for the enrichment of the Church that from time to time God raises up men and women who follow Christ and imitate him more closely.⁵

³ LG 9

⁴ RD 15

⁵ Cf. PC 1

The Church itself has discerned and recognized our charism as a response to some precise and urgent needs of the present days as a remedy to certain evils and to a void that had appeared, and this as a new gift made to the entire People of God.

This is the reason why the Constitutions, harking back to the Council, say that we need to "cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness".⁶

The concrete expression of this ecclesial awareness and of our love for the Church (for the universal Church as for the particular Church in Turin, or in London, or Sydney, or New York, or Delhi, or Nairobi etc.) is made clear in the article's second paragraph: it implies two things: fidelity to the Pope and collaboration with the particular Churches.

a. "Filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching".

This is one of our characteristics, witnessed to by Don Bosco's whole life and by our tradition. One need only think of the numerous sayings of Don Bosco in this connection:⁷ The Pope's wishes must be a command for us".⁸ "I am indignant", he said on one occasion, "when I see the little attention that some writers give to the Pope and to what he says ... we must close ranks around him ...".⁹

In presenting his new Society he had said that "the fundamental purpose of the Congregation from its beginnings was to constantly sustain and defend the authority of the supreme Head of the Church among the poorer classes in society, and especially among young people in danger".¹⁰

The salesian is convinced that the Pope and the Bishops have received from Christ the mandate to lead his Church and maintain the cohesion of all its forces.¹¹ Peter's successor is the visible sign and efficacious instrument of the unity of the episcopal college and of the whole Church, and therefore we nourish for him in our heart and activity a "*filial loyalty*". For the Popes he knew, Don Bosco was a most attentive and devoted servant, and the Popes reciprocated this attitude.

The salesian loves the Pope and does not conceal such love. He is able to instill this same love in the young and make them attentive to papal teaching, knowing that in this way he is giving them a sure and certain reference point in the search for truth.

Art. 125 will express in more precise terms our attitude to Peter's successor when it says that we Salesians are filially submissive to his authority.

b. "Communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity".

⁶ Cf. PC 2, 5; MR 14b; RD 14

⁷ Cf. E. VIGANO, *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, AGC 315, 1985

⁸ BM V, 380; cf. BM V, 571

⁹ Cf. BM V, 383

¹⁰ "*Riassunto della Pia Societa' di S. Francesco di Sales nel gennaio 1874*" in OE vol XXV p. 380

¹¹ Cf. LG 18

greater length in art. 48, which explains how our mission is made part of the pastoral plan of the particular Church. What is emphasized at this point is our efficacious intention to live in a spirit of real communion and collaboration with the local bishop and his group of priests.

The reference to "religious" corresponds to the attitude and teaching of Don Bosco. Here we need do no more than quote the tenth of the recommendations he gave to the first missionaries: "Love, reverence and respect other religious Orders, and always speak well of them."¹² Our solidarity with them stems also from our conviction that religious families are living forces in the Church, and that we must work with them in unity and charity, rejecting any jealousy or superiority complex.

As far as the "laity" are concerned and our communion and collaboration with them, we note that the attention of the salesian world is broadening in line with the reflections the Church has been making concerning the values and significance of the "lay state".¹³ Many lay people are associated with our work (cf. C 29), but in any case the salesian is immersed in a reality in which concern about the Mystical Body must increase; he is called to be an animator in the educative and pastoral community, even to the extent of rendering it "a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C 47). As specialists in communion and collaboration (which is what we should be!), our contact with the laity can have a prophetic significance if we become legible and credible signs of God, professionally competent and capable of bridging differences, but especially if we are bearers of the characteristic "salesian spire."¹⁴

The salesian works for the Church's growth and educates young people to do likewise

We are men of the Church, apostles who foster a living "sensus ecclesiae", engaged in works that have been entrusted to us by the Church and which we animate in the Church's name.¹⁵

The Congregation is not closed in on itself but creates new linkages in the Church, and is concerned about making them grow in charity. "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, jointed and knit together, ... grows and up builds itself in love" (Eph 4,16).

In particular we feel ourselves called, in the Church, to foster communion between forces working for the salvation of youth.

The Rule reminds us of an important commitment in our work as educators: "*we educate young Christians to an authentic understanding of the Church*"; i.e. we educate them to see in the Church the "Body of Christ" and the "People of God", the

¹² BM XI, 364

¹³ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The advancement of the lay person in the Salesian Family* AGC 317, 1486

¹⁴ V. commentary art. 47, p. 431-435

¹⁵ Cf. Pc 8

communion of all the forces working for salvation and their centre of unity and animation. On this account we sustain the baptismal vocation of the laity and all specific vocations; hence the effort we make to bring about a living experience of Church in the pastoral and educative communities: art. 35 sets out this responsibility more clearly, and art. 125 will deal specifically with the education of youth to accept the teaching of the Pope.

This is not an easy task: any plan to intensify dialogue between youth and the Church would seem in some places to be particularly difficult; and yet the Church is suffering a great deal because of the fact that many young people are indifferent or uninterested in the problem of God, or are atheists, non-believers, or even actively opposed to the Church. Others would like the Church to adapt itself to their own ideas and spirit, broadening its outlook and becoming less demanding, without giving any heed to the fact that it is bound by the Word of God. Still others declare their adherence to Christ but not to the Church. And it is these conditions that we, through the witness of our love, have to proclaim the mystery of the Church and make it loved.

With non-Christian youngsters our attitude will always be careful to show respect for cultures and for other religions, but love of Christ's Church and of truth does not admit of compromise; in non-Christian countries too we must be able to testify to the fact that the Church is a Mother, full of kindness towards everyone, and possessing the greatest of all treasures and the supreme truth, Jesus the Lord.

Don Bosco's phrase, which winds up the article, is a splendid synthetic expression of the intensity of our endeavour to build the Church and put ourselves at the service of Peter's successor: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".¹⁶

*God our Father,
you willed to make your Church
the People of the new Covenant,
the centre of unity and communion
of all the forces working for salvation in Christ.*

*Your Son, who became man, loved the Church
and sacrificed himself for her;
grant that we too, as living members, in loyal
unity with the Pope and the Bishops and fully
docile to their teaching and directives, may
express our fidelity to their magisterium.*

*Teach us how to educate our young
people to an authentic sense of Church,
and how to lead towards her
those who are still in search of the truth.*

Through Christ our Lord.

¹⁶ MB V, 383

ART. 14 PREDILECTION FOR THE YOUNG

Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much".¹ This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life.

For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health: For you I study. for you I work. for you I live for you I am ready even to give my life".²

¹ DON BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin 1847. p. (OE IL 187)

² DON RUFFINO. *Cronaca dell'Oratorio*, ASC 110. quaderno 5, p. 10

The salesian vocation is distinguished by a special gift of God which leads to predilection for the young. This love of predilection, which permeates all of a salesian's thinking and acting, impresses on him a characteristic mark which is not only the result of natural gifts and inclinations, but also an expression of pastoral charity. Entirely taken up by zeal for the good of young people, the salesian never ceases throughout his life to foster within himself an attitude of sympathy for youth, the desire to meet and be with them, a continual concern to get to know them and help them to reach a full personal development.

The salesian derives his predilection for the young from the love shown by Christ himself for children and young people:

- "Let the children come to me" (Mt 19,14), said Jesus to the apostles, who were too quick to defend him from the disturbance they were causing him

- and in the conversation with the young man who had asked what he must do to gain eternal life, the evangelist notes: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him and said to him " (Mk 10,21);

-of interest too is what happened in the case of the three he raised from dead to life: the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8,49-56), the son of and Lazarus widow of Naim (Lk 11 -17); and Lazarus (Jn 11); the emotion shown by Jesus and his miraculous interventions are signs of his love for those concerned.

Speaking of youth, Pope John Paul II refers to it as a period of singular value experienced by man: the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will subsequently be of great personal and social importance. Youth is a delicate and important age "on which depends the end of this millennium and the beginning of the next".¹

Greatly interested' in youth is the Evil One and all his minions, in order to ruin their lives. But young people are dear to the heart of the Church as they were dear to Christ. They are dear to the heart of Mary, who was herself a young girl, who lived and worked among the young, and who now continues to understand from heaven their

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the youth of the world*, 1985, cf. n. 3. 16

urgent needs, and to respond when they call upon her. In his dream at the age of nine, his guide (Jesus the Good Shepherd) said to John: "I will give you a Teacher...".²

To get in touch with youngsters you have to love them. We may recall once again what John said to his mother while still a boy: "If I were a priest ... I would look for boys and gather them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and want their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare."³

This "predilection" had already enlarged his heart and made him "everything for the young", as Don Bosco well expressed it in the Foreword he wrote for the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.⁴

The salesian receives from God the gift of predilection for youth

A youngster needs someone "to whom he can turn with confidence: someone to whom he can entrust his essential questions: someone from whom he can expect a true response."⁵

Jesus Christ, the perfect model, shows us how to be available, open, kind and accessible.

He is the root and source of the pastoral charity which for the salesian is expressed in the love of "predilection" for the young. In Don Bosco this love "can only be explained through his love of Jesus Christ ... it was God's gift. It is the first charism of the salesian, his vocation par excellence".⁶

Speaking about the same topic, Don Albera asserted: "It is not enough to feel for them a certain natural attraction, a love is needed that is more than normal. Such predilection is, in its beginnings, a gift of God" ... *"This predilection is the salesian vocation itself"*.⁷

The Rector Major, Fr E. Viganò adds: "The Salesian Family came into being because Don Bosco loved the young. His was a love of predilection that permeated his every inclination and talent; but basically it was a special gift from God, a 'salvation strategy' for modern times".⁸

After fixing our gaze on Jesus, we can understand Don Bosco, in whom pastoral predilection towards boys and young people seemed like a kind of passion. He felt that he had to be a sign of love: "The Lord sent me to look after boys";⁹ "my life is dedicated

² Cf. BM 1, 95

³ BM I, 170

⁴ Cf. "Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales" 1858-1875, MOTTO, pp. 58-61

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 1985, 4

⁶ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290, 1978, pp. 18-19

⁷ P. ALBERA, Letter of 18.10.1920, *Circular letters*, p. 372

⁸ ASC 290, 1978, p. 16

⁹ BM VII, 171

to the good of the young";¹⁰ "I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare; I am here only for your benefit";¹¹ you are the objective of my thoughts and concerns";¹² "I feel at home with you; this is really where I belong" ;¹³ "My dear boys, you are very dear to me. It is enough for me to know that you are young to become interested in your welfare... it would be difficult to find anyone who has a greater love for you in Jesus Christ, or a greater desire for your true happiness";¹⁴ "you are the masters of my heart";¹⁵ "I hope you will not be offended if I tell you that you are all thieves; I say it again, you have all stolen me; your letter signed by 200 of my dear friends has stolen my whole heart, of which nothing remains to me except a lively desire to love you in the Lord, to do good to you, to save the souls of all of you";¹⁶ "my dear sons in Jesus Christ, whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next";¹⁷ "these words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus".¹⁸

These and many other similar expressions reveal the love which moved Don Bosco in giving himself to the young, a love which found its source in the imitation of that gesture of the Lord: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10,21).

It could be said that the whole salesian movement is centred in an "oratorian heart", or in other words a priest of the local Church of Turin possessed of an overwhelming apostolic passion for poor and abandoned youngsters. "We must find the unifying force of our Family in that kind of priestly love characterized in Don Bosco by an overwhelming apostolic passion to help the young...".¹⁹

This love of predilection, an "expression of pastoral charity", of which the Constitutions speak, is not something superficial but a reality which characterizes all the salesian is and does; it endorses it with a seal which is like a "new character", rendering him a friend "accessible" to the young.

John Paul II, writing to priests, speaks of such a quality as follows: "Accessibility to young people means not only ease of contact with them, both inside and outside church, wherever young people feel drawn in harmony with the healthy characteristics of their age (I am thinking for example of tourism, sport and in general the sphere of cultural interests). The accessibility of which Christ gives us an example consists in something more. The priest, not only through his training for the ministry but also through the skill he has gained in the educational sciences, ought to evoke in

¹⁰ MO, p. 163 (Don Bosco to the Marchesa Barolo)

¹¹ BM VII, 302

¹² *Collected letters* II, p. 361

¹³ BM IV, 455

¹⁴ D. BOSCO, "*Companion of Youth*", Introduction (OE II, 187)

¹⁵ *Collected letters* II, p. 361

¹⁶ *Collected letters* III, p. 5

¹⁷ *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The Salesian Family* ASC 304, 1982, pp. 13. 23

138 young people trust as the confidant of their problems of a fundamental nature,

questions regarding their spiritual life and questions of conscience".²⁰

This is true for every salesian.

We must intensify this love of predilection for the young, which does not mean that others are excluded, because charity has no frontiers: "This love flows from a particular concern for what being young means in human life... The future of a person depends to a great extent upon the nature of that person's youth".²¹

The salesian offers his time, talents and health for the benefit of the young

The second paragraph of the article tells us how this predilection for youth is manifested in practice. The salesian, deeply moved by a passion for the welfare of youth, generously gives for them his time, talents and health, and maintains a permanent attitude of sympathy in their regard, a constant presence (assistance) and a continual interest in getting to know them and win their affection.

Here too the example comes from Don Bosco, according to those words which the Constitutions put before us in the very first article: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".²²

Don Bosco had formulated this promise very much earlier, but he endorsed it at the time of his wonderful cure from a serious illness: "I am convinced that God granted me an extension of life in answer to your prayers. Therefore gratitude demands that I spend it all for your temporal and spiritual welfare. This I promise to do as long as the Lord will permit me to remain in this world".²³

He used often to repeat: "Remember that, whatever my worth, I am here every moment of the day and night for you".²⁴

In his last years he spoke of "this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys".²⁵

Starting from this fatherly example, the article of the Rule speaks of interior and exterior attitudes which the salesian must develop. "The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them... Our primary goal is the care of youth, and consequently every concern which draws us away from that objective cannot be good".²⁶ As Fr. Luigi Ricceri wrote: Don Bosco fulfilled his vocation for the young by "bypassing every obstacle and leaving behind all

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to priests*, op. cit. 4

²¹ Ibid. 6

²² MB XVIII, 258

²³ BM II, 386

²⁴ BM VII, 302

²⁵ *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

²⁶ BM XIV, 216

things, even good ones, that could in any way hinder its accomplishment".²⁷ And Fr. Viganò adds: "Our presence among the young is in obedience to God... It is amongst

youth in need that our mission feels truly at home".²⁸

Finally this love of predilection leads to a permanent and deep interest in getting to know individual youngsters, and also in being aware of the cultural phenomenon called nowadays the "youth condition". "We must lend a willing ear to the voice of the world of the young and keep it in the educative and pastoral dialogue of evangelization".²⁹

*We thank you, Father,
for having filled the heart of Don Bosco
with predilection for the young:
"That you are young", he said to them,
"is enough to make me love you very much".*

*Enrich the heart of every salesian
with the same gift of loving kindness,
and help us to discover in all young people
the presence of Jesus,
so that we may be ready to offer for them
our time, talents and health,
and even the total donation of our whole life,
in imitation of our Founder, who said:
"For you I am ready even to give my life".*

²⁷Cf. ASC 284 (1976) p. 33

²⁸Cf. ASC 295 (1980) p. 5

²⁹Cf. ASC 290 (1978) p. 24

ART. 15 SALESIAN LOVING KINDNESS

Sent to young people by the God who is 'all charity',¹ the salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience.

His love is that of a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return; this is the loving-kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco.

His chastity and well-balanced attitude open his heart to spiritual fatherhood and give transparent witness to God's anticipating love.

¹ DON BOSCO, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin 1847, p. 81; (OE II, 151)

Art. 15 is closely linked with those immediately preceding ("Predilection for the young") and following it ("Family spirit"), and is an explanation of how we are to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people" (C 2). It presents "salesian loving-kindness", which is born of "spiritual fatherhood" and of the characteristic message of purity and chastity, and is aimed at the formation of young people for love.

Introducing this topic, the Acts of SGC say: "(The salesian) asks the Holy Spirit for the gift of 'sympathy', modelled on the meekness of Christ".¹

The article emphasizes that the initiative of sending the salesian to the young comes from God, who is "all charity".

The underlying reason is that if a youngster does not experience love at that stage of his life, he does not live in an environment in which love is present, his growth becomes compromised.² The transforming power of love passes through the loving kindness of the educators, and the Salesians manifest it with the purity recommended by Don Bosco, i.e. with a love that is transparent, deep, strong and well balanced.

To be signs of the love of God for the young requires in us this transparency (ascesis) and the mystical presence of God within us.

The salesian is welcoming

After emphasizing the divine source of all kindness, the text begins by presenting some basic attitudes of the salesian who is "sent to the young.

The salesian is "*open... and ready to welcome others*": he is not closed in on himself but able to relate to others; since it would be difficult for an apostle to live at

¹ SCG, 100

² On the need for an experience of love for growth in faith, cf. the testimony of Agostino, a boy who after many negative experiences came into contact with the Salesians at Arese (Milan), and subsequently died at the age of only 16. He wrote the following, in the form of a prayer: "They say that love is a proof of your existence; may be that is why I have never met you I have never been loved so that I could feel your presence. *Lord, let me find a love that will bring me to you*, a love that is sincere, disinterested, faithful and generous, a Love that would be a bit like your image". (From *Il Vangelo secondo Barabba*, Arese 1974 p. 79)

the same time a hermit's life, he adopts attitudes which favour contacts: openness and cordiality, respect and patience, a willingness to make the first approach and show welcome; in other words he is able to create sympathy and friendship.

Don Bosco recommended to his sons: "Try to make yourselves loved".³ "Try to act in such a way that all those to whom you speak will become your friends", he said to Don Bonetti.⁴ And writing to Don Cagliero, he declared: "The salesian spirit we want to introduce in the houses of America is ... charity, patience, gentleness, with no humiliating reprimands, no punishments, doing good to all and evil to no one. This holds for the salesians among themselves, with the pupils, and with others, whether living with us or externs".⁵

"Open and cordial", the salesian is *"ready to make the first approach"* towards the shy and the timid, towards those whom an exaggerated sense of respect keeps silent and at a distance; he is ready to bridge the gap, to approach in a sympathetic manner, to "come down from the pulpit", to make himself little with a little ones. Don Bosco always recommended this kind of attitude. And when it is the other person who makes the approach, he must be welcomed without fail, the door and heart must be opened to him, he must be listened to and his interests shared: "Let the superior be everything to everyone, always ready to listen to every doubt or complaint of the youngsters... all heart to seek the temporal and spiritual good of those whom Providence confides to him".⁶

And all this is to be done especially by the adoption of three basic attitudes or qualities: *"kindness"*, which seeks the good of the other person; *"respect"*, which avoids cornering or exploiting him and recognizes his unique personal dignity behind his defects; and *"patience"*; which is nothing else than the expression of constant and persevering love: "Love is patient and kind", says St Paul.⁷

This complex of exterior qualities which ensure a good salesian reception and characterize the relationship of the salesian with everyone and especially with the young, corresponds to what Don Bosco called "familiarita", which might be best rendered in English by "informality". This has not yet reached "amorevolezza" (loving kindness), which indicates rather an interior attitude, a movement of the heart. But it is evident that the two realities are closely linked and correspond. Don Bosco himself wrote: "You cannot have affection without this familiarity) a friendly informal relationship)".⁸

The salesian shows loving kindness as a father, brother and friend

³BM X,453

⁴Collected letter II, 434

⁵Cf. Letter of Don Bosco to Don Cagliero, 6.8.1885, *Collected letters IV*, 328

⁶MB XVII, 112

⁷Cf. 1 Cor 13,4; cf. also D. BOSCO, *The preventive system in the education of the young*, chap. 2, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 248

⁸*Letter from Rome*, cf. MB XVII, 107. Appendix to Constitutions. pp. 254-264

The loving kindness of the salesian is made specific in this paragraph which draws its inspiration from the Letter from Rome of 10 May 1884. "*Amorevolezza*" is a word characteristic of Don Bosco's terminology, with which he expresses the affection full of fatherly and brotherly kindness that he nourishes towards youth. The text indicates three nuances of this kindness.

—*True and personal "affection"*, given substance by human warmth and supernatural delicacy. Like Don Bosco, every salesian is a "man of heart". It is enough to read the above mentioned Letter from Rome: "My dear sons in Jesus Christ ... not being able to see or hear you upsets me more than you can imagine ... These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus...".⁹ The terminology used by the Saint is striking: affection, cordiality, familiarity, charity, heart, love etc. And towards the end of the letter his secretary notes: "At this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears... because of the ineffable tenderness that was evident from his face and voice".¹⁰

A great salesian, Don Berruti, has written: "Heartfelt love is a characteristic of salesian charity. Don Bosco was not satisfied with the austere kind of charity, born of the will and of grace, which forms part and parcel of the educational systems of other Orders".¹¹ His is a charity of the style of St Francis de Sales or, better, after the heart of Christ who wept over his friend Lazarus and over the grief of his sisters Martha and Mary.

— The affection of "fathers, brothers and friends": the expression comes literally from the Letter of May 1884. Salesian affection resembles that which binds the members of a family together or a group of friends. It means that the "superior", the master" or even the "priest", preacher or celebrant, does not close himself off within his own particular function, and this without loss to his authority; the latter does not give rise to fear because it is exercised within a deeper relationship which unites one person to another, father to son, brother to brother, friend to friend.

— "*Able to draw out friendship in return*".

Once again this is the explicit doctrine of Don Bosco. The salesian speaks the "language of the heart", a language which includes both words and actions: he shows that he loves, and seeks explicitly to gain the love of others, to "win over and conquer" their hearts, so as to create a communion within which to establish a dialogue of the heart. "An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them", says the little treatise on the Preventive system apropos of punishments.¹² And again in the Letter from Rome: "The youngsters should not only be loved, but they themselves should know that they are loved... One who knows he is

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.* 11

¹¹ On the splendour of salesian charity in Don Berruti, v. *Don Pietro Berruti, luminosa figura di salesiano*, Testimonianze raccolte da P. ZERBINO, SEI 1964, chap. XXVI, p. 564 if.

¹² *The preventive system in the education of the young*, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 246-253

loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young".¹³ This John Bosco had learned already in his dream at the age of nine: "You will have to win over these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness".¹⁴

And evidently this must also be the attitude of the salesian towards his own confreres.

Through his gift of chastity and well balanced attitude, the salesian is a sign of God's anticipating love

It needed all the daring of a Saint to let loose an army of educators with a method like this for education and the attainment of sanctity. The objections of opponents are well known: does not that kind of love "from the heart" expose both educator and pupil to danger? No, replies the Rule, because Don Bosco knew that he could count on the salesian being chaste in his affections.

The Constitutions place in their proper place Don Bosco's insistent words about chastity: he puts it in immediate relationship with this loving kindness. If Don Bosco demands of the salesian a clear and strong purity, consciously assumed and lived, it is precisely because he also demands of him a deep and true affection: purity preserves the authenticity of love. The characteristic therefore of the salesian spirit is not a chastity which is simply austere, but the chastity which is a guarantee of true affection and rules out any deviation.

Don Bosco, as we have seen, exhorts us to love "in such a way that the youngsters know they are loved", but at the same time he demands from his sons a great detachment from themselves in showing affection, the rejection of any sentimental sensitivity, the avoidance of any word or gesture which could be badly interpreted or prove disturbing, of any intimacy which would narrow the heart and prevent it from being open to all.

In this way chastity makes possible the valid expressions and positive fruits of love. As we shall see when speaking of consecrated chastity, it is an evangelical way of loving: the salesian gives up physical fatherhood, but does so to make himself more capable of spiritual fatherhood: chastity disposes the heart for this great task.

The salesian therefore has a heart which is spontaneous but delicate, a heart which is tender but not weak or effeminate, a real sensitivity but one which does not weaken his self-control. "Balance" of this kind is a gift made possible by God's grace, through the Spirit of charity. Thanks to this presence the loving kindness of the salesian has the joyful unembarrassed quality which belongs to the sons of God and reveals the Father's love.

¹³ Cf. Letter from Rome, 10 May 1884; Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 259

¹⁴ BM I,95

*God our Father, source of all love,
through your ,Spirit you bring to birth in us
the living force of true friendship.
Make us open and cordial in welcoming our fellow men
and especially the young.*

*Make us generous and impartial
in our love for each and all,
with a sincere and chaste affection,
so that it may prove to be for those we meet
a reflection and foretaste
of your own anticipating fatherly love.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 16 FAMILY SPIRIT

Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the prompting of the heart.¹

This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation.

¹ cf. MB XVII, 110

Every religious community finds at its source God himself who calls the members to live together united by the bond of charity (cf. C 50). It is called to be in the Church "a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in his presence";¹ we shall see later how the religious vows help in this project of communion (cf. C 61): chastity renders us more available to love each other as brothers in the Spirit, poverty makes it easy to give and receive, and obedience prompts us to seek together the will of God.

The Rule tells us that we Salesians, if we are faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, establish within our communities (which in familiar terms we call "house") that unmistakable style or relationships which, in our living tradition, we are accustomed to call "family spirit". From the description given in art. 16 of the "salesian house" we can glean the extent to which the spirit of Don Bosco penetrates our communities at different levels: local, provincial, world, and the entire Salesian Family, where the very term 'Family' signifies the spirit which unites the members.

But it is not a question of a style which exists only within the house': the Salesians, wherever they are, in the educative and pastoral communities or in contact with other groups, in all their relationships in fact, tend spontaneously to establish a kind of "family", to give life to a "family spirit", which makes each one feel at home and at ease, which means that he also feels responsible for the common good.

In this way the article follows naturally on the two previous ones and completes the description of the style of salesian relationships, inspired by charity.

The family atmosphere makes us feel accepted and that we share responsibility together

The model for the salesian "family spirit" is in the first place the life of the Oratory at Valdocco, where Don Bosco lived as a father among his boys and

¹ PC 15

collaboratos. The description given by the author of the Biographical Memoirs is interesting: "In those days the Oratory was truly a family".² "Don Bosco ran the Oratory as a large family, and the boys really felt as if they had never left their homes".³ "Peaceful joy, unmarred by worry, ruled the Oratory, and family spirit brightened its life. The boys were given all the freedom compatible with discipline and good conduct."⁴ It was on this family style that Don Bosco set up all his houses, and even the religious community as well.

We shall find the theme returning at various points of the constitutional text.⁵ The purpose of the present article is to emphasize some of its characteristic aspects.

The first paragraph speaks of "mutual affection", of "feeling welcome", of "responsibility for the common good", i.e. of a deeply felt intercommunication which is at the foundation of an authentic "family spirit".

"The need and joy of sharing everything is experienced", as in a true family. Whatever goods a member possesses are made available to the others; each one enriches the others and is enriched by them in return. This giving and receiving brings about a growth in joy and unites the members by solid and unbreakable bonds. But the most important exchange is not of material goods, but rather of life itself and of good things more deeply personal, like thoughts and feelings, plans and interests, joys and sorrows, etc.: this is the "opening of the heart" that Don Bosco used to speak of.

This is true for the educative community, but the article applies it also to the religious community; it is not sufficient that the relations between members of the same house be correct, bureaucratic and formal: they must also be "personal". The Constitutions will tell us that the family spirit inspires every moment of the community's life. and that in an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows and are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences" (cf. C 51-52).

The same is true also of relationships involving authority and obedience, of which the Rule speaks later. "In salesian tradition (these) are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust" (C 65); to a discreet and respectful exercise of authority will correspond a practice of "filial" obedience that is spontaneous and generous. Those who have keen "family sense" do not need orders to do those things which will be advantageous to the community. For us who "live and work together" (C 49), for us who believe that our apostolic mandate "is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local

² BM III, 250

³ BM IV, 474

⁴ BM IV, 338-339

⁵ The family spirit invades every aspect of salesian life and mission:

- in the educative community: cf. C 37. 38. 47

- in the religious community: cf. C 49. 51. 53. 56

- is fostered by the evangelical counsels: cf. C 61

- in authority and in obedience: cf. C 65 - as regards chastity: cf. C 83

- in the formation community: d C 103

communities, whose members have complementary functions" (C 44), the family spirit is the great secret for strengthening our cohesion and responsibility.

The family atmosphere is governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart

The text qualifies this atmosphere, saying that it is based on "mutual trust" and "daily forgiveness". The Letter from Rome is a sufficient endorsement of this. The first Oratory at Valdocco is described as follows: "The greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors... closeness led to affection and affection brought confidence. It is this that opens hearts and the youngsters express everything without fear to their superiors". And then, when things had changed at the Oratory: "The reason for the present change is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors ..., who are now thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends... If you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again, for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence".⁶

Brotherly relationships and mutual trust, says the article, make recourse to laws, regulations, norms and authority less necessary; instead appeal is made to interior qualities of the individual, to faith and the "promptings of the heart".

Here too the principle extends to every kind of community in which salesians are involved, because it is a feature of the spirit which they practise always and everywhere. The source of the principle is always the Letter from Rome, in which Don Bosco comes out with a kind of cry of anguish which is very significant: "In the old days at the Oratory... boys would do anything they were asked by one who they knew loved them. We had no secrets from you", Valfre told Don Bosco. "Why do people want to replace love with cold rule?"⁷ In salesian houses things are not done "because you have to", but rather because the underlying reason is understood, because love and willingness are present, and all this in the light of faith.⁸

One of the surest signs of the salesian spirit is the untroubled air of freedom and creative joy, which is common among the sons of Don Bosco. There is no constraint or fear, each one can say what he thinks, each one can make his own generous personal contribution and make suggestions... Don Bosco himself used to say: "God does not like things done by force. As a loving God, he wants things done for love's sake".⁹ Again we become aware that the salesian spirit leads us to the very depths of the Gospel. Later we shall see some further applications of the salesian spirit to the life of the community and the practice of obedience.

⁶ Letter from Rome, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 254-264

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ V. Don Caviglia's description of the fatherly authority of Don Bosco: A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco*, pp. 168-169

⁹ BM VI, 637

The family atmosphere gives rise to vocations

One of the finest fruits of the family spirit is vocations. The history of the Congregation amply demonstrates the truth of this in the case of both Don Bosco and the first salesians. Inserted as they were in the heart of a salesian community made warm by family affection, many boys learned to model their own lives on those of their educators; they became progressively aware of the germ of a salesian vocation that God had placed in their heart, and the family atmosphere led them little by little to identify with ideals and the style of life of their teachers; slowly their sense of belonging to the Congregation matured together with the desire to take part in its pastoral activity.

This is the dynamic growth process which is characteristic of the salesian way of life; the atmosphere is one in which vocations naturally appear and grow; they then mature in the family spirit and a gradual insertion into apostolic work follows almost automatically.

A precise task of our communities is to involve our youngsters in our family life, to enable them to experience for themselves how wonderful is the salesian mission and be attracted to follow the Lord Jesus and work for his Kingdom: "Come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39).

But it should be kept in mind that this will be possible only if the family spirit shines forth in our communities, and especially in formation communities; it is possible only if all the members "form a family founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ, united in mutual esteem and common endeavour" (C 103).

*Grant, O Lord, to our communities
a true family spirit
in mutual trust and reciprocal forgiveness,
and in the joyful sharing of all we have
in obedience to the supreme law of love.*

*Grant also that many young people may
find themselves at ease with us, and so be
encouraged to get to know and to, follow the
same vocation.*

ART. 17 OPTIMISM AND JOY

The salesian does not give way to discouragement in face of difficulties, because he has complete trust in the Father. "Let nothing upset you", Don Bosco used to say.¹

Inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales, he believes in man's natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness.

He is able to make his own what is good in the world and does not bewail his own times; he accepts all that is good,² especially if it appeals to the young.

Because he is a herald of the Good News he is always cheerful.³ He radiates this joy and is able to educate to a christian and festive way of life: "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy".⁴

¹ MB VII, 524; BM VII, 317

² cf. 1 Thess 5,21

³ cf. Phil 3,1

⁴ D. BOSCO, Il giovane Provveduto, Turin 1847, p. 6; (OE II, 186)

The article expresses the components of a typical christian and salesian humanism. The new style of pastoral relationships presented in the preceding articles (C 14-16), is completed by a reference to salesian joy and optimism, which draws its inspiration from the principles of "complete trust in the Father", and trust also in "man's natural and supernatural resources". This double trust opens the salesian to other elements too, so that he "makes his own what is good in the world" "does not bewail his own times", and "accepts all that is good, especially if it appeals to the young".

In this way loving kindness and the family spirit are lived in an atmosphere of undisturbed satisfaction, Optimism, joy and happiness are necessary realities in the world of youth, and must therefore be concretely experienced in salesian environments. The text speaks of "joy" and "cheerfulness". One does not exclude the other: there is no authentic cheerfulness that is not born of a deep joy, from a heart at peace with God and men; nevertheless joy is not always expressed in gaiety and cheerfulness but among us the latter forms part of our youthful spirit Don Bosco knew that a boy's life rotated around freedom, games and happiness; he knew that any normal and efficacious educational efforts must respect the boy's natural state, which excludes oppression, force or violence; for this reason he wanted joy and cheerfulness to pervade the oratory environment in which the boy lived. That is why in his educational system the relationships between the youngsters and their educators, and between the educators themselves, are marked by a friendship and family spirit which helps the boy to grow in joy.¹

It should be remembered that the whole article is inspired by the text of St Paul which the liturgy uses for the feast of St John Bosco, part of which is placed at the head of the present chapter: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The

¹ P. BRAINDO, Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco, Turin 1955, p. 214 ff.

Lord is at hand... Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4,4-9).

The salesian has trust and courage

The first paragraph of the article emphasizes the salesian's attitude of courageous trust during the trials that accompany his apostolic work, as also at times when he must remain inactive through sickness or old age.

It is an attitude inculcated by Don Bosco by word and example. His biographers describe him as remaining always calm, even in moments of difficulty; the advice he gave Don Rua who had been appointed the first Rector at Mirabello is well known: "Let nothing upset you!"; this and other valuable pieces of advice were later inserted in the "Confidential reminders for Rectors², but it forms part of the spirit which animates every salesian.

The source of the trust and the apostolic courage of the salesian is to be found on high. If he is able to preserve his deep inner peace and not give way to discouragement in the face of trials, it is because he believes in God's fatherhood; God's work cannot fail, and the trial is a "providential" path to a better result. Here there is in fact a certain appeal to the salesian's supernatural spirit: he has the right to count on God in the measure that he remains God's servant, seeking nothing else but his glory and his Kingdom.

The salesian is optimistic and believes in the capabilities of every youngster

This optimism is born of hope, of a deep sense of the Father's Providence and of the certainty that Christ is risen; but it is also supported by man's trust. The Constitutions recall that in our case it is "inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales", founded on a double conviction: the goodness of God ("I am not a God who condemns; my name is Jesus the Saviour") and the possibilities given to man ("Our human heart can give rise naturally to the beginnings of the love of God").³ God is so good that he has put into man's heart "natural and supernatural resources" in which the educator or man of action can always find reasons for hope. The practice of the preventive system", wrote Don Bosco, is wholly based on the words of St Paul: "Love is patient and kind; love bears all things ... but hopes all things and endures all things"⁴ In the Biographical Memoirs we find these words of our Father: "Just as there is no barren or sterile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man's heart. No matter how barren and restive at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit. It will begin by loving what is naturally good and ultimately

² Cf. BM X, 447

³ Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the love of God*, book I, chap. 7

⁴ Cf. D. BOSCO, *Treatise on preventive system*, App. Const. p. 248

150 advance to what is supernaturally good, provided that a zealous spiritual director

will cooperate with God's grace by prayer and effort. Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it".⁵

The whole preventive system consists in the progressive development of these. "living sources which every man carries deep within himself"; and because salesians do not lose sight of the frailty of youth, they lend their brotherly presence "so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil" (C 39), and help them to gradually overcome this fragility. The whole skill of the educator rests in the ability to find a resonant chord in the depths of a heart and get it to vibrate. Don Bosco was convinced that the grace of God and human effort can make of every adolescent a genuine saint.

Optimism is always therefore a salesian characteristic at every age and situation of life.

The salesian makes his own what is good in the world, especially if it appeals to the young

The salesian spirit makes us reject any unilateral judgement on the world. It is true that there is a world which "is in the power of the evil one", as St John says (1 Jn 5, 19); but the reference is to worldly elements opposed to God's designs. The world, in the sense understood by the conciliar Constitution "Gaudium et Spes", is the object of the Father's love, even though it be a complex reality in which sin and redemption are mixed.⁶ The salesian is not blind to sin and evil, but insists spontaneously on the redemption aspect. He is conscious of being "deeply united with the world and its history" (C 7); he resists the natural tendency of many adults to praise the past and bewail the present, because he is able to seek, discern and accept "what is good" today's world, and fight strenuously against evil, but without bitterness.

Like Jesus who came "not to judge but to save" (Jn 12,47), Don Bosco did not take up rigid and provocative attitudes in dealing with his adversaries: he always hoped to change them by prudence and patience.

Among the good things of the earth, the salesian makes his own especially those which "appeal to the young", and also things of which the young are themselves bearers and promoters. Anyone, on the other hand, who rejects the present and is closed to the future, shows by that very fact that he is not suitable as an educator of youth.

The salesian is cheerful, radiates joy, and lives in festive fashion

The final paragraph concentrates our reflection on the joy and cheerfulness which is part of the salesian spirit.

⁵BM V, 236-6

⁶Cf. GS 2

The deep root of this joy is the Gospel of Christ, the Lord's "Good News" which the salesian proclaims: "... that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full" (Jn 15,11); "your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16,22). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and arises from the conviction that God loves us.⁷

From this deep and solid root is born a serene and enthusiastic Christianity tinged with the kind of cheerfulness that was seen in Dominic Savio: "Here we make holiness consist in being very cheerful" (a new kind of definition in the history of sanctity, but deeply evangelical nonetheless); the kind that Don Bosco gave to his boys as a programme of life in the slogan: "Cheerfulness, study and piety". Don Caviglia goes so far as to speak of cheerfulness as the salesian's eleventh commandment! On the other hand, everyone knows the famous saying attributed to St Francis de Sales: "If a saint were sad, he would be a sad saint!"

It is not a question of an alienating frame of mind leading to a life where ignorance is bliss, but a true sanctification of the joy of living. The salesian environment must be such that those in it can detect and experience a joyful atmosphere that opens hearts to optimism and trust in life, that leads to the quiet acceptance of the hard things we meet and even enlightens with holy joy the difficult moment of death.

The Rule emphasizes that not only is the salesian cheerful himself, but he is a *communicator of festive joy*: "We're a festive people, we're a joyful lot", in the words of a modern song composed by some young salesian in Italy.

Joy is self-propagating, it is contagious, it needs to expand, to explode in festive happiness; it must have space therefore, something like a playground (which Don Caviglia defined as "Don Bosco amidst the young";⁸) it must have music and singing, because "an oratory without music is like a body without a soul";⁹ it needs a theatre and outings; it needs periodic celebrations which the youngsters can see and in which they can take part, to serve as highlights in the daily rhythm of their lives.

The salesian knows that genuine and authentic cheerfulness is not possible for anyone whose heart is not at peace, and at the same time it becomes an efficacious call to those who are not in that state. "The devil fears cheerful people", Don Bosco used to say.¹⁰ The salesian educator is well aware that this is the way to make youngsters experience the liberating efficacy of the grace of Christ. But he knows too that there is a price to be paid: in the dream or vision of the pergola of roses¹¹ anyone seeing the salesian joyful, enthusiastic and optimistic might get the impression that he was walking on a carpet of roses; but the piercing pain caused by the thorns show that the salesian spirit may find in this attitude of cheerfulness a very real opportunity for asceticism: it is a happiness fed by sacrifice, sometimes of a severe kind, but accepted with a smile, with simplicity and without fuss, as something quite normal without

⁷ On christian joy, v. Paul VI, Encyclical "*Gaudere in Domino*"

⁸ *Opere e scritti di Don Bosco*, ed. A. CAVIGLIA, V, 173

⁹ BM V, 222

¹⁰ BM X, 294

¹¹ Cf. MB III, 25-27. The dream was repeated three times in Don Bosco's life: in 1847, 1848 and 1856

playing the martyr or the hero. In the unavoidable trials of life the salesian repeats with Don Bosco: "A piece of paradise will make up for everything".¹²

The reflection concludes with Don Bosco's exhortation to his boys, which enshrines a programme for holiness: "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy"¹³

*That following the example of St Francis de Sales
and the teaching of Don Bosco,
we may always believe
in the natural and supernatural resources of man,
and while not ignoring his weakness,
be able to discover the germs of goodness
which you place in the heart of every youngster,
—Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in spite of the thorns strewn on our path,
we may never lose sight of the goal which awaits us,
but remain optimistic,
full of trust in our Father
—Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to discern the values of
creation and be able to accept what is good,
especially if it appeals to the young, —Lord,
hear our prayer.*

*That as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus,
we may be bearers of joy,
and be able to educate young people
to a holiness based on Christian happiness,
—Lord, hear our prayer.*

¹² BM VIII, 200

¹³ D. BOSCO, *Companion of Youth*, Turin 1847, OE II, p.186

ART. 18 WORK AND TEMPERANCE

"Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish",¹ whereas the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will instead bring about its death.²

The salesian give himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered.

He does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it.³

¹ MB XII, 466; BM XII, 338

² cf. MB XVII, 272

³ cf. 1875, XIII, 13

In this article and the one which follows we turn our attention to some characteristics given by pastoral charity to our salesian apostolic activity. According to the Constitutions the salesian apostle is distinguished by his tireless industry which remains at the same time well balanced (the inseparable "work and temperance"), by daily self-sacrifice, by creativity and flexibility in the face of urgent requirements, and by a spirit of initiative in response to needs arising in the course of time.

The precious chapter of Don Ceria in the Annals of the Congregation cited earlier¹, presents three elements which give to the religious spirit the unmistakable mark of the "salesian spirit": they are "piety", which means the ability to transform work into prayer, with the support of the sacraments; our "family life"; but above all a "prodigious activity" both individually and collectively.

The article we are now examining presents, as its title implies, the double concept of "work and temperance", which is the *"badge and password of the salesian"*.²

"Work and temperance", two inseparable salesian concepts

The text of the Rule first highlights the role that work and temperance have in the Congregation's life and mission. For Don Bosco they were a programme of life (a motto to be put alongside "da mihi animas, cetera toile"), and a guarantee for the future: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish".³

¹ Cf. E. CERIA, *Annali della societa salesiana*, I, p. 722 ff.

² BM XII, 338

³ *ibid.*

"Salesian life, considered in its activity", says Don Rinaldi, "is work and temperance, enlivened by the charity of the heart".⁴

In our tradition the two elements are inseparably linked. In the dream of the ten diamonds, the diamonds of work and temperance, on the two shoulders, seem to support the mantle of the personage.⁵ In the physiognomy of the salesian and in his apostolic life, work and temperance cannot be separated one from the other; they have complementary functions of incentive and support. The reality of life calls on the one hand for the enthusiasm and on the other for renunciation, on this side for commitment and on that for mortification. It should be noted that from a salesian point of view work and temperance represent a positive reality. Work gets an individual moving, stimulates his creativity, prompts him to a certain self-affirmation and sends him into the world; the qualities of salesian work, for example, are alacrity, spontaneity, generosity, initiative, constant updating and, naturally, union with one's fellows and with God. Temperance, as a virtues which leads to self-control, is a 'hinge' around which various moderating virtue turn: self-restraint, humility, meekness, clemency, modesty, sobriety and abstinence, economy and simplicity, and also austerity; this complexus adds up to an overall attitude of self-control. In this way temperance becomes a preparation for the acceptance of many difficult or unpleasant requirements of daily work... For us salesians, wrote the Rector Major, "temperance is not the sum total of what we have given up, but a growth in the practice of pastoral and pedagogical charity".⁶

It can be said that work and temperance, the "badge and password of the salesian", are for us a testimony to a charity which loves "not in word or speech but indeed and in truth" (1 Jn 3,1 8).

The work of the salesian

The Rule says of the salesian that he "gives himself to his mission with tireless energy"; the reference is to an assiduous and particular kind of work, which becomes a means of sanctification.

The emphasis placed on the "professional" quality of the salesian's work should be noted⁷: it is work which is linked to the implementing of the mission, and hence is pedagogical, educational and pastoral in character, and prepared with indispensable qualifications in the human sciences and theological disciplines; a work lived according to the typical salesian style expressed in the words "taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation", and echoed in Don Bosco's words: "He does much who, though doing little, does what he must; he does nothing who does much, but not what he should do".⁸

⁴ACS 56, 26 April 1931, p. 934

⁵MB XV, 183

⁶Cf. E. VIGANO, *Un progetto evangelico di vita*, LDC 1982, p. 118 ff.

⁷Cf. GC22 RRM. 293

⁸BM I, 298

own example as a formidable worker and his encouragement to commitment to work for souls. Considerable significance attaches to what Don Caviglia once said in an introduction to a discussion on salesian work: "It seems almost a scandal in a saint, but he said 'let us work' much more than 'let us pray'".⁹

Speaking to the Superior Council in the evening of 10 December 1875, Don Bosco said "As for the Congregation, I see that although we keep repeating that we must consolidate what we have, things go better when we work hardest: ... as long as we are intensely active and do plenty of work, everything goes on wonderfully. There is really a very great desire to work among the members of our Congregation".¹⁰

On another occasion in a conference he said: "If you join the Congregation you will want for nothing, but you must work ... No one should enter if he intends to sit around twiddling his thumbs...".¹¹ Our novitiates are no places for idlers. And the motto: "*bread, work and heaven*" is a slogan which does not admit of compromise!

Our Father came back constantly on the same point: "Don't remain idle; if you don't work, the devil will"¹². Pius XI, who had known and admired our Founder, condensed the thought of the Saint into a few words: "Anyone who doesn't know how to work is out of place in the Salesian Society".

Such a declaration is much to the point at the present day. The seventh successor of Don Bosco has written: "We are on the threshold of a new culture prompted by the civilization of work: we are living in a technical and industrial age, in which work occupies a central place. Well then, in our work we want to feel that we are 'prophets' and not just being 'ascetical'".¹³ All work is productive and socializing; it causes cultural growth, but it requires a professional approach; it calls for competence, organization, formation, study and updating.

The Constitutions emphasize the *divine greatness of work*, which makes us "co-workers" with God for the coming of his Kingdom.

The salesian is aware that by his work he is participating in the ongoing creative action of God in the world:¹⁴ creation is seen as a fundamental act in the history of salvation, directed not to the bringing into existence of galaxies, but to rendering the world human, to transforming it in history, to the growth and domination of the earth".¹⁵ Here there is also the root of a fundamental and creatural lay status from which can arise a real "mystique" of human work, a sound secularity and a proper appraisal of professionalism.

⁹A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, Turin 1985, p. 99

¹⁰BM XI,

¹¹BM XIII,

¹²BM XIII, 34

¹³E. VIGANO, op. cit., p. 107

¹⁴Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, 1981

¹⁵E. VIGANO, op. cit. p. 112

By his work the salesian feels especially the joy of collaborating with Christ in the work of the "redemption"; in the activity of mankind, wounded by sin and immersed in structures which bear sin's consequences, the mystery of Christ the Saviour is inserted: his example at Nazareth is conclusive. The feeling of being a "co-redeemer" gives eloquent value to work: fatigue, patience, dedication, commitment all take on redemptive significance which gives to the heart of the worker a touch of divine nobility".¹⁶

The salesian worker does not identify only with his "profession" (educator, instructor, engineer, communicator, agriculturist, cook, etc.) but more especially with his "vocation", which transforms his activity into witness, which makes of work a message for the present day, nourished at the sources of faith, hope and charity, which are the historical dynamic forces which change society and human existence.

One can understand from all this that "tireless activity" does not mean either agitation or activism, but the activity proper to the salesian, permeated by practical charity and an apostolic sense: what he is doing is "*working for souls*" with the Lord.

The salesian's temperance

Temperance, one of the cardinal virtues, is presented by the Constitutions as self-control and the custody of the heart: i.e. the moderation of the inclinations and passions, a constant effort to be balanced and reasonable, and a break with earthly attractions — not by fleeing to the desert but by staying among men with the heart under control. "More than a virtue on its own, temperance is an existential basic attitude implying many other virtues which lead a self-control and mastery of the heart... It accustoms us to inconvenience by rationalizing our desires and feelings, by the domination of our passions, by composure in our common life, by a proper reserve, by a healthy shrewdness (as an expression of intelligent common sense); and all this in the light and under the guidance of reason. Yes; temperance controls everything in accordance with reason."¹⁷

"It is a like temperance that crowns the salesian smile; it is a similar temperance, joined to work, that traces the outlines of the salesian physiognomy".¹⁸

Temperance leads to a healthy balance in everything, and not only to the control of concupiscence. Don Bosco wanted temperance and common sense to be present even in work. On 3 January 1879 he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: "As for work, yes, go ahead and work, but don't overdo it, Don't shorten your life by privations or excessive toil or depression or such other nuisances".¹⁹ To us salesians he said the same thing: "Work as much as your health will allow, but be on

¹⁶E. VIGANO, op. cit. p. 113

¹⁷E. VIGANO op. cit. p. 119-120

¹⁸ibid

¹⁹BM XIV, 191

158 your guard against idleness".²⁰ And he told the departing missionaries: "Take care

of your health. Work, but only as much as your strength allows".²¹

It is true to say that our temperance can be measured by the effort we make to love by making ourselves loved! And experience teaches that that is no easy task. To be "temperate" for us means to be controlled, balanced, with common sense, not given to exaggeration, reasonable in behaviour, self-controlled and pleasant in manner; but also sensitive to so many real needs, to what is pleasing or otherwise to the young, to the signs of the times, to all the vast sectors of the Church's renewal, not permanently ready to calm on the brakes when changes are taking place, but at the same time being watchful against excesses and deviations.

A temperance which helps to "remain even tempered" is not made up of a collection of renunciations, but springs rather from growth in faith, hope and charity, from adherence to the Constitutions, from love of the community, from cheerfulness and from heroicity attached to the daily round.

The salesian's penance

The salesian's asceticism is based on work in its stern requirements (the sacrifice of the daily duty) and on temperance, which certainly calls for renunciations to develop the necessary self-control. And here enters the theme of the cross, which links up well with the faithful and self-sacrificing discharge of his duty, and with the exertions involved.

The final paragraph reproduces almost to the letter some words which go back to Don Bosco himself: "Let each one be ready, when necessity requires it to suffer heat and cold, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain, whenever this will redound to the greater glory of God, the spiritual good to others, and the salvation of his own soul".²²

Also pointed out is the *mystery of the cross in the life of the salesian apostle*, as a characteristic trait inherited from the Founder: it is a salesian style of mortification, which anticipates or strengthens a penitential practice suited to our times and so much recommended at the present day: "a joyful well-balanced austerity".²³ "A great deal of present-day penance." says a document from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "is already present in the circumstances of life, and must be accepted there".²⁴

At a time of great cultural changes, far different from the circumstances in the lifetime of the Founder, it is well to reaffirm explicitly, with the Constitutions, that self-renunciation and the taking up of one's cross are integral elements of the style of life and activity of Don Bosco, who "in order to clothe his holiness with attractive

²⁰ BM XIV, 511

²¹ BM XI, 364

²² *Costituzioni 1875*, XIII, 13 (cf. F. MOTTO p. 191)

²³ ET 30

²⁴ *Elementi essenziali della vita consacrata*, CRIS 1983, n. 31

pedagogical and pastoral characteristics, made ceaseless and enormous efforts in the 159 way of asceticism."²⁵

Our own ascetic realism as apostles and educators is founded on St. Paul's declaration: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1,21). Anyone entering our Society does so to follow the Saviour, consciously sharing his cross by self-renunciation, in trials and difficulties, in his passion and even in his death.

This ascetical side of the salesian is well expressed by the Rule which speaks not extraordinary penances but of the daily acceptance of the unforeseen elements of the apostolic life: "cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain...", which constitute a "martyrdom of love and self-sacrifice for the welfare of others"²⁶

But Don Bosco repeats to us the words of St Paul: "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8,18).

*That in imitation of Don Bosco
who was concerned only with the salvation of youth.
we may respond generously to your call
and dedicate ourselves with tireless energy
to the mission you entrust to us,
— Lord; hear our prayer.*

*That we may understand the greatness and beauty
of our apostolic work,
which makes us participants in your creative activity,
and collaborators of your Son
in the construction of the Kingdom,
—Lord, hear our prayer.*

*The we may be always able to unite our
work with salesian temperance, and be
convinced that in "work and temperance"
lies the secret of the apostolic success and
fruitfulness of the Congregation,
—Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That without seeking extraordinary penances
we may accept the daily demands
and renunciations of apostolic life,
and make of them an instrument
for your greater glory
and he salvation of the young,
— Lord, hear our prayer.*

²⁵ E. VIGANO, ASC 310 (1983), p. 14

²⁶ BM X111, 236

ART. 19 INITIATIVE AND FLEXIBILITY

The salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord manifests his will also through the demands of time and place.

Hence his spirit of initiative and apostolic creativity: "In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness".¹

Timely response to these needs requires him to keep abreast of new trends and meet them with the well-balanced creativity of the Founder; periodically he evaluates his work.

¹ MBXIV, 662; BM XIV, 536

If our generous and self-sacrificing style of work is to attain the pastoral efficacy required by the Kingdom of God, it must exhibit a number of aspects, which are also attitudes of the person of the salesian: practical responses to the needs of those to whom we are sent, a spirit of creative initiative, and a balanced flexibility in following the vicissitudes of history.

The changes of our time overwhelm us with innovations and tensions, which make it easier for us to yield to extreme ideas between conservatism and progressivism, excessive concern about efficiency and spiritualism, evangelization and human advancement, emphasis on pastoral work and attention to teaching etc.

To be alert to the signs of the times, to have a practical mentality and spirit of initiative, to make choices with level-headed creativity, all this means keeping one's feet firmly on the ground, being aware of the fact that circumstances are continually changing (but without totally ignoring tradition), acting with moderation ("temperance"), watching for deviations and "periodically evaluating his work".

The Salesian makes a practical response to the signs of the times

The salesian wants to live in the present, taking cognizance of all the needs of cultural realities and historical situations, looking eagerly for what today's youth needs in a society which is pluralistic, fragmented, strongly socialized, and technically oriented; and in a Church which through the Vatican Council has renewed its pastoral physiognomy.

In a situation far different from ours, but full nevertheless of innovations and unknown quantities, Don Bosco had said: "In these days, when all monastic orders are being suppressed by the state, when nuns can no longer feel safe in their cloisters and monks have disappeared, we get together and, despite all our enemies, grow in numbers, open houses and do whatever good can still be done Monks have been exiled and we respond by changing garb. We carry on dressed as priests, and should

this too be forbidden we shall use civilian garb and continue to do good. We shall even grow beards if we must; these things can never keep us from doing good.¹

To keep up with the progress of science and truth, to provide a valid response to the changes in culture in which both we and our youngsters are immersed, the salesian will be attentive not only to the development of ideas but also to the concrete reality of persons and events.

This reality calls for shrewd observance so as to detect in it the "signs of the times".² to discern urgent local needs and, through them, to hear the Lord's voice calling us to a commitment for the Kingdom. This was Don Bosco's attitude: his works came into being in accordance with a prearranged general plan, but they were all started to meet needs of particular times and places: "I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and circumstances required".³ An adequate and generous response to the needs of people and places is one of the criteria which the Constitutions will later lay down for checking the validity of our work and the activities of our communities (cf. C 41). This was also the attitude of the Church of Vatican II: the Church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask".⁴

The salesian maintains a spirit of initiative

In a world in continual and rapid transformation, no one is more sensitive to changes than young people. Educators must therefore be particularly attentive to this fact and able to meet its consequences.

The desire to provide timely answers to individual needs leads necessarily to the two qualities of initiative and flexibility, words which provide the heading for this article.

The text makes use of typical terms to express the sense of the creativity required in the salesian:

•"*Spirit of initiative*" means that the salesian begins as soon as possible to do what seems to need doing, without waiting for ideal conditions; he gets on with the job spontaneously without waiting to be asked or told. It is an attitude which calls for courage. To Fr Achilles Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI, Don Bosco confided: "When it comes to progress, I want to be in the vanguard."⁵ His zeal continually suggested some new project to him or some new means of doing good to youth.

¹ BM X, 462

² "The signs of the times are facts and events which display a historical and sociological sense, and also a theological sense of the times. ... They characterize an era, explain the needs and aspirations of the peoples of humanity in that period.... and reveal the roads that God is providing for the Church to follow" (*Linee di rinnovamento*, 1971, pp. 15-17)

³ MB XVIII, 127

⁴ GS4; cf. also GS11

⁵ MB XVI, 323

• "*Apostolic creativity*" means that the salesian uses his pastoral imagination to use and exploit everything good that exists, and to create new things as well where the need is felt: innovations in the work itself or in ways of doing it. Those extraordinary words of Don Bosco cited in the article: "I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness" show us that in certain circumstances the salesian will have to take risks and go ahead with *apostolic boldness*, driven on by his love for the salvation of the young and the certainty that this is what God is asking of him: it is an attitude in line with St Paul's words: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power" (2 Tim 1,7).

The salesian is flexible and level-headed in following the events of history

Fidelity to life and its changes, rather than to laws and structures: this is the final characteristic feature of the salesian's realistic and flexible approach to the urgent needs of youth. A realistic mentality reveals that people and environments evolve, especially nowadays and especially among young people, the group most sensitive to what the future may bring.

From this follows the need for the "periodic verification of his work", to check whether it is efficacious in the relevant circumstances of life, and to keep it so. In this regard we have a valuable statement of Don Rinaldi: "Don Bosco believed in bending to meet the needs of the times. This elasticity, which makes possible adaptation to all kinds of good that are continually arising is the real spirit of our Constitutions; and on the day when this spirit changes, it will be all up with our Pious Society".⁶

Vatican II notes that the task of the educator requires, among other human qualities, "a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt old ones".⁷

All this also supposes a certain flexibility in the means and structures of pastoral activity; if these are cumbersome they may hold up the necessary transformations.

For this reason it should cause no surprise if with the Salesians certain things evolve and change. It would rather be surprising if they did not: it would indicate an anti-salesian manner of having recourse to traditions, and one contrary to genuine tradition and to our spirit. Don Bosco once confided to Don Barberis: "I see that from the moment we stand still, the Congregation will begin to decay"!

⁶ ACS 17, 6 January 1923, p. 41; cf. SGC, 135

⁷ GE 5

*Bestow on us, O Lord,
as you did on our Founder and Father
"a heart great as the shores of the sea",
able to read the signs of your presence
and the designs of your will.*

*Help us to be courageous in initiatives,
ready to respond to the needs of people and places,
forgetful of ourselves and our own tastes and interests,
and prompted only by the desire for your glory and the
salvation of our fellow men.*

ART 20 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AND SALESIAN SPIRIT

Under the guidance of Mary, his teacher, Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory, a spiritual and educational experience which he called the "Preventive System". For him this was a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all His creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them.

Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way of living and of handing on the Gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved.

There is a strict linkage between the salesian spirit and the preventive system. One may say that *the salesian spirit is expressed and becomes incarnate in a particular way in the preventive system*; it is Don Bosco's most original creation in the pedagogical field, but it is also a characteristic general way of being and acting at both individual and community level which is so evident in the life of the salesians. The preventive system is our way of "prophesying" our practical way of living the Gospel as educators and of tending to the fullness of charity. It involves the person of the salesian in a manner of thinking and feeling, of life and activity, which inspires and characterizes his whole existence.¹

The preventive system embraces a complexus of principles, which the Constitutions present in different places:

- it is the guide to our educational and pastoral activity, and at the same time a style of sanctification which takes its rise from a heart steeped in the mystery of Christ the Saviour;
- it is the plan which characterizes the pastoral brilliance of Don Bosco, able to translate spirit into life in a correct and practical way;
- it is the measure of our authenticity and of our vocation as evangelizers and educators of youth;
- for us it is a vital synthesis of pedagogy, pastoral work and spirituality; through it "we publicly profess our love for the Father who calls us and unites us in communities to make us evangelizers of the young, in the shared responsibility for an educational plan inspired by the charisma of Don Bosco";²

¹ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The Salesian Educational Project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 13. It may be of interest to note that although the preventive system is not quoted explicitly in the Constitutions written by Don Bosco, the latter contains all the essential elements of the salesian educational method: we find there the charity, which is the centre of the preventive system and from which the mission of the Society of St. Francis de Sales draws its inspiration ("every spiritual and corporal work of charity": chapt. I, art. 1); we find "the young, and especially those who are poor" as agents in the educational activity (chapt. I, art. 1-5); we find the figure of the salesian who is both religious and educator, "entirely dedicated" to God and to the youngsters (called "to do and to teach") and the community which is at the same time a family; we find the superior described as a father and friend to the young etc. For all this cf. P. BRAIDO, *"Il sistema preventivo nelle Costituzioni salesiane di Don Bosco"*, in *Fedelta e rinnoramento*, LAS 1974, pp. 103 118.

² GC 21, 31

— finally, for the Salesian Family, the preventive system is one of the foundations of unity in the face of plurality of ideas and of decentralization; when cultural differences might lead us astray, it helps the members to preserve "the vital bond with their Founder and unity of spirit".³

In this way a salesian community can verify its life and vocational growth by daily examining its practice of the preventive system.

Reflection on this article becomes all the more important and necessary if we heed the warning of the GC21: "With young people of today, the preventive system means that a new kind of presence is needed".⁴ Don Rinaldi declared: "The salesian is either a salesian or he is nothing; he is either of Don Bosco or of no one. If we study Don Bosco, if we follow his system, we shall truly be his sons; otherwise we shall be nothing, we shall be heating the air and getting nowhere".⁵

The preventive system, a true spiritual and educational experience, is a gratuitous love, which forestalls, accompanies and saves

This fundamental element of our spirit⁶ matured in the life of Don Bosco as a "spiritual and educational experience", "an experience of the Spirit",⁷ which from its beginning had seen the motherly presence of Mary as "teacher and guide". This kind of experience, lived among the "boys of the first Oratory" in simplicity, joy, family style and a concrete form of education, has been passed on to us as a precious personal and community legacy, and we receive it as a method of pastoral action and a path to sanctity.

The text of the Constitutions emphasizes that this creative synthesis of Don Bosco is catalyzed by the "pastoral charity" which is at the centre of the salesian spirit (cf. C 10): Don Rinaldi and Don Caviglia, speaking of "bonta" (our 'fourth vow', linked with the very name of 'salesian'!), say that it is nothing else than the practice of the preventive system, lived among youth: it is not only a "system of kindness", but "kindness erected into a system".⁸

Later we shall see the preventive system as a method of educational and pastoral activity which, through educational presence and the force of persuasion and love, makes youngsters grow up as "upright citizens and good Christians" (cf. Const. Chap. IV, and especially C 38, 39).

Here the Rule is drawing special attention to the fact that the preventive system, as an experience of the Spirit, *is for us a way of sanctification*: it is "a love

³ GC 21, 80

⁴ GC 21, 155

⁵ E. VALENTINI, D. Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e spiritualita salesiana, Turin 1965, p. 32

⁶ Cf. GC 21, 97

⁷ Cf. MR 11

⁸ A. CAVIGLIA, La pedagogia di Don Bosco, Rome 1935, pp. 14-15; cf. ASC 290 (1978), pp. 9-10

freely given, inspired by the love of God which forestalls every creature by his divine providence, accompanies him by his constant presence and saves him by giving his life for him".⁹ It is translated therefore into the constant practice of charity which is without limits, and which makes of the salesian a sign and witness of love (cf. C 2).

The preventive system is a way of living and working to offer to youth the Gospel and salvation

The Rector Major has written: "The SGC reminded us that between salesian "mission" (one and the same for everyone everywhere) and the actual "apostolate" (which varies according to different situations) there is an important difference, and they need to be harmonized. The preventive system lies between the two as a pedagogical and pastoral signpost, lighting the way and pointing out what initiatives we should develop and how we should set about them in the various situations that the times and places present".¹⁰

"The first and foremost essential of the preventive system for us today is 'not to desert the difficult field of our youth commitment' ".¹¹

The salesian, as the Constitutions put it, is invited by the preventive system to *live among the young*; this is a practice stemming from the heart rather than the pedagogical sciences, which stimulates the salesian to learn the art and sacrifice of staying with youngsters, especially the most needy ones, of roving them, of getting to know them individually together with the problems arising from the situation in which they live.¹²

We recall the testimony given in the Letter from Rome: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation?" Don Bosco himself used to say: "*I feel at home with you: this is really where I belong*".¹³ On this phrase the Rector Major makes the following comment: "The salesian not only works for the young; he lives with them and is always in their midst. For him the preventive system is a matter of the heart... He must master the art of being physically present and accept the sacrifice it may entail".¹⁴

Again the salesian receives from the preventive system the incentive to *work with the young and for the young*, involving them in the realization of their plan of life. The Constitutions expressly indicate the ultimate purpose of this task with and for youngsters: to hand on to them the Gospel of Christ and to bring them his salvation. The preventive system intimately links evangelization with education (cf. C 31); it does not reduce pastoral work to catechesis alone or to the liturgy alone, but covers all aspects of the youth condition by linking the Gospel with culture and life.

⁹ Cf. CC 21, 17

¹⁰ ASC 290 (1978), p. 13; cf. SGC, 30

¹¹ Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 21; cf. also GC 22, 6

¹² Cf. GC 21, 13

¹³ BM IV, 455

¹⁴ Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 22

The article ends with a fundamental statement: the preventive system "*permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships and our manner of living in community*", impressing on all our activity, the orientation to its supreme end, which is what Don Bosco wanted: the only purpose of the Oratory is the salvation of souls." In this way it gives life to an educational process oriented to Christ, with special attention to the sacramental and Marian life; it presents youthful holiness in a bold and original fashion and in ways which appeal to the young, because it passes through a charity "which knows how to win the love of others".

With regard to the way in which the preventive system is realized in practice, more will be said in the context of the apostolic mission (cf. C 38, 39). Here it will be enough to recall a letter written by Don Bosco on 10 August 1885 to Don G. Costamagna, provincial of Argentina: "I would like to have with me all my sons and our Sisters of America... I would like to give them all a conference on the salesian spirit which must animate all we say and do. The preventive system must be our characteristic... in the classrooms let there be only kind words, charity and patience... Let every salesian make himself the friend of all; let him never try to get his own back on anyone; let him be always ready to forgive, and never hark back to incidents that have been forgiven... Gentleness in what we say and do, and in the advice we give, will win over everyone and enable us to attain all our objectives"¹⁵ And we know that to this letter is attributed the subsequent spiritual and temporal prosperity of the Argentine province. Not only the provincial, but others too made copies of it and wrote to the Saint to thank him for it. Some there were who felt that the letter highlighted their own defects, or who found it particularly difficult to be patient and charitable; they bound themselves by vow to observe Don Bosco's advice, and renewed the pledge every month at the Exercise for a Happy Death".¹⁶

Fr Duvalier, who had collaborated for twenty years with Abbe Pierre in the apostolate for the re-education of delinquent youngsters, makes a kind of significant appeal to us: You have works, colleges and oratories for young people, but your real treasure is one and only: the pedagogy of Don Bosco. In a world in which youngsters are betrayed, drained, ground down and exploited, the Lord has entrusted to you a pedagogy in which the paramount aspect is respect for the boy, for his greatness and frailty, for his dignity as a son of God.

"Preserve it, renew it, rejuvenate it, enrich it with all modern discoveries; adapt it to all the developments of the twentieth century and their ramifications that Don Bosco could not be aware of. But I beg you to keep it safe! Change everything, let your houses go if necessary, but keep this treasure and build up in thousands of hearts this way of loving and saving the souls of boys which you have inherited from Don Bosco".¹⁷

¹⁵ *Collected letters IV*, Turin 1959, p. 332

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 33 note

¹⁷ Various Authors: "11 sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova", Acts of European Salesian Congress on the educational system of Don Bosco, LDC Turin 1974, p. 314

*Lord our God,
in the preventive system
Don Bosco found a sure method
for spreading your love among youth.*

*Grant that we too may assimilate and live
this form of total dedication
to the education of the young
left us by our Father as a precious heritage,
and may be able to transmit it
faithfully and intact
to those who will come after us.*

ART. 21 DON BOSCO OUR MODEL

The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher.

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living "as seeing him who is invisible".¹

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".²

¹ Heb 11, 27

² DON RUA, 24 Aug 1894

This concluding article provides a vertex and synthesis for the whole chapter: it declares that the salesian spirit is found incarnate in the Founder, and that to live this spirit one must go back to his example: Don Bosco is the "father" and "teacher" the Lord has given us; he is our "model".

Every founder is a result of the life and holiness of the Church,¹ and is shaped by the Spirit as an example to other brothers to whom he repeats with the Apostle: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (Cor 1 1,1). Don Bosco is our model in so far as he is for us a living image of Christ himself.

The use of models in contemporary culture, as has always been the case in ecclesial tradition, is a felt need. Ideals are communicated every more by examples, rather than through concepts.

Don Bosco, as a model of salesian spirit, stems from the mystery of God, and to Him refers back: he functions therefore in a living, connected and mysterious way, and has great pedagogical value. The way he lived his life expressed much better than our words something that is in fact incapable of expression. Any description we can give of salesian spirit calls for understanding, while his exemplary life calls for imitation. His example is continually present to the soul of the salesian and to the community, so that little by little its features, physiognomy and style of life can be assimilated by those who imitate him. Don Bosco continues to exercise this attraction in our regard; when developed by study and research it results in love, transformation and renewal.

In this way Don Bosco "comes back amongst us": his life is still an appeal to us. Although the historical perspective of his time has changed and cannot be identified

¹ Cf. LG 45, 46

with our own, he nevertheless remains in our regard a prophet, one who inspires us and is a sign indicating the path we should follow.

We know, finally, that through the communion of saints he is still present in the Church and the Congregation, and his sanctity and intercession remain no less efficacious with the passage of time.

The Lord has given us Don Bosco as a father and teacher

Coming as it does at the end of the chapter, this statement helps us to see in Don Bosco a vital synthesis of the salesian spirit. We note, with the SGC, that it is not a question of an abstract Don Bosco "alive and at work in the midst of his boys, throughout the period of his apostolic life".² This is the Don Bosco who becomes the "permanent criterion"³ of the "dynamic fidelity" of the salesian, the perennial source of inspiration and reflection.

Let us consider for a moment this figure of Father and Teacher which becomes ever greater the farther away we get from him in time

— The image of "*Father*" derives from the mysterious divine fatherhood, which is revealed in the gift of life and of divine sonship in Baptism, but is modelled too on the simple and human qualities of a father of a family; both evoke in the salesian and in the community the idea of kindness, attention, availability and forgiveness.

All his life, Don Bosco displayed a father's heart. He said to his salesian: "No matter in what remote part of the world, you may never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord".⁴ And we recall the heart-rending appeal in the Letter from Rome of 1884: "Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? that we should go back to the days of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone".⁵

The salesian can never forget that the particular "experience of the Spirit",⁶ which is the gift of the salesian vocation, has been passed on to him, by disposition of divine providence, precisely through his Founder, as new gospel communication, a particular kind of ecclesial commitment. The Founder introduced and, as it were, gave life to this new way of following Christ, and accompanied the early days of the newly born Congregation with tremendous sacrifices. Don Bosco is indeed the Father of our vocation!

² SGC, 195

³ Cf. SGC document: *Don Bosco at the Oratory, enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*, SGC, 192 ff.

⁴ BM XI, 362

⁵ Cf. MB XVIII, pp. 107-114; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263

⁶ MR 11

— The image of "*Master*" or "*Teacher*" recalls his ability to reproduce some features of the "divine Master", who had been his guide from the first dream at the age of nine, and also some characteristics of our Blessed Lady who had been given to him as a "Teacher":⁷ from them Don Bosco learned kindness and the art of showing youngsters the way to salvation, making them see how much God loves them.

One cannot forget Don Bosco's ability to communicate as a teacher; he was able to speak in simple terms, to make himself understood, to pass on incisively the Word of the Lord, but especially to win affection, which means his ability to speak and teach with the language of the heart.

We invoke him as "Father and Master", together with all our young people, and especially the street-boys, the apprentices and young workers, the pupils of the trade schools, the jugglers and acrobats, the youngsters called to follow him so as to save other youngsters; but as well as these, with parents, teachers, educators and pastors too.

But let us not forget that in his spiritual testament Don Bosco repeats that our real Superior is Jesus Christ: "*He will always be our Master, our guide, our model*".⁸

We study him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace

It has been said that Don Bosco is one of the most 'complete' Saints in Christian history, in the sense that in him were accumulated gifts of nature and grace to a quite remarkable extent. The text emphasizes this fact, and highlights in particular the "splendid blending of nature and grace".

In Don Bosco human qualities were not suppressed, but permeated by the divine; they kept all their force. He was "*deeply human*, rich in the qualities of his people", "open to the realities of this earth"; able to inspire esteem, confidence and affection because he was able to love; he was a formative educator, "an idealist and realist who would try anything but at the same time show prudence" (Daniel-Rops); a "giant with massive arms with which he has managed to draw the whole universe to himself" (Card. Nina to Leo XIII); a dreamer (how many "dreams" he had during his but very much down to earth in what he achieved.

On the other hand he showed himself to be "*deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit*"; he lived, in fact, "as seeing him who is invisible", i.e. he was able to read with an eye of extraordinary faith the historical events in which he was immersed.

Don Bosco gave to others the impression of being a man of this earth but also of heaven, open to his fellow men but immersed in God, This made him genial with

⁷BM I, 95

⁸ Cf. MB XVII, pp. 257-273

others, and for us is an invitation to develop all our own resources the better to fulfil our vocation.⁹

We must make use of this interpretation of the unique spiritual figure of Don Bosco to discern the foundational and unifying aspect of salesian spirituality, which is both deeply incarnated in history and deeply immersed in God.

The Rule reminds the salesian of the importance of "studying" Don Bosco, of feeling that he is close at hand, of comparing himself with him; only a constant daily comparison with the Founder can preserve and renew his burning love and ardent zeal for the good of young people.

We "imitate" him as a model in the service of youth

All Don Bosco's rich gifts of nature and grace placed him at the service of a unique mission in "*a closely-knit life project*". In him the human and divine aspects were intimately united in the single mission for the salvation of youth.

This is another surprising feature of his personality both as a Founder and as an educator: he is a man with a fixed idea always in mind, which becomes ever broader in detail but remains essentially that of the dream at the age of nine, and will do so until his dying breath: save the young, and especially the poorest of them.

This service to youth prompted him to undertake courageous enterprises. He realized them "with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue". As his first successor testified, "he took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young. Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".¹⁰

His example is an invitation to us to be resolute in our commitment, to unify all our thoughts, strength and all we are in one and the same direction, a stimulation to fidelity until death.

Finally the text specifies that Don Bosco gave himself to his work with firmness, making use of all his resources with *constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart*. Firmness and constancy to realize a vocation and work beset by so many difficulties; firmness to undertake initiatives that called for a lot of courage, sometimes flying in the face of traditional ideas and ways of doing things; firmness to accept the hard work and toil of his ministry, even to the extent of dying of bodily exhaustion.

For a man driven on by such holy zeal, he nevertheless had a great and delicate tenderness; it sprang from a heart deeply touched by the wretchedness of the young and the injustices suffered by the lowly; the tenderness of the heart of a father which made him attentive to each one of his children, anxious for their good, sad when he

⁹ On the human and divine aspects of the sanctity of Don Bosco, cf. P. BROCARDI, "*Don Bosco profondamente santo*", LAS Rome 1985.

¹⁰ D. RUA, Circular letters, p. 130 Letter of 24.08.1894

him trust and joy before the infinitely good God, and before the Virgin Mary, the Mother of his family.

In this way Don Bosco remains still the guide who can enlighten our choices at the present day, the model against whom we can measure our fidelity, the animator of our educational and pastoral plans, our intercessor before God for the graces of which we stand in need.

*May you be blessed, O Lord,
for having given us Don Bosco as our father and teacher,
and for filling him with extraordinary gifts
of nature and of grace;
he showed himself perfectly human
among his contemporaries,
and completely dedicated to you
in docility to the Holy Spirit.*

*Grant, we pray you,
that following his teaching and example
we may bring him to life again in ourselves,
in dedicating ourselves to you and to our fellow men,
in faithful service given to the young
with constancy, courage and perseverance
and with the warmth and sensitivity of a generous heart.*

CHAPTER III

THE PROFESSION OF THE SALESIAN

“Jesus said to them; 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Mk 1,17-18).

In the fuller account of Mk 1,16-20, two parallel scenes of a calling by Christ are recorded, and two lines of thought coalesce: there is the essential act of calling by Jesus, with the peremptory imperative ("Follow me"), together with the solemnity of the promise ("I will make you become fishers of men"); and there is the prompt reply, without any second thoughts, on the part of those called. And one can glimpse at once the catechetical use that can be made of the passage by the Christian community, which sees in every vocation a prolongation of that first command, and the essential schematic features of the scene.

There is a certain similarity with other biblical scenes portraying vocation, and in particular with the calling of Elisha by Elijah (1 Kings 19,19-21). But in the words of Jesus a double element is discernible, and is in fact emphasized later in the Gospel (cf. 3,13-19): the total bond with the person of the Master as the Messiah (a following of Jesus which will mean always following his leadership in obedient fidelity), and consequently active participation in his mission, that of the Kingdom of God, for the purpose of which the vocations are given. To become "fishers of men", in the light of the parable of the good and bad fish (Mt 13,47-50), is a phrase that takes on the deep significance of preparing men for the messianic kingdom, of helping them to the full attainment of their salvation, and of leading them to experience the joy of the new world.

A careful study of these quotations evokes the apostolic consecration which the salesian endorses, in the form of a prayer, in the profession formula (C 24), and in this way he is given the grace to be a participant in those first vocation scenes beside the lake, from which began the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1,14-15).

* * *

The third chapter of the Constitutions is entitled "*the profession of the salesian*", and presents some important innovations with regard to tradition, in expressing the fundamental features of our act of religious profession.

A first innovation is the actual *placing of theme in the first part of the Constitutions*. In the texts previous the SGC the profession had always found place in the description of the various steps leading to incorporation into the Society, but it is now presented in the initial part of the Constitutions together with the other fundamental elements of the salesian vocation. The intention was to give prominence in this way to the fact that profession invests and sheds light on all other aspects of the life of the salesian. The global significance of salesian profession can be clearly

seen: it makes us people "consecrated" by God for the young, linking "evangelical religious life to the service of youth".¹

It should be noted too that profession is presented with explicit reference to the Congregation's identity: it is in fact an apostolic and religious profession which distinguishes the salesian from others.

Another innovation in the chapter arises from the *way* it is set out: it starts from the personal vocation of the salesian and from his donation to God, involving his entire apostolic commitment, life of communion and the choice of a form of existence in line with the evangelical counsels.

In the act of profession God's love meets man's response. In the formula, the subject of the verb "consecrated" is God, because his is the initiative and the consecrating action; but it implies also the giving of himself on the part of the salesian, who responds to God's call by making his profession and thus entering the Society. God consecrates him for an apostolic mission that is rooted in the Gospel and is to be realized in community; and the salesian offers himself totally to Him to live this apostolic commitment, in union with his brothers and according to the Gospel.

Finally the chapter is new in respect of the explicit *message of salesian holiness*, linked to the profession in the spirit of the Beatitudes, which constitutes the best and most needed gift we can offer to our young people.

The parts of the Constitutions which come afterwards appear as a logical and coherent development of the commitment which the salesian assumes at the moment of his profession.

A consideration of the structure of the chapter reveals that it is centred around the personal act of profession, which forms a kind of nucleus for all the articles.

1. *Art. 22: Personal vocation of the salesian.*

The fundamental premise is the personal vocation, which implies special gifts on the part of God. To this every salesian responds by the offering of himself in a project of sanctification and Christian realization. While Chapter I defined the identity of the Society and Chapter II described the particular spirit which animates it, Chapter III concentrates the attention on the identity of each member through his personal commitment.

2. *Art. 23: Meaning of our profession*

The significance of profession is seen in reference to each member and to the entire Society. Profession is:

- a sign of a meeting of love and covenant;
- the gift of the salesian to Christ and to his fellow men;
- a reciprocal commitment between the professed and the Society;

¹SGC, 118

- a deeper participation in the grace of Baptism;
- a radical act of freedom;
- the beginning of a new life;
- a specific service to the Church.

3. *Art. 24: Formula of profession.*

The central nucleus consists, as we have said, of the act of profession: *the formula* expresses in the form of a prayer the commitment to freely assume a life according to the evangelical counsels, together with a global expression of the tasks of the salesian mission as set out in the Constitutions.

4. *Art. 25: Profession a source of sanctification.*

Consequences of the meeting God and the confrere which takes place at profession are:

- the consecrating action of the Spirit, which becomes a permanent source of grace, and sustains perseverance and growth in pastoral charity;
- the stimulus and help of salesians now in glory, and of those living at our side, for the full realization of this ideal of life;
- a witness to specifically salesian sanctity, which is the most valid gift we can give to the young.

It may be well to recall once again the fundamental significance of this brief chapter. The salesian will certainly be able to have recourse to it, both in his ordinary daily practice and in the hour of trial, to renew his act of personal commitment, which is first and foremost the promise of "an unconditional love of God".

ART. 22 PERSONAL VOCATION OF THE SALESIAN

Each one of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society. Because of this God gives him personal gifts, and by faithful correspondence he finds his way to complete fulfilment in Christ.

The Society recognizes his vocation and helps him to develop it; and he, as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks.

Every call is an indication that the Lord loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy.

The first article of the Constitutions told us of the call God had given to the Founder; this art. 22 speaks of the call God gives to each individual member of the Society.

Don Bosco received special gifts to become the Founder of a vast spiritual movement for the salvation of the young; each of us receives personal gifts to enable us to continue the same mission among youth.

Continuity of this kind, which is based on the initiative and fidelity of God, is manifested by the incessant gift of apostolic vocations which the Congregation receives. For this reason, while emphasizing the supernatural nature of the vocation, the article also gives prominence to the richness this implies for the Church and for the Congregation.

It also makes us think of the importance of working for vocations, on which depend the future, the development and the mission of the Church. Don Bosco tells us: "We give the Church a treasure of great value when we find a good vocation".¹ And again. "Let us try to swell our numbers. To achieve this end, each of us must take it upon himself to win over new members".²

The salesian is called to the Congregation by God

The first paragraph well expresses the *personal and divine* aspect of the vocation. We are "called by name" (Jn 10,3; cf. C 196): the statement has the efficacious ring of faith. It is the sign of a love that comes from afar: it comes in fact from the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

The Father calls every man to sanctify his name, to attain his Kingdom, to fulfil his will. He is the Lord of the harvest and of vocations (cf. Mt 9,38), and each of us knows that his vocation comes from the Father; he is obedient to the Father and with the Father he lives in an individual relationship of love.

¹ MB XVII, 262

² BM IX, 40

In the Son, the One "called" by the Father par excellence, we have all been called (cf. 2 Tim 1,9); but it is Christ himself, the Master, who gives us our call (cf. Rom 1,6; Jn 11,28) and says: "Come and see" (Jn 1,46), "Come and follow me" (cf. Mk 2,13), even though frequently he may make use of the mediation of others.

It is the Spirit who consecrates for the mission those whom the Father calls through his Son Jesus Christ. Every vocation is a gift of the Spirit, and only in the Spirit can it be perceived, mature and come to fruition.

Personal gifts of different orders (intellectual, practical and above all spiritual) are given so that the one called may be able to know and live the values of the salesian vocation, especially the urgent need for service to poor youngsters, and to take his place in the plan of a community, which is itself a meeting of individuals, which is in fact "Congregation" (the very word expresses the dynamic aspect of the vocational "call"). These gifts are given to enable him to realize himself fully in Christ, the perfect Man.

Here is expressed the certainty that the Lord accompanies with the riches of his grace each one who has been called: how indeed could the Spirit point out to someone a road to be followed without giving him the strength and capacity to follow it? But at the same time the importance is emphasized of the discernment that each one must make to know his own vocation, and verify his suitability for it if he chooses the salesian life.³ if he is called, what must he do to respond to God's gift?

We note that the personal aspect of the gift is never disjoined from the *community commitment*. Don Bosco recommended: "We renounce our own self-interest. Therefore let us not seek our own personal good, but rather let us work with zeal for the common good of the Congregation".⁴

As we have already said, all this dynamism leads us to full self-realization, and at the same time becomes a witness for the young to whom we are sent.

If "self-realization" meant nothing more for us than the satisfaction of our own tastes and human ideals or the perfecting of our physical and intellectual capabilities, we should be like so many youngsters who cannot reflect on the deep sense of life and so do not find the way to their true happiness.

Our aim is to "realize ourselves in Christ": in this way we share in the greatness of God, in the plans of his Kingdom, and we fulfil a task of mediation for those who are seeking the fullness of their own humanity.

The confrere gives himself; the Society recognizes and welcomes him

Here the community aspect of the salesian vocation finds further confirmation.

³ Concerning vocational discernment cf. the document: "*Criteria and norms for salesian vocation discernment, Admissions*", Rome 1985, and in particular nn. 2-6: "The Constitutions and vocation discernment"

⁴D. BOSCO, *Introduction to the Constitutions*: Five faults to be avoided; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 244

its members:

— to "*recognize him*" in his vocation: more than being just a superficial juridical act, this calls for an active and positive attitude, embracing trust, esteem and respect for the person of the confrere beyond his function or what profit he brings to the Congregation; it means rather a recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the confrere's soul;

— to "*help him*" to develop his vocation, to grow in it and exploit the gifts which are the richest expressions of a spiritual and apostolic personality, and a resource for the whole community.

On the other hand the confrere is aware of how much he receives from the Society, and cannot forget that his vocation is that of a member linked with all the other members, that the Spirit distributes his gifts not for the satisfaction of individuals but for the common good" (1 Cor 12,7). He has the right to receive because he has the duty of giving. He will realize his personal vocation to the extent that he develops in himself a disinterested love, the sense of shared responsibility, and the family and group spirit.

This "reciprocal recognition" respects the differences between one person and another, and permits the expression of a true relationship between the Society and each member: in this way it creates a proper "sense of belonging", as a result of which each one puts himself and his gifts at the service of the common life and activity.

In simpler words, Don Bosco expressed it as follows: "Let no one neglect his own duty. Let everyone do his duty well with zeal and humility, with confidence in God; let him not yield in defeat if he is called to some sacrifice which costs much. Let him take heart that his endurance and fatigue benefits the Congregation, to which we are all consecrated".⁵

Don Bosco felt a great interior gratification at being a salesian; it was evident in his words, in his reviews of the houses that had been opened or would be opened shortly, in his description of the work undertaken outside Italy. His biographer writes: "In these instances his vibrant words were calculated to strengthen the bonds of esteem and love which bound his listeners to the Congregation, so that those who had joined it might love it and those who were thinking in their hearts about entering might be encouraged... Such talks kindled in his listeners an enthusiasm which made them love not only Don Bosco, but the Oratory, the name salesian and the good the salesians were doing in various parts of the world. Their enthusiasm, radiating far and wide outside the Oratory, created an environment so well disposed towards the Congregation as to multiply its friends and benefactors".⁶

Every vocation is a sign of God's love for the Congregation

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ BM XIII, 623

The vocational dynamism which the Congregation has within itself arises from its "being Church", i.e. from the fact that it is immersed in God and in his designs for salvation.

By sending it new vocations the Lord shows that he loves the Congregation, that he wants it to be vibrant and enriched with fresh energy, that he wants to keep alive this charism he had given to the Church.

In this way the Lord expresses his love of predilection for each one of those he has called, and at the same time for the Congregation he has raised up.

The response to this love must not be only personal. The Congregation, which feels God's love for it, must play a role of mediation for other vocations, it must be a sign of vitality for the good of the Church and a centre of "new apostolic energy".⁷

"We must welcome in the Congregation", said Don Cagliero on one occasion, "those who are ready to plunge into the midst of the world and work for the welfare of souls. Our Congregation is not made for people who wish to reform their past lives".⁷

On the other hand, a religious community, called in baptism and religious consecration to holiness and the construction of the Kingdom, would have cause for worry if it proved unable to generate new members. It would not display the power of God who can "make the desert blossom" (Is 35,1).

*Lord our God,
in the personal vocation of each of our confreres you
manifest your love for the Salesian Congregation,
which you want to see alive for the good of your Church.
Grant to our communities
the ability to welcome each confrere as your gift;
increase our gratitude for your call,
and make us generous in responding to it.*

⁷ BM XIII, 625

Religious profession is a sign of a loving encounter between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters.

It is one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make, an act which recalls and endorses the mystery of his baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression.

By publicly binding himself in the eyes of the Church, through whose ministry he is more intimately consecrated to the service of God,¹ the salesian begins a new life, which is lived out in a service of permanent dedication to the young.

Profession is also the expression of a mutual commitment between the professed member who enters the Society and the Society which receives him with joy.²

¹ cf. MR 8; LG 44

² cf. LG 44; PC 5; CIC, can. 654

The act of profession, "the pact of our alliance with God,¹ is the loving encounter between the Lord who calls and consecrates and the disciple who responds by giving himself totally to God in the following of Christ the Redeemer.²

The response of the salesian who offers himself to the Lord in full freedom, joyfully aware of the choice he is making, involves his whole person and gives apostolic direction to his life, because it animates and guides all the initiatives to which his love gives rise.

By the commitment he makes at profession the salesian ratifies publicly before the Church his intention to live as an ardent disciple of Christ, and a bearer of the riches of a new kind of holiness which proclaims the message of the Beatitudes to youth.

By offering himself to God, loved above all else, the professed member is incorporated into the Society by a solemn oath and undertakes to embrace the style of sanctification in the mission to the young and in community life, following the evangelical path traced out by Don Bosco.

This is the full significance of salesian profession which is highlighted in this article of the Rule. As we shall now see, for us the act of profession is a *sign*, a *choice*, a *beginning*, and a *commitment*.

Profession is a "sign"

¹D. RUA, Letter of 1.12.1909; *Circular letters*, p. 499

² Cf. *Redemptionis Donum*, Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, which develops the theme of the religious life and its relationship to the gift of the Redemption

The act of profession marks the end of a long and hidden story, that of two loves in search of each other: Jesus took the initiative in giving the call and hence the initiative of love, because to seek and call is an indication of love;³ and the disciple allowed himself to be attracted, responded with generosity, and now pronounces his decisive "yes".

Profession is therefore a visible sign of a meeting and covenant of love: a sign of the love of Christ, but also a sign of man's loving response.

The disciple, says the text, "responds by giving himself totally to God and to his brothers and sisters", thus expressing the radically evangelical nature of the profession. The adverb 'totally' signifies a generosity with no strings attached, an austere option consciously and continually made, a life recollected in God to reveal the divine liberality through service to others, and to make known to the young the person of Christ, the Word of life, whom he has met in a special and intimate way.⁴

By this radical gesture of freedom, by which he commits himself without any reserve, the believer bears witness to his faith and love.

Profession is a "choice" which endorses the baptismal covenant

Profession is rooted fundamentally in Baptism, the sacrament of faith, which is the beginning of the new life in Christ.

Through his immersion in the waters of Baptism — water is a sign of cleansing, of purification, of death, and is at the same time the primordial element from which comes forth life — the Christian dies to sin and is purified and renewed, and so enters into the life of the risen Christ; the Old man dies and the new man is born, the man who is redeemed; he has become a son of God, a citizen of the new realm of the saints, a sharer in the holiness of God himself, bearing an indelible mark and tending continuously to full maturity in Christ. On the day of his Baptism every Christian is made capable of sharing in Christ's threefold ministry of prophet, priest and king (cf. Pet 2, 9-10).

Don Bosco often expressed his great joy "at having been made a Christian and a son of God through Baptism".⁵

The same Spirit who in Baptism, and subsequently in Confirmation, changed an individual's life and gave him growth, in the act of profession descends again with his power on those who, having accepted the divine call and offered themselves totally to him, publicly commit themselves to live according to the Gospel and make themselves available for the mission the Lord will entrust to them..

³ "The call to the way of the evangelical counsels springs from the interior encounter with the love of Christ... When Christ "looked upon you and loved you", calling each one of you, dear Religious, that redeeming love of his was directed towards a particular person... You replied to that look by choosing him who first chose each one of you..." (cf. RD 3)

⁴ SGC, 122

⁵ BM II, 19

nature and mission of the Society (cf. C 2, 3), and emphasizes the fundamental dimension of profession, which is the consecrating action of God who reserves for himself and destines for a mission the one he has called: through the ministry of the Church the salesian is "more intimately consecrated to the service of God". Profession thus becomes "a more perfect expression of baptismal consecration",⁶ a renewal and endorsement of that covenant which is endowed with a new gift of love on the part of the Father and is lived with a new commitment to fidelity on the part of the disciple.

The article also points out on the part of the professed the exceptional quality of his choice, which it describes as one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make; with full freedom he offers himself and all his life, his past and his future, for the service of God. Could a believer do anything greater than "give himself totally" and engage himself for life just for love?

It is clear that such an act would exceed our purely human strength, were it not done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

All this will be taken up again and further developed when we speak of the specific commitments of salesian profession (cf. C 60 in particular).

Profession is the "beginning" of a new life

Profession, an act of great spiritual value and at the same time an act with an ecclesial character, opens up for the salesian a particular way of life. As was said in the preceding paragraph, it is rooted in the new life of Baptism but carries with it a specific innovation: "God gives to our baptismal adoption as sons a specific complexion".⁷ This complexion or physiognomy is what is described in the evangelical plan of the Constitutions and which is expressed in the formula of profession (cf. C 24); here the Rule is emphasizing the fact it is a question of a "service of God" and that this service is realized in particular in "permanent dedication to the young". The new life, inaugurated by profession, commits the salesian to be totally for God and to open his mind and heart to the hopes and needs of youth.

This innovation is also externally visible, i.e. it is reflected in specific life structures. The obligations of profession, in fact, while entirely based on the evangelical spirit, are expressed in new existential conditions in which self-expression and development are possible. What this means for us is that, if it is true that the salesian mission brings us into close and frequent contact with the world, our manner of living cannot be in any way "worldly", it must be "religious", built on the Rule of the Gospel and lived according to the Constitutions of the Society. The Rule frees us from worldly responsibilities so that we can put our lives completely and permanently at the disposition of God; it organizes our relationships and activities in direct linkage with

⁶RD 7, cf. also LG 44 and PC 5, on which the doctrine is based; v. also ET 7; MR 8

⁷GC 22, Closing address of Rector Major; cf. GC22, 63

the Lord and those to whom he sends us; it establishes us in a community of 184 individuals who are one and all consecrated for the Kingdom.

We are impelled along this new way by the charity which the Holy Spirit diffuses in our hearts. But because we carry this treasure in fragile vessels, we keep ourselves humble, aware of our weakness but with trust in God's fidelity.

Profession is a public "commitment"

Finally, the constitutional text emphasizes the public character of profession before the Church and the Congregation. This means that it takes place in public and has an official and reciprocal significance: it is the official inauguration of a donation and a function.

Once he has entered the Salesian Society, the professed member shares in the responsibility and task of the Church; but from this point onwards he will serve the Church in the particular kind of service which is specific to the salesians, i.e. one that is directed to the benefit of youth. The Church, in accepting the profession through the person of the Superior, recognizes the commitment. What it comes to for the salesian is that the making of his profession means declaring in a public act that he will have "a greater love" for young people, a love that extends beyond words and feelings, because he is committing himself to a permanent and effective dedication to them: "greater love has no man than this, that a man give his life for his friends" (Jn 15,13; cf. Jn 3,16).

Profession is also the act which binds the salesian to the Congregation, an act which certainly has juridical aspects and consequences but has also a "human" and spiritual value. What is happening is that a man and a believer is entering a brotherly community so as to live its spirit, enrich its communion and participate in its work. He is "received with joy" as a member with full rights; especially he has the right to find there understanding, affection and support, because the commitment is reciprocal.

The canonical aspect of profession should not be overlooked: its public character implies recognition of the fact on the part of the Church, but also a personal obligation of the professed with regard to bearing witness to the counsels, the mission and the common life: to make profession means to freely commit oneself to the stable fulfilment⁸ of these obligations (cf. C 193).

⁸ Cf. LG 44

*Lord Jesus,
on the day of our profession you
brought together our love with
your own Love which is infinite
and called us to give ourselves
fully and generously to you.*

*Grant that the pact of the Covenant,
which by your grace we have made with you,
may be the constant expression of a new life
in the service of your Church
and in our lasting dedication to the young.*

ART. 24 FORMULA OF PROFESSION

The formula of profession has a deep significance in the life of the salesian: it is the visible representation and sign of that joyful "yes" that he said in reply to the invitation to follow the Lord and commit himself to a life with Don Bosco given for youngsters. The words of the formula express the attitude of a heart which wants to be totally dedicated to God and youth: a total oblation to God loved above all else,¹ the full and personal assumption of the covenant by means of a personal oath of fidelity.

In this perspective the profession formula must contain a synthesis of the whole project contained in the Constitutions, which represents the practical way in which the salesian lives the evangelical donation of himself, as we gather from the text revised by the SGC and GC22.² This text expresses the unity and totality of the salesian vocation, the gift of himself to God on the part of the salesian in an apostolic consecration lived in community for the salvation of youth.

The GC22, by placing the profession formula in the first part of the Constitutions, wanted to emphasize the fact that the whole life of the salesian is governed by this act which seals his response of love to the love of the Lord.

Finally it should be kept in mind that for a proper understanding of the ecclesial and overall significance of the formula, it should be considered in the context of the celebration of the profession, according to the "Rite of Religious Profession" as renewed in accordance with the decrees of Vatican II and promulgated by Paul W.

In the formula we can distinguish five parts.

1. The invocation of the Trinity

At the solemn moment of profession the salesian invokes the three divine Persons, because he recognizes that they, each by his proper title, are at the origin of the "encounter" that takes place in profession. Even the formula in the earliest Constitutions began in this way: "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost".³

"God my Father, you consecrated me to yourself on the day of my Baptism".

The offering of the profession is made to God the Father, through his Son Jesus, in the Holy Spirit. It is connected with the baptismal consecration, which we must see as marking the beginning of God's love for us and the foundation of the donation of ourselves (C 23).⁴

¹ Cf. LG 44

² For the history of the profession formula, v. F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Constitutions salesiennes de 1966, Commentaire Historique*, PAS 1969, II, pp. 395-397

³ Cf. *Costituzioni 1875, Formula of the vows* (F. MOTTO, p. 205)

⁴ Cf. also C 3 and C 60

him more closely"

Within the Christian vocation, the profession appears as a response to a particular and free call, and as the sign of a special love; it is Jesus who has called his disciple to "follow him more closely".⁵

"and led by the Holy Spirit who is light and strength"

Human strength alone could not suffice to express the commitment of profession; as well as being completely free, the act is also "charismatic" in the sense that it is performed in the light and strength of the Holy Spirit who, far from destroying freedom, gives it added strength. The two "epicleses" or "blessings", occurring in the "Rite of Religious Profession", which the celebrant pronounces with hands outstretched over the candidates, invoke the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those making their profession so that "they may fulfil with your help that which by your gift they have promised with joy".⁶

2. The commitment to a consecrated apostolic and fraternal life

"With complete freedom I, N.N., offer myself totally to you".

In this way each one expresses his "Here I am, Lord": it is the total gift of himself, which includes the triple commitment that will be immediately specified and which represents the plan of life in the community of Don Bosco. Such a response in love would be impossible without full and responsible freedom.

"I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me, especially to young people who are poorer"

The response to the Lord who has called, consecrated and sent his disciple, implies the personal assumption of the apostolic mission which, as art. 3 says, "sets the whole tenor" of the life of the salesian. Significant is the reference in the profession formula to the principal ones to whom we are sent, "young people who are poorer": the salesian repeats with Don Bosco: "For you I am ready to give my life" (cf. C 14).

"to live in the Salesian Society in communion of spirit and action with my brothers"

The commitment to the mission is lived in a community. The salesian accepts membership of the Society he is entering, and therefore accepts that he will live in "communion" of spirit and action with his brothers.

"and in this way to share in the life and mission of your Church".

⁵ LG 42

⁶ Cf. "Rite of Religious Profession"

The evangelical life which the professed member makes his own belongs to the "unity and sanctity of the Church";⁷ his apostolic service is a Church commitment, which he carries out for and in the name of the Church.

3. Profession of the counsels made to God by vow

"And so, in the presence of my brothers, and before Fr. N.N. (who takes the place of the) Rector Major of the Society of St Francis de Sales, I make the vow for ever to live obedient, poor and chaste, according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions"

(or for those making temporary profession: *"... although it is my intention to offer myself to you for all my life, in accordance with the Church's dispositions, I make the vow for ... years to live ..."*).

The solemnity attaching to this part of the formula should be noted: we oblige ourselves by oath (vow) before God to follow the obedient, poor and chaste life which Jesus chose for himself to fulfil the mission received from the Father. In this the Church recognizes an element common to all forms of consecrated life. The Superior, before whom we make our promise, represents the Church and the Society which ratify the commitment which has been made, and in this way we continue Don Bosco's mission in the Church.

The professed member obliges himself to live the evangelical life "according to the salesian Constitutions", i.e. the entire project of salesian life as Don Bosco lived it and as he has passed it on to us.

The formula includes a specific insertion for temporary profession. This is seen as a step desired by the Church in view of a subsequent commitment which will last for the whole of life. But right from the start the intention of the one making his profession is to commit himself without any reservations at all; this in fact is a condition for its validity. Apart from this distinction the formula is the same for both temporary and perpetual profession: "I offer myself totally to you... I pledge myself to devote *all* my strength".

4. The invocation of help

"Father, may your grace, the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, of St. Joseph, of St. Francis de Sales, and of St. John Bosco, together with the assistance of my brother salesians keep me faithful day by day."

The collected obligations that have been assumed may seem overwhelming for our human weakness. Reference has already been made to the "light and strength" of the Holy Spirit as a seal of perseverance. Now we invoke our heavenly Protectors so

⁷ LG 44

that they will be beside us to help in the realization of a project of holiness which they too have at heart: Mary Help of Christians, the "mother and teacher" of our vocation, St Joseph, her spouse and Patron of the universal Church, St Francis de Sales, the inspirer of our pastoral charity, and our Founder Don Bosco.

Also invoked is the help of his brethren in the great family the professed is entering.

In this way fidelity to profession is given the double support of grace and of the community from whom the professed will need daily help, as is specifically stated.

5. The welcoming acceptance

The Superior responds:

"In the name of the Church and of the Society, I welcome you among the Salesians of Don Bosco as a confrere committed by perpetual (or temporary) vows."

The offering of himself expressed in profession is a public act. It is recognized and accepted by the Church, in the person of the Superior, at the moment in which the professed member is acknowledged and accepted into the Society.

In a deeper sense the individual and his offering are accepted by God in the offering of Christ, the perfect Victim. This is why the profession takes place during a eucharistic celebration. "The Church, in virtue of her God-given authority, receives the vows of those who profess this form of life, asks aid and grace for them from God in her public prayer, commends them to God and bestows on them a spiritual blessing, associating their self-offering with the sacrifice of the Eucharist".⁸

By his profession therefore, the salesian is committed with equal force to the apostolic mission, to fraternal life, and to fidelity to the religious vows.

Let us renew the obligations we assumed at our profession:

*God my Father,
you consecrated me to yourself on the day of my baptism.
In response to the love of the Lord Jesus your Son,
who calls me to follow him more closely,
and led by the Holy Spirit who is light and strength,
with complete freedom I offer myself totally to you.*

⁸ LG 45

*I pledge myself
to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me,
especially to young people who are poorer,
to live in the Salesian Society
in communion of spirit and action with my brothers;
and in this way
to share in the life and mission of your Church.*

*And so, in the presence of my brothers,
I make the vow for ever to live obedient, poor
and chaste according to the way of the Gospel
set out in the salesian Constitutions.*

*Father, may your grace,
the intercession of Mary Help of Christians,
of St Joseph, of St Francis de Sales,
and of St John Bosco,
together with the assistance of my brother salesians
keep me faithful day by day.*

ART. 25 PROFESSION A SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION

The action of the Spirit is for the professed member a lasting source of grace and a support for his daily efforts to grow towards the perfect love¹ of God and men.

The confreres who are living or have lived to the full the gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness.

The witness of such holiness, achieved within the salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer to the young.

¹ cf. PC 1

In religious consecration the action of the Spirit, the author of sanctity, opens up to the professed the possibility of ample spiritual experiences.

The perpetual (or temporary) profession which the salesian makes at a particular moment but which he is called upon to renew every day, is for him a source of sanctification. The call to holiness, common to all Christians,¹ is realized for him through the evangelical path of the Constitutions. In this way his profession comes to mean an explicit commitment to aim at sanctity in the manner lived by Don Bosco. The Constitutions can be likened to a road to be followed; the consecration is like the energy provided by the Spirit to help him to travel it.

The entire text of the Rule is a path to sanctity, because it is a "gospel way of life" (cf. C 24, 192). The original and significant signs of salesian holiness are therefore scattered throughout the whole of the text. The present article considers that holiness in its source, and emphasizes its manifestation in the witness of confreres who are living or have lived to the full the project of the Rule.

The action of the Spirit helps the professed to grow in holiness

From the very first article the Constitutions have emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit in the work of our Society: He it was who raised up Don Bosco and formed him for his mission; it was He who guided him in giving life to various apostolic projects, first among them our Congregation. The "active presence of the Holy Spirit" is the source of "strength for our fidelity and support for our hope". We could say that the Constitutions look at salesian reality from a pneumatological standpoint: docility to the voice of the Spirit is one of the features which characterize our community (cf. C 2).²

This article considers specifically the presence and action of the Spirit in the life of the individual salesian: for the professed the Holy Spirit is the "source of grace and support" in his efforts to grow in perfect love.

¹ Cf. LG, chap. V

² On the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in Don Bosco and in the Society, v. also C 12. 21. 64. 99. 146

At the moment of profession the Spirit of the Lord, the source of grace, permeated the heart of the salesian with the power of his "blessing", enriching him with the special gifts of the covenant and of his unfailing assistance and protection, which will accompany him throughout his existence. In this way the act of profession marks the beginning of a spring of grace, a permanent outflow of spiritual energy, a vital force which is a help to growth and fosters sanctification.

To sustain the professed member in his growth towards perfect love, the consecration of the Spirit gives strength and incessant encouragement to his pastoral charity, in his daily self-abnegation, in the renunciations inherent in the vows, in the severe demands of work and temperance, and in the contradictions and temptations which assail his fidelity; the Spirit sustains and guides his will in overcoming the many difficulties of life, and is a constant reminder of the need for conversion.

To grow in the perfect love of God and men is the great commandment of Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39). This is the objective of all consecrated life, according to the constant teaching of the Church which was confirmed by the Council.³ Our own style of loving God and young people is that of the preventive system: a charity which is rooted in God, and consequently loves and is able to provoke love in return.

The project of the Constitution lived by the confreres is a help on the way to sanctification

Example has an attractive force.

We see this in our Founder, a real "giant of the Spirit",⁴ whose sanctity gave birth to a spiritual posterity. We discern it in the confreres who "have lived" the project of the salesian Rule, and have now reached their homeland, the heavenly Jerusalem, and are united with Mary and Don Bosco.

We see it in the confreres who are still "living it to the full", i.e. in all its completeness, without any half-measures or compromise, even though they are inserted in today's world.

It is from the living witness of the confreres that emerge the characteristics of salesian sanctity, as they are proposed to us by the Rule. It is:

- a sanctity that prompts us from within: "I feel a deep yearning, an earnest need to become a saint... now that I see one can be happy and holy too, I definitely want to become a saint";⁵

³ The conciliar decree on consecrated life opens precisely with the definition: "*perfectae caritas prosecutio*": the pursuit of perfect charity" (PC 1)

⁴ Pius XI

⁵ Dominic Savio: cf. BM V 135

- a sanctity possible to everyone, and not just to "extraordinary" people; even boys can attain it: "It is God's will that we become saints, and it is quite easy to do so", said Don Bosco to his boys;⁶
- a sanctity to be found in the daily round; one becomes a saint in the fulfilment of one's duties, living in one's own environment, without looking for extraordinary situations elsewhere;
- simple, with nothing artificial or abnormal about it, no unusual attitudes, no rigid discipline: it is sufficient to do what one has to do anyway, but to do it well;
- apostolic: "self-sanctification by educating" and "education by sanctifying". Don Bosco is the Saint of youth, not only because he worked among the young but because he became a saint by doing such work;
- congenial, attractive and joyful, but at the same time strong and demanding: "Heaven is not for sluggards!";⁷
- a sanctity which is contagious! Don Bosco once said: "I recall how several boys, like Dominic Savio, Mickey Magone, Francis Besucco and others, made this novena (for the feast of All Saints) with extraordinary devotion and fervour. One could not ask more of them... Have you ever seen bunches of sticks stacked one on top of the other? If one catches fire, so do all the others in turn. You can do the same... A lighted match can set fire to a haystack and start a great bonfire. One of you with the will to become a saint could kindle the others by your good example and salutary advice. What if all of you were to make this effort? What a great blessing that would be!"⁸

The Rule recalls the essential role of the confreres who by their simple and wonderful life make familiar to us the heights of perfection. They are indispensable: without them the Congregation would not achieve its objectives. They are a friendly presence, models and points of reference; they are the fruit and source of our spirituality; they are the Congregation on its pilgrimage towards heaven.

The witness of salesian sanctity is a gift to youth

Meditating on the vocation of Don Bosco and his message, a group of young people called the hill of the Becchi the "*Mount of the youthful Beatitudes*". It is an intuition which gives rise to some stimulating reflections on salesian holiness, and leads to the rediscovery of the deep linkage between the preventive system and the spirit of the beatitudes.

The world cannot be transformed without the spirit of the gospel beatitudes.⁹ They were proclaimed for everyone and represent the most practical way of living Christ's renewal plan. We Salesians are invited "to listen to them again in the company

⁶ Cf. BM V, 135

⁷ Cf. BM VII, 6

⁸ BM XII, 407

⁹ Cf. LG 31

of youngsters so as to give rise in the world to renewed hope".¹⁰ It is a question of living among youth and with them the charity proclaimed by the Gospel, practising it in poverty, in mildness, in purity of heart, in the search for peace and justice. The kindness, reasonableness and family spirit of the salesian environment bear valid witness to this.

All over the world at the present day salesians are committed to the planning of a "salesian youth movement", as a kind of spirituality suitable for inculcating in the many groups of our boys and girls; but to do this seriously and not just beat the air, it is essential to insert into such a movement the ferment of the beatitudes. "Youth spirituality, in fact, cannot be manufactured just by words, but is generated by living witness".¹¹

The beatitudes, incarnate in our youth mission, make us truly "signs and bearers" of the supreme value to which Jesus gives testimony: love! We are well aware that they do not suppress the commandments, they do not rule out moral, they do not devalue ethics, nor do they prescind from the virtues; but they extend further than any law, be it ever so necessary and holy. "At the level of the spirit of the beatitudes you do not ask whether what is done is 'good' or 'bad'; you ask whether what we are doing manifests and communicates the heart of Christ, i.e. whether or not we are witnessing to his Love".¹²

The Constitutions tell us that the salesian who lives his vocation to the full is *a witness to the beatitudes of the Gospel*; he provides a practical revelation of its unique significance; i.e. its supreme value for humanity's renewal and salvation.

The *best gift we can offer to young people* is precisely this school of evangelical and salesian holiness.¹³ Inaugurated by Don Bosco, enriched by a tradition of Saints, endorsed by the daily testimony of innumerable confreres, this current of holiness is revealed as the greatest force in our communities.

Forged at Valdocco, it moves the salesian to become immersed among the young and the common people, to bring them the kindness and salvation of Jesus. Based on the generous simplicity of his daily self-donation, all the demands of his intense work become invested with joy and humbly concentrate the exercise of faith, hope and love in pastoral charity.

Every salesian community, where the confreres live to the full the gift of their profession, becomes a domestic school of salesian holiness.¹⁴ The evidence shows that as the testimony of our sanctity progresses, the hearts of the young become

¹⁰ E. VIGANO, *Strenna 1985*, in the international youth year.

¹¹ E. VIGANO, *Commentary on the Strenna 1985*

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Cf. E. VIGANO, *Replanning our holiness together*, ASC 303, 1982, p.13; v. also Letter of R.M. in AGC 319 (1986) which explicitly links salesian sanctity with profession.

¹⁴ The Rector Major writes: "Don Bosco, who lived at a time in the last century when Saints were flourishing in Piedmont, had the merit of starting an authentic "School of sanctity". If the various apostolic works he began were of value in his time the fact that he successfully promoted a particular kind of holiness would be sufficient by itself to make evident a remarkable spirituality which places him among great ones of the (lurch with a fertile sanctity capable of reincarnation among other people in the course of future centuries" (AGC 319 (1986) p. 9)

transformed and hope and love flourish in them: the transformation of youthful hearts keeps pace with our own sanctification!

*Grant us, O Lord,
through the strength of the Spirit
who has consecrated us to you,
the grace to persevere in fidelity
and to progress every day in love
after the example of our brothers
who have travelled the same road to holiness.
Grant that, like them, we may be witnesses
among men and especially among the young
to the divine value of the Beatitudes.
Amen.*